

One in a Thousand

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Traditionally, Jewish children start learning Chumash from the beginning of this week's parashah. One might wonder: Why not start from the beginning of the Torah, from Bereishit? There is also something very unusual about the first word of this parashah, "Vayikra," which is written in the Torah with a small aleph. What does this all mean?

Regarding the judgment process in the Heavenly Court, it is written, "If he has an interceding angel, one [positive-speaking angel] out of a thousand [persecuting angels] to attest to a man's righteousness, then He is gracious to him and says, 'Redeem him from descending to the pit; I have found a ransom'" (Job 33:23-24). Our Rabbis have interpreted this verse to mean that even if only one angel comes to a man's defense, and even if, within the defense itself, 999 parts are against the man and in only one part is he deemed meritorious, he is still worthy of being saved.

Similarly, we have the power to look at our friends and at ourselves and make judgments in the same positive way. I may look at myself and discover 999 faults, but if I can find one

good point – and, even if within that good point, 999 parts are negative and there is but one point of true good intention – nevertheless, by identifying this tiny goodness, I can leave the negative and begin a new, positive spiritual life. The reason is that the source of true goodness is God Himself. Since God is eternal, any point of goodness, no matter how insignificant, has eternal, permanent power.

Inasmuch as we are each a part of the process of discovering and identifying this Godliness, the Tzaddik is the head of the movement. He has both the ability to discover the good point within us – thus causing us to feel spiritually free to grow and strive – and he also teaches us how we can appreciate and live joyfully with these good points.

In building the Golden Calf, the Jewish People fell into a sin that is considered to include all three capital offenses – bloodshed, idol-worship and illicit relations. The nation that had just heard the Ten Commandments from God Himself now felt utterly lost and rotten. But Moses the great Tzaddik interceded on our behalf. He pleaded with God to see the speck of goodness that remained within us. As a result of this successful plea, God commanded us to build the Tabernacle. Upon its completion, God called out to Moses from the place of the small aleph.

Aleph has the numerical value of 1. As we have seen, even if the good point is only a thousandth part good, and even if this thousandth is surrounded by 999 negative points, nevertheless, this goodness is eternal. This goodness is the small aleph. Just as the Jews built a physical Tabernacle, so too, the Tzaddik builds a parallel, supernal Tabernacle powered by the goodness contained within each one of us. It is from this place that, even after the sin of the Golden Calf, God was able to still speak to Moses. It is from this place of goodness that the innocent cheder boy receives his spiritual vitality, and from this place of goodness within us that a soon-to-be-born spiritual child can grow up.

We are all children of God. Therefore we each have the potential – no matter how distant we may be – to live a spiritual life of goodness. By attaching ourselves to the Tzaddik and his process of discovering Godliness, we can live with this goodness breath by breath. We will then not only change ourselves, but also make an enduring impact on the entire world. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Eiruvey Techumim 6