

# Pathways: We're Good to Go

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December 27, 2018



**Do I deserve** to be redeemed? Do I deserve to be saved by God?

We often ask ourselves this question, whether consciously or subconsciously. Consider: The average person has 60,000 thoughts a day. Shockingly, 95 percent of them are repeated daily and 80 percent of those thoughts are negative. We tend to judge ourselves overwhelmingly negatively, and that's why we can question whether we are worthy of God's attention and ultimate salvation.

This doesn't mean that our actions make us worthy of all the goodness that God bestows on us. We can never begin to pay back our debt for the blessing of life and all the other blessings He gives us. But where we go wrong is in understanding God's true nature, and missing the ultimate reality.

This week's *parashah* repeats itself, "And God said, 'See, I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt'" (Exodus 3:7). What is this double vision?

Moses had a prolonged argument with God. He adamantly refused to accept the role of redeemer of Israel. Why? Moses had seen the true deficiencies of the Jewish people; he couldn't fathom accepting the most difficult job of looking beyond their grave issues and seeing their true goodness and ultimate potential. As far as he was concerned, he was unable to justify their redemption.

But God disagreed. "I have seen how their idol worship will lead them to worship the Golden Calf – but nevertheless I see how they will stand at Sinai and accept the Torah" (*Midrash Rabbah, Ki Sisa* 41). God sees only the good. From His point of view, the Jews were worthy of redemption.

God then commanded Moses to throw down his staff and the staff became a snake. This showed Moses that he had spoken ill of the Jewish people, just as the snake in the Garden of Eden spoke slander against God (Rashi on Exodus 4:3). He then commanded Moses to pick up the snake by its tail, and the snake turned back into a staff. Why the tail? God was showing Moses that even if the Jewish people were so low that the evil venom of the snake was spiritually dominating them, still, the Tzaddik must grab hold of some shabby end-piece of remaining good, and thereby bring the people back to their Source.

Yes, we all are a mixture of good and bad. Sometimes we build golden calves, and sometimes we're ready to stand at Sinai and accept the Torah as if it were being given today. But we must learn from God and look only at the good. This goes beyond seeing the goodness in ourselves – it also applies to dealing with our shortcomings.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that if we are so negative about ourselves, it must be that we know that, at our source, we are essentially good. If we feel so badly when we speak negatively against our friend, it must be that we truly see the good in others and are bothered that we slipped. By acknowledging our intrinsic goodness, we strengthen ourselves to deal with our

deficiencies constructively. Enough with the negativity! Let's learn how to see like God does. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Tanchumin 6*