

And God Saw It That It Was Good

When I became a Bat Torah, my adult Bat Mitzvah, a little over a year ago, I found the process enlightening as I struggled to find meaning in ancient liturgy. I emerged enriched from the experience and as a result volunteered to undergo this process again and share with you some thoughts about today's Torah portion.

In preparation, I read the story of the Creation in Genesis several times. The first time I read it to familiarize myself with it. The second time I read it looking for what pops out the most. And that was clearly the phrase GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD.

When God saw what was made, God saw a world that reflected God's own nature—holy, intentional, and beautiful. Each time God says it's good, it's like an engineer testing a system and declaring: ***"Yes, this works perfectly."***

God must have had a vision of a world of not only beauty but a world functioning according to a divine design.

God saw beauty, harmony, and balance.

Creation was not chaotic, random, or mismatched—it was harmonious..

- Light and dark balanced.
- Land and sea separated and so forth.

Why did this phrase have so much importance to me? I've been a lifelong visual artist and managed to earn a livelihood from this gift. And I will call it a gift from God. For many years, I was a public school visual arts teacher -first at the secondary level in Wayland, Massachusetts. And the last 24 years of my career I was a

K-8 visual arts teacher in urban Somerville Massachusetts. Today I'm retired from public schools, and I oversee the Glass Enamel Studio at Artisans Asylum, and create watercolors at home.

During my teaching days, my students often asked me to look at their work and they would ask, "Is it good?" My response would generally be "let's take a look at it and discuss it." We would isolate areas that seemed pleasing, and we would try to figure out what made that so. Sometimes it would be about the color harmony, perhaps the composition or perhaps the juxtaposition of pictorial elements. I used to joke that art is like music: it either sounds good or sounds bad. And when we look at art, we often say it looks good or it

looks bad. But it establishes meaning to our opinion when we are able to figure out how we came to that conclusion.

Today while I am working in my own studio, creating my own artwork, I constantly ask myself is it good? And I ask myself why and what else I need to do to strengthen my painting. Recently, my youngest grandson (he's 15 years old) enlightened me to ChatGPT.com, and he explained that AI could be a great source of assistance to anybody. I decided to pursue this further, and I posted a recent floral watercolor, and I asked ChatGPT is it good?

I got a lengthy response:

Is this watercolor I created good?

ChatGPT said:

Thanks for sharing your watercolor! Here's some honest and constructive feedback on your piece:

What's working well:

- **Color blending:** The way the reds, purples, and greens flow into each other is beautiful. You've captured one of watercolor's strengths — soft transitions and transparency — very nicely.
- **Energy and movement:** The top red bloom with its feathery edges brings a lot of dynamic movement. It feels lively and spontaneous, which gives the painting a vibrant, expressive quality.
- **Composition:** There's a good balance between the denser, darker areas and the lighter, more airy parts. Your eye moves around the piece smoothly.

What could be improved:

- **Definition and layering:** Some of the forms (especially in the middle and lower parts) blend a lot, almost to the point where they lose structure. You might try introducing a few more hard edges or defined lines to add contrast and help viewers read the shapes more clearly.
- **Depth and contrast:** Adding slightly more value contrast (darker darks and lighter lights) could enhance the sense of depth, especially in the foliage and between the flower layers.

- **Intentional detail:** A few small areas of sharper detail — even just hints — could really elevate the piece. Think of them as “focal points” that catch the viewer's eye.

Overall impression:

You clearly have a good feel for color and a loose, expressive style, which is a strong foundation in watercolor. With a bit more attention to contrast and edge control, your work can become even more impactful.

IMAGINE THAT!!!!

Yet I took another look at my painting, and I said yes, this IS good and I am not looking to make it even more impactful as Artificial Intelligence suggests.

I myself decided that the painting had a fresh feeling and to continue belaboring it would take away the gestural immediacy and make the painting look overworked.

I appreciate your response AI, but God gave me the gift to create this painting without your assistance. And while artificial intelligence can offer all these comments, it does NOT have the gift from God to create the painting I created.

The conclusion here is we undergo a process when we decide what is good.

Sometimes we need to stick to our instincts regardless of outside pressure. While I am open to receiving feedback. I am compelled to weigh and measure my options for the maximum good. I may need to talk to God, NOT AI, for inspiration.

I consulted Google to find out the meaning of the Hebrew word TOV. I know it's the Hebrew word for good. Here's what I got:

“In Hebrew, the word "tov" (טוב) primarily means good. However, it carries a more nuanced meaning than just "good" in English. It encompasses the ideas of beauty, thriving, and harmony, reflecting God's creative work and purpose. It describes something that is not just pleasant, but also life-giving and aligned with God's will.”

(Google response)

We all use the word, TOV when we say mazel tov -wishing folks the best life has to offer. The vibrance of the expression MAZEL TOV is much greater than simply saying “good luck. I wish you the best.”

I think we are wishing folks beauty, thriving, and harmony as suggested above. I think all of us in our daily life ask the question, “Is it good?” On a lower level we might ask is this restaurant good, is that mechanic any good, is that performance good, and so forth. But today because it’s Rosh Hashanah and the beginning of a new year, I am looking ahead to my better sense of good. How can I make my year ahead good? What can I do to keep myself healthy and keep my body good? What can I do to strengthen my relationships with family and friends? How can I make what seems good even better?

After God created humanity, God said it was VERY good. It seems at that point God has decided that this divine creation could be NOT ONLY GOOD BUT VERY GOOD. (TOV MEH OD in Hebrew)

Today’s world has strife and confusion and hate, and strikes many of us as being broken. My only power -and I will call it God given power -I get is with God’s assistance- NOT AI assistance-to make my own little world good. I hope in the coming year to enlist all my spiritual and God-given resources to make it a VERY GOOD year. And I wish all of you my fellow congregants a very good year - a TOV MEH OD year with many Mazel Tavs!

SHANA TOVA!

From: Barbara Marder