

Evil Thoughts (Nitzavim-Vayelech)

Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results. -Willie Nelson

There is a concept in Judaism that one is only punishable for what one does. You can plan a heist but are only found guilty of the act of attempting to rob a bank, not for the thought of robbing a bank.

There is however a caveat to this rule. There are some evil thoughts that are punishable. Just the firing of the neurons in your brain focused on some particular evil idea is liable to divine retribution. The horrible, punishable thought is 'idol worship', or more properly translated, 'strange worship'.

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the Kli Yakar (1550-1619), on Deuteronomy 29:18, draws this conclusion from an interesting verse:

“And it comes to pass, when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying: ‘I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.’”

The evil thinker may believe that as no one besides himself is aware of the thoughts of his heart, then he is both guiltless and beyond punishment. Well – he'd be wrong. God knows.

God knows what is in the heart and mind of man. If man's mind is preoccupied with 'strange worship', with devotion to things, concepts and pleasures that are against those prescribed by tradition – that is punishable. Just the thinking of it is highly problematic. The Talmud states, that in some cases, the thought of sin can be worse than the sin itself.

Thankfully, however, the converse is also true. In repentance, just the thought itself can count. If someone decides to change their ways, if they truly, earnestly, from the bottom of their heart have committed themselves to improve their actions, just that thought is counted as repentance – even if they did nothing yet. Not only that, but the Kli Yakar adds that based on such a powerful thought, based on the commitment, God Himself will help the penitent with the act of repentance. When the sinful opportunity comes again, God, based on the person's soulful repentance, will assist in helping the sinner overcome the temptation.

May we start thinking good thoughts, abandon strange worship and get on the bandwagon of the people God is assisting.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

*To the Technion scientists exploring how positive thoughts positively impact
physiology:*

<https://technionuk.org/news-post/can-good-thoughts-heal-the-heart/>