

Dear Chavraya,

On gravestones of the righteous in many older Jewish cemeteries, there often appears a short phrase describing the person as *tam v'yashar/upright and whole-hearted*. Such a person, even as we all strive to be, in the summation of their life has fulfilled a mitzvah found in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Shoftim/Judges*. There, amidst lengthy enumerations of laws concerning primarily civil and criminal matters, are five simple words in whose very simplicity is the essence of their meaning: *Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha/Be whole-hearted with God, your God*. One mitzvah so simply stated that encapsulates all of Torah, while drawing the way of its fulfillment from so many other mitzvot.

Meaning *innocent, simple, honest, complete, whole*, "tamim" is translated in the "Targum Onkelos," an Aramaic interpretive translation of the Torah, as *sh'lim/complete, whole*. In Hebrew it is *shalem*, the root of *shalom*. Without wholeness there is no peace. To be *tamim* is to be whole, at one with God, with self, and with others. It is to be a peace-maker, a bringer of wholeness where there is division and strife and pain. Prior to the flood, in a world drowning in its own violence, the Torah describes No'ach as *ish tzadik tamim hayah b'dorotav/a righteous person who was whole-hearted in his times*. To Avram, taking the first steps of the Jewish journey on his way to becoming Avraham, God said, *hithalech l'fanei vehiyeh tamim/walk before Me and be whole-hearted*. Jacob is described as *ish tam yoshev ohalim/a simple man, living in tents*. In that way of simple goodness touched by innocence, one of the four children in the Pesach Haggadah is the *Tam*, the "simple child." At the same time, the one who is *tam/tamim* is not passive. Abraham argues with God, Jacob wrestles with God.

Of this simply stated mitzvah, the Slonimer Rebbe teaches, *Be whole-hearted with God, your God is of the highest spiritual levels of Torah... If one walks in the way of whole-heartedness, it is as if one has fulfilled (the mitzvot) from aleph to tav (a to z), so it is as if one has fulfilled the whole Torah from beginning to end*. A mitzvah so simply stated but of such great span, *tamim tihyeh/be whole-hearted* speaks through its context in the Torah to both the collective social dimension of our lives and to the deeply personal and spiritual. It is immediately preceded by exhortations not to consult soothsayers and diviners or interpreters of omens. It is immediately followed by warnings not to heed false prophets, those who would tell the future. In each case there is an implicit teaching to live in the present without seeking to know the future. It is not at all to live for the moment in the way of the hedonist, but living with wholeness of heart to sanctify the unfolding of time from our own place in its flow. We are part of the future in the way of our helping it come to be. In the social and collective realm, we respond to the sorrow and strife around us in accord with our vision for the future, of a world made whole. That is the way of the true prophet. In our own lives, we plan for the future according to our hopes and dreams, while living fully in the present of our days, and in their presence.

To be whole-hearted with God is to live with hope and faith, to be inspired by future promise and possibility, not to be immobilized by fear for what might be. In his commentary on our simple verse of such depth, Rashi offers beautiful life teaching: *walk with God in wholeness of heart and look to God, and do not search after*

*the future; rather, receive all that comes upon you with wholeness of heart, and then you will be with God and of God's portion. On one hand, a teaching of theological challenge, it is on the other one of comfort and affirmation that encourages us to live. In times of joy and of sorrow, when we laugh and when we cry, and when we rail against the pain that comes with living, railing at times even against God, God is with us. Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha/Be whole-hearted with God, your God. Of sublime simplicity, it is a mitzvah that speaks to the wholeness of life. Living with hope for the sake of the world and ourselves, when the time comes, may we be remembered as tam v'yashar/upright and whole-hearted.*

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor