

Parashat Shoftim 5776, 2016:

*“Be Wholehearted (Tamim) with the L-rd, Your G-d.”*

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Leah bat Shifra and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains the *pasuk* (verse): “Be wholehearted (*tamim*) with the L-rd, your G-d.” (*Sefer Devarim* 18:13, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) This English version reflects Rashi’s (1040-1105) midrashically-based comment on our verse: “Conduct yourself with Him with simplicity and depend on Him, and do not inquire of the future; rather, accept whatever happens to you with [unadulterated] simplicity and then, you will be with Him and to His portion.”

In contrast to Rashi’s analysis, the approach of Onkelos (First Century C.E.) on our *pasuk*, and throughout the entirety of his Aramaic translation of the Torah, suggests a different connotation for *tamim*, namely, *she’lim*, or perfect and complete. Furthermore, while Rashi focuses upon a person being wholehearted with G-d, Onkelos emphasizes the proper manner that one must adopt in his approach toward the Creator: “Perfect and complete you shall be regarding the awe and fear you should have for the L-rd your G-d.”

At this juncture, whether we adopt Rashi’s or Onkelos’ explication of our *pasuk*, it is apropos to turn to a halachic investigation of “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d,” and

examine its relationship to the *Taryag Mitzvot* (613 Commandments). As in nearly all matters of Jewish jurisprudence, there is a *machloket* (disagreement) as to the status of our verse, i.e., is it included or excluded from *Taryag Mitzvot*? In this instance, the major disputants are the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) and the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270).

Maimonides neither includes “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d” as a commandment in his *Sefer HaMitzvot*, nor offers any justification as to why this is so. Nachmanides, however, in his glosses on this work, suggests a rationale as to why Maimonides excluded our verse from the *Taryag Mitzvot*:

Perhaps the master (i.e. the Rambam) thought that [“Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d”] is a general command that incorporates **all** of the *mitzvot* in regards to the proper manner that one is obligated to walk on the paths of the Torah. [As such,] this matter is similar to the verse, “Praiseworthy are those whose way is perfect (*temimei derech*), who walk with the law of the L-rd.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 119:1) Therefore, he [i.e. Maimonides] did not bring this verse into his accounting [of the *Taryag Mitzvot*, since he clearly requires specificity regarding the *mitzvah* action to be performed, and not a meta-statement describing the ideal spiritual approach to serving the Almighty]. (*Critical Notes to Maimonides’ Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandments Uncounted by Maimonides*, number 8, translation and markings my own)

As mentioned above, Nachmanides disagrees with Maimonides’ decision to exclude “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d” from the *Taryag Mitzvot* and, instead, includes it in this classification. He formulates the general parameters of this commandment in the following fashion:

The eighth *mitzvah* that we are commanded is for our hearts (i.e. minds) to be perfectly aligned with Him may He be blessed. And this is as it is stated in the Torah: “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d.” The essential matter of this command is that we should associate our hearts (minds) with Him alone, may He be blessed, and believe that He, and only He, performs all actions in the universe, and that He alone knows the truth as to what the future will bring. Moreover, it is solely from Him that we are allowed to ascertain the nature of future events, through the vehicle of his prophets, or His men of mercy – namely, through the *Urim v’Tumim* [under the direction of the *kohan Hagadol*]. As such, we are prohibited from seeking out soothsayers and their ilk, and we must never

believe that their words will surely come to pass. (*Critical Notes to Maimonides' Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandments Uncounted by Maimonides*, number 8, translation and markings my own)

In sum, the Ramban maintains that “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d” is a constitutive element of the *Taryag Mitzvot*. In his view, this *mitzvah* mandates that we turn to the Creator and His earthly representatives for knowledge of forthcoming events. Concomitantly, we must eschew the words and visions of necromancers who purport to foretell the future through divinations. Thus, by turning solely to the Almighty, and by consciously rejecting the so-called prophecies of human oracles, we demonstrate our unmitigated allegiance to Hashem and live lives that are *tamim* with Him.

Rav Tzadok ha-Kohen Rabinowitz of Lublin (1823-1900) views our verse, “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d,” in a different light than the other commentators whose views we have examined. Rather than discussing the substantive content of, “be *tamim*,” he emphasizes the expression, “with the L-rd, your G-d,” as the modality through which one can attain *temimut* (perfection or completeness). Yet, how does one achieve the status of being “with the L-rd, your G-d?” In order to answer this question, Rav Tzadok quotes a *pasuk* from *Sefer Shemot*: “And you shall worship the L-rd, your G-d, and He will bless your food and your drink, and I will remove illness from your midst.” (23:25) He notes that the verse explicitly states, “I [Hashem] will remove illness from your midst,” and proceeds to metaphorically explain its import:

All of this [i.e. the removal of illness from our midst] does not take place by itself. Only Hashem, may He be blessed, has the ability to remove [illness]. This is similar in kind to a filthy garment – even though you soak it in water, the person who is washing it must scrub at it until he removes its grime. Nonetheless, without water the dirt will not be removed. (*Likutei Mamarim*, page 86, this and the subsequent passage, translation and markings my own)

According to *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory), water often symbolizes Torah. By way of illustration, *Midrash Rabbah, Sefer Bereishit 24* explains the verse “And they [Joseph’s brothers] took him [Joseph] and cast him into the pit; now the pit was empty there was no water in it,” (*Sefer Bereishit 37:24*) in this fashion: “Rav Acha said ... “there was no water in it” connotes that there were no words of Torah – which is allegorically referenced by the word “water.” Rav Tzadok follows this line of reasoning and states that the water he references in his parable is none other than Torah. Moreover, it is Torah that ultimately enables one to “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d:”

The reference to “water” specifically refers to *divrei Torah* [i.e. Halacha] and *divrei Aggadah* [non-halachic Torah subjects]. This is so, since through them, one may recognize He who spoke and thereby created the world, and, thereby, bask in the light of the face of the living King. [As such,] the Torah states: “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d,” [this means,] when one is **with** Hashem and His followers [i.e. Torah scholars], then he will be perfect and complete without any lack whatsoever.

When viewed from the widest perspective, our *pasuk*, “Be *tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d,” is ultimately urging us to fulfill the moral, ethical and spiritual charge issued by Hashem to *Avraham Avinu* (our Father Avraham) so long ago: “I am the Almighty G-d; walk before Me and be perfect (*tamim*).” This message is particularly apropos for the month of Elul, as we prepare ourselves for the *Yamim Noraim* (the Days of Awe) and the coming year. Like Avraham, may we, too, strive to strengthen our relationship with the Holy One blessed be He, so that we may serve Him in faithfulness, authenticity and *temimut. V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.