

Lech Lecha 5787 Cultivating Wholeness

Is it possible to cultivate wholeheartedness?

It is hard to know exactly what God wants from Avram (Abraham's original name) towards the end of Parshat Lech Lecha: [“Walk before Me and be *tamim*.” Genesis 17:1](#). Be wholehearted. But what does that actually mean?

Later, as a people, we receive the exact same direction:

[תמים תהיה עם ה' אלהיך](#)

[You must be *tamim* with the ETERNAL your God. \(Devarim 18:13\)](#)

What was God asking of Avram? Or perhaps more importantly, what is God asking of us?

We might gain a clearer understanding by looking at [how the word *tamim*](#)—and its root *tam*—is used across the Torah and Jewish tradition. Noah is described as *tamim*, standing righteous and singular in the generation of the Flood. Sacrifices brought to the altar must be *tamim*—free of blemish. In other contexts, *tam* describes simplicity: the simple child (*tam*) at the Passover Seder, an ox without a history of goring, or our patriarch Jacob: an *ish tam*, a simple man dwelling in tents, contrasted with his brother Esau, the hunter. *Tam* also appears as a verb meaning completion, as in *v'yitmu yemei evel Moshe*—“and the days of mourning for Moses came to an end.”

A key to this puzzle lies in the context of Devarim, where “*Tamim tihyeh*” immediately follows a list of forbidden practices, soothsaying and divining the future. Rashi explicitly defines what this wholeheartedness requires: “Walk before God whole-heartedly, put your hope in God, and do not attempt to investigate the future.” Rashi's insight reveals that being *tamim* means resisting the urge to peek around the corner, control outcomes, or seek external reassurance that everything will be fine. It is about being “whole”—in other words, self-contained and internally grounded.

Consider the difference between an open circuit and a closed one. When we live in search of outside confirmation—whether by reading fortunes in snakes or clouds, or by measuring our worth through others' approval and performing for the world—we become fragmented, seeking completion outside ourselves. Wholeheartedness, on the other hand, means anchoring ourselves in our own understanding of the good: knowing internally what is right and sticking with it.

No human being can be completely unblemished in the sense required of a sacrificial animal. Instead, to be *tamim* is to become a complete circle—a closed circuit that is grounded from within. Like Jacob in his tent or the sincere child at the Seder, a person who is *tam* does not need to constantly look outward for validation. Being wholehearted does not mean we are finished growing; it means closing ourselves off to the endless need for external approval, which can leave us feeling less than whole.

Ultimately, the invitation to “Walk before Me and be *tamim*” is not a demand to be perfect or unblemished, but to be whole. We *can* cultivate *temimut*—we can build wholeheartedness—by allowing our fullest, truest selves to walk with God and with one another.