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:

תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

You must be tamim with 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 seems to be saying that being *tamim* means resisting the urge to peek into the future and to control the outcome. We don't get to seek external reassurance that everything will be fine. Instead we have to try to be "whole," self-contained and internally grounded.

Consider the difference between an open circuit and a closed one. When we are chasing outside confirmation—whether by reading fortunes in snakes or clouds, or by measuring our worth through others' approval, it fragments us, turning us outward into the neverending hunt instead of inwards to that potentially peaceful sanctuary within. Wholeheartedness means feeling anchored in our own understanding of the good: knowing internally what is right and sticking with it.

No human being is ever going to be unblemished like 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. We don't want to be the ox who is kicking and goring, but the one who is relaxing and doing our own thing. Being wholehearted does not mean we are finished growing; it just means we are done with the chase.

The invitation to "Walk before Me and be *tamim*" is not asking us to be perfect or unblemished, but to try, instead, to be whole. We *can* cultivate *temimut*—we can build wholeheartedness—closing out the outside voices to allow our fullest, truest selves to walk, with God and with each other. Shabbat Shalom.