

Shoftim: What Does it Mean to be *Tamim* with God?
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תָּמִים תְּהִיָּה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ. (דב' יח:יג)

Tamim shall you be with the Lord your God! (Deut. 18:13)

Often translated as *whole, perfect, wholehearted*, the precise meaning of **תָּמִים-tamim** is elusive. What does **תָּמִים-tamim** mean? And what does it mean to be **תָּמִים-tamim with God**? To answer this question, we have to look at how **תָּמִים** is used elsewhere in the Torah and examine the context of its use here in Deut. 18 in connection with general prohibitions against magic. The only time **תָּמִים** appears as a word describing a character is with two specific individuals: Noah and Abraham.

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ זֶנַח אִישׁ צַדִּיק

תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ. (בראשית ו:ט)

These are the begettings of Noah. Noah was a righteous, tamim man in his generation; in accord with God did Noah walk. (Gen. 6:9)

וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וְתִשְׁעֵים שָׁנִים וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר

אֵלָיו אֲנִי אֵל שַׁדַּי הִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה **תָּמִים**. (בראשית יז:א)

Now when Avram was ninety years and nine years old God was seen by Avram and said to him: I am God Shaddai. Walk in my presence! And be tamim! (Gen. 17:1)

Noah is **תָּמִים** in his generation. The Torah also characterizes him as a **צַדִּיק-tzaddik** (also Gen. 7:1). While Abraham is never explicitly described as a **צַדִּיק**, righteousness is, of course, associated with him. When God decides to reveal to Abraham his intent to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, God says this about him: **כִּי יָדַעְתִּי לַמַּעַן אֲשֶׁר יַצֹּנָה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ** **אֵלֶּיךָ**. **Indeed, I have known him, in order that he may charge his sons and his household after him: they shall keep the way of God to do what is right and just** (Gen. 18:19). This is an entirely plausible way of saying that Abraham is indeed a **צַדִּיק**. Unlike Noah who is described as already being **תָּמִים**, Abraham is instructed to be **תָּמִים** which means that God is either validating the kind of person that Abraham already is or God is giving Abraham a standard of excellence to strive for. Because both Abraham and Noah enter into covenants with God, these two characteristics, being **righteous** and being **תָּמִים** ought to be considered as prerequisites. That is, in order to be a covenantal partner with God, you have to be both a **צַדִּיק** and **תָּמִים**.

The word **תָּמִים** occurs again at the end of the Torah in the Song of Moses, in describing God's works:

הַצֹּר **תָּמִים** פָּעָלָיו כִּי כָל דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט

אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עוֹל צַדִּיק וְיֵשֶׁר הוּא. (דברים לב:ד)

The Rock, tamim are his deeds, for all his ways are just. A God steadfast, [with] no corruption, equitable and upright is he. (Deut. 32:4)

God is the Rock. His works are **תָּמִים**. His ways are just. He is a God of steadfastness and trust. But Israel is the very opposite of all of that. In the very next verse, Israel is presented as corrupt, crooked, and perverse:

שָׁחַת לוֹ לֹא - בְּנָיו מוּמִים - דּוֹר עָקֹשׁ וּפְתִילָתַל. (דברים לב:ה)

Is corruption his? No, his children are blemished. A generation crooked and perverse. (Deut. 32:5)

Moses is saying that God, and everything associated with God, is **תָּמִים**. On the other hand, everything associated with Israel is **blemished**. This set of opposites - **תָּמִים** and its antonym, **blemished** - is the key that helps us define the word. **תָּמִים** is used over forty times as a descriptor for a sacrificial animal. **In order for an animal to be acceptable for sacrifice it must be unblemished-tamim**. Interestingly, the first time we find it used in reference to a sacrificial animal is with Paschal Lamb, the covenantal sacrifice.

שֶׁה **תָּמִים** זָכָר בֶּן שָׁנָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם מִן הַכֹּבָשִׁים וּמִן הָעִזִּים תִּקְחוּ.

(שמות יב:ה)

A male that is tamim, year-old lamb shall be yours; from the sheep and from the goats are you to take it. (Exod. 12:5)

In the laws pertaining to sacrificial animals, physical deficiencies such as blindness, broken bones, mutilations or deformities, disqualify an animal from sacrificial eligibility (Lev. 22:22). The Torah states that explicitly in this verse:

וְאִישׁ כִּי יִקְרִיב זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים לַה' לִפְלֹא נֹדֵר אוֹ לְנִדְבָה בְּבָקָר אוֹ

בְּצֹאן **תָּמִים** יִהְיֶה לְרִצּוֹן כָּל מוֹם לֹא יִהְיֶה בוֹ. (ויקרא כב:כא)

A man, when he brings near a sacrifice of shalom to God for making a vow-offering or for a freewill-offering among the herd or among the flock: it must be tamim, for acceptance, any defect there must not be in it. (Lev. 22:21)

תָּמִים therefore means: **unblemished**. For sacrifices, we can take the meaning literally: a sacrificial animal must be **תָּמִים** - physically **unblemished**. But for human beings we can take **תָּמִים** metaphorically. **Just as a sacrificial animal must be physically unblemished to be acceptable as an offering, a human being must be morally unblemished to be an acceptable partner to God's covenant. tamim-unblemished is therefore, a metaphor for an upright, blameless, morally unimpeachable character.** Let us now turn to our verse in Deut. 18. instructing all of us to be **unblemished**.

כִּי אַתָּה בָּא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ לֹא תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת

כְּתוֹעֲבֹת הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם. לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְךָ מַעֲבִיר בְּנוֹ וּבִתּוֹ בָּאֵשׁ קֶסֶם קְסָמִים

מַעֲוֹן וּמִגִּישָׁה וּמִכַּשֵּׁף. וְחָבֵר חָבֵר וּשְׂאֵל אוֹב וַיִּדְּעֹנִי וְדָרַשׁ אֵל הַמֵּתִים.

כִּי תוֹעֲבַת ה' כָּל עֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים וּבִגְלַל הַתּוֹעֲבַת הָאֵלֶּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מוֹרִישׁ

אוֹתָם מִפְּנֵיךָ. תָּמִים תְּהִיָּה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ. כִּי הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה

יֹרֵשׁ אוֹתָם אֵל מַעֲבֹנִים וְאֵל קְסָמִים יִשְׁמְעוּ וְאַתָּה לֹא כֵן נֹתֵן לָךְ ה'

אֱלֹהֶיךָ. נִבְיָא מִקֶּרְבְּךָ מֵאֲחֵיךָ כְּמֹנִי יָקִים לָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּ.

(דברים יח:ט-טז)

When you are entering the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you are not to learn to do according to the abominations of those nations. There is not to be found among you one having his son or his daughter cross through fire, an augurer of augury, a hidden-sorcerer, a diviner, or an enchanter, or a tier of [magical] tying-knots, or a seeker of ghosts or all-knowing ones, or an inquirer of the dead. For an abomination to God is anyone who does these-things, and because of these abominations the

Lord your God is dispossessing them from before you! תָּמִים shall you be with the Lord your God! For these nations that you are coming-to-possess: to sorcerers and augurers do they hearken, but you—not thus has the Lord your God made you! A prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like myself will the Lord your God raise up for you; to him you are to hearken...(Deut. 18:9-15)

In other words, anything to do with magic, the occult, necromancy, the dark arts or sorcery, is abominable. Magic corrupts faith. Magic presents the illusory possibility that there are forces in the universe other than God. For that reason, a person who practices anything associated with magic, or for that matter, a person who follows the magician or sorcerer is metaphorically blemished. When the Torah says, תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ it means that we are to be **unblemished** in our relationship with God. To be תָּמִים with God is to not be associated in any way with any of the things that captured the spiritual imaginations of those who previously lived in the land. ¶ Religion and Magic have always been adjacent to one another in terms of how human beings organize their lives. Today we have relegated magic to the margins of culture, nevertheless it is comical, yet not coincidental, that these two sections of books are often adjacent to one another in bookstores! Magicians, astrologists, shamans, fortune-tellers, tarot card readers, palm-readers, numerologists, psychics, and the like, still command quite a lot of the popular imagination. Possibly since *Bewitched*, there has not been a year without a popular TV show or movie devoted to magic! How can we explain this? Micah Goodman argues as follows:

The human condition is one of existential fear. An awareness of two realities gives rise to this fear. (1) The first is the reality that there is a future. People, perhaps unlike animals, are aware of the existence of the future. Their consciousness is not rooted only in the present, but is free to consider the future as well. (2) The second reality is our inability to know the future. The knowledge that there is a future but we cannot know what it will bring is the source of our fear, as well as the foundation for the two human projects that arose to over that fear, namely religion and politics.

That paragraph deserves to be studied closely. It's a concise explanation about how our societies and civilizations have organized themselves from their very beginnings. What differentiates us from animals is the way we experience, or our consciousness of time. Human beings have the ability to look backwards and to transform the past into a story. Isaac Bashevis Singer articulated this idea best in his children's story, *Naftali the Storyteller and his Horse Sus*: ***When a day passes, it is no***

longer there. What remains of it? Nothing more than a story. If stories weren't told or books weren't written, man would live like the beasts, only for the day. The whole world, all human life, is one long story. But that awareness of the past is what also enables us to project ourselves into the future. The past is knowable through memory. But the future is inherently un-knowable. My late Uncle Dave said it much more succinctly: ***The past is history. The future is a***

mystery.¹ The human dilemma is this in a nutshell: How can we assert control over the future? Again, Micah Goodman: ***Religion and politics help us gain control over an uncontrollable future. Religion, when it takes the form of magical beliefs, furnishes man with a sense of control. Politics, when it takes the form of tyrannical rule, furnishes the ruler with physical control over his subjects...*** Comment: Imagine you are a



A medieval sorcerer.

farmer. You produce wheat. You rely on a precise combination of sunlight, rain, wind, and soil to yield an abundant harvest. You can work the soil and plant the seeds with your own hands, but you have no control over the sun, the wind or the rain. A monotheist prays to God and performs rituals to rejoice in the knowledge that God will be present in good times and bad times. A pagan recites incantations and performs magical rituals in an attempt to control nature. In the event of calamity, a monotheist engages in reflection. In the event of calamity, the pagan is crushed by failure and blames a scapegoat, and often resorts to violence. ***Faith in One God, unblemished by magic, the kind envisioned by Moses in Deuteronomy is therefore, a moral necessity.*** Moses' commandment - תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ - ***be unblemished with God, speaks to the moral danger of defective ideas, outlandish rituals, and megalomaniac charlatans.*** We think of Noah as being obedient and uncritical. But in being תָּמִים he was also **unblemished** by magic. We think of Abraham as being fiercely devoted to God, with a heightened sense of self-preservation and a slight edge of argumentativeness. When God urges him to be תָּמִים he is not saying to him ***be wholesome*** but ***be critical of the world around you and all the ways human beings try to control it through magic. Stay connected to me without the need of any intermediary and in that way you will become a model to your descendants, who themselves will learn how to be like you in their own time.*** ***Shabbat Shalom!***

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Sharon Frant Brooks and Kenneth Brooks to commemorate the yahrzeits of her mother, Frieda Frant, grandmother, Tillie Frand, and uncle, Jacob Frant, z"l.

This Shabbat we mark 694 days of the war and the captivity of the hostages. We pray for an end to the war and the return of the hostages. May God shield Israel, protect the IDF, heal the wounded, comfort the bereaved, and spare innocents from suffering.

¹Also attributed to Deepak Chopra with honorable mention to Master Oogway from the film *Kung Fu Panda*. It concludes: ***but today is a gift, that is why we call it "the present."***