

Parshat Shoftim: Walking Wholeheartedly With God

Anna Veronese, Class of '28

This Dvar Torah is dedicated to the memory of Shirel bat Rubina z"l, in the month of her passing. May her neshamah have an aliyah.

Last month, one of my closest friends lost her young sister, who died suddenly and unexpectedly. There are no words to describe the immense grief and pain felt by the family, and by the entire community, for the loss of this young soul. I have the privilege of knowing this family very well, as they welcomed me with open arms when I was living alone in Rome while studying archaeology at university 20 years ago. I was a firsthand witness to and beneficiary of their chesed, their goodness of heart, and their moral integrity—values with which they raised all their children.

Shirel was a very practical person, oriented toward action. She was strong and determined. She had steadily graduated from university, gotten married, moved to another city with her husband, adopted a dog, and kept organizing wonderful trips to discover the world. Yet during the shiva, the phrase that came up most often to describe her was “she had a pure soul.”

What does it mean to have a pure soul? It was only natural that the verse from our parsha came to mind: “You must be wholehearted (tamim) with Hashem your God” (Devarim 18:13).

The immediate context of this verse is a warning given to Am Yisrael not to “imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations” (18:9), namely, the nations they will encounter when entering the Land of Canaan. The Torah provides a detailed catalog of these forbidden practices: various forms of divination and fortune-telling, sorcery such as passing a child through fire, wizardry, consulting ghosts or familiar spirits, and necromancy (so much for one's childhood dream of being accepted to Hogwarts...).

Thus the first and immediate meaning of the adjective tamim here is to be wholehearted with God—that is, to maintain an exclusive relationship with the Divine, without flirting with alternatives (the Chizkuni points to the tragic example of the nations who tried to worship God while keeping their original religions—a fatal compromise that left them vulnerable to divine punishment).

The Rambam offers a complementary perspective, emphasizing the intellectual dimension of being tamim. Since divination and sorcery are “words of falsehood and lies,” those who believe in such practices while knowing the Torah prohibits them are simply fools. The truly wise recognize that these forbidden practices are “emptiness and vanity” that lead people away from truth.

Yet, I believe there are other nuances to the word tamim, encompassing much more than just avoiding forbidden practices. The word itself suggests completeness, wholeness, integrity. As Rav Hirsch on our verse explains, being tamim means we “should not detach the slightest fiber of our destiny and

action-life from God”—we should be in our wholeness with God. This isn't just about what we avoid, but about how we live entirely.

Throughout Tanach, we encounter figures described as tamim or tam: Noah is called “a righteous man, tamim in his generation” (Genesis 6:9); our patriarch Jacob is described as “ish tam yoshev ohalim”—a wholehearted man dwelling in tents (Genesis 25:27); and Job is praised as “tamim v'yashar”—wholehearted and upright (Job 1:1). In each case, tamim describes someone of moral integrity, authenticity, and complete devotion to doing what is right.

Rashi offers perhaps the most practical definition: “Walk before Him wholeheartedly, put your hope in Him and do not attempt to investigate the future, but whatever it may be that comes upon you accept it wholeheartedly.” Here, tamim becomes about trust and acceptance—living fully in each present moment while entrusting our future entirely to God. This perfectly embodies who Shirel was.

The Midrash (Sifrei Devarim 173) deepens this understanding, teaching us that “when you are wholehearted, your portion is with the Lord your God.” It connects tamim to King David's words: “And I in my integrity/wholeness will walk” (Psalms 26:11) and “in my integrity/wholeness You have upheld me and established me before You forever.” (Psalms 41:13). Thus, the midrash tells us that being tamim isn't about achieving some impossible perfection—it's about doing “all that is stated in the matter”—following what God asks of us while maintaining that exclusive, trusting relationship with Him.

It is extraordinarily difficult to accept the loss of a young life, to find meaning in such tragedy. Yet perhaps we can learn from how Shirel herself accepted all that came her way throughout her life—with wholehearted trust in Hashem. She walked tamim with God in this world, living with authenticity, moral integrity, and complete devotion to what was right. And in her pure soul's journey to the next world, she continues to walk tamim with Hashem still.

Anna Veronese was born in Venice, Italy. Since 2009, she has been living in Paris with her husband and three children. She holds a BA in Archaeology, an MA in History from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and an MA in Information Science from the CNAM Institute in Paris. She is Project coordinator at Ta Shma, an independent French Beit Midrash in Jerusalem and the vice-president of Kol-Elles, a Beit Midrash in Paris offering Jewish learning for women. She studies issues of gender, equality, and social justice within Orthodox Judaism. She is passionate about Italian Jewish traditions, rich and composite in both customs and liturgy, which she studies and passes on to the next generation.