

Parshat Shoftim

Being "complete" with God

June 21st, 2013

This week we are reading Parshat Shoftim which is devoted almost entirely to the theme of Justice. Moses is addressing the new generation of Israelites, the ones that are going to inherit the Land of Israel, and he wants to be sure they will continue to follow the Torah and the laws of God.

One specific verse of the Parsha is about a commandment that asks from us to develop an important virtue in our lives. In chapter 18 of the book of Deuteronomy the Torah says “Tamim tihiye im Adonai Elohecha” – “You must be complete with the Lord your God”.

But what does it mean to be “complete”? Does it mean that I have to be a good human being? Does it mean that I have to follow the laws of God blindly? What is the meaning of the “completeness” (tmimut) that the Torah is asking from us?

Once I hear a beautiful commentary that tries to answer this question learning the meaning of the word from other texts in the Torah and the Jewish tradition.

The first time where we find the word “tamim – complete” is with Noah. According to the Torah Noah was chosen by God to save the world because he was “tamim bedorotav” which means “a complete person in his generation”.

The generation of the flood was a corrupted one, God looked what they were doing and repented from having created the world. But he found one person who was able to resist the temptation of becoming corrupt, someone who in spite of all the social pressure to imitate the customs and the behavior of their peers, he managed to remain “complete”. In the case of Noah: “Tamim – complete” means to have courage.

The second time is with Abraham. The Torah tells that God asks from Abraham “hithalech lefanai vehey tamim” – “Walk before me and be complete”. And if we pay attention to when Abraham received this request from God we will see that it happens just before his name was changed from “Abram” to “Abraham”, when he received the letter “H” that represent the presence of God.

What we can learn here is that Abraham was able to give a space to God in his life. In spite of being an important person, with much wealth and many servants, he discovered God and was able to give to Him an important place in his life.

Abraham now can feel that God is behind him, protecting him, giving him strength. But at the same his faith doesn't limit him because he knows he has to make his own decisions. For Abraham, believing in God doesn't imply to give up your free will or that you have to follow blindly what he asks. Abraham still makes his own decisions and he is responsible for them.

“Tamim” - being “complete” – in the case of Abraham means giving God a space in your life but understanding that faith implies being responsibly for your deeds.

And the last text is not in the Torah but in the Haggadah of Pesach. We read that the third of the four sons is called “tam” (the root of tamim) which many people translate as “simple” but in the context of our tradition can be perfectly translated as “complete”. This son is “tamim” because he is completely open to receive answers and to learn. His other brothers have already a defined position about Judaism: One that already knows, another one that it seems he doesn't want to learn, and the last one that simply cannot learn”.

In the context of the third son, to be “tam – complete” means to be open, not having prejudices and not being judgmental.

We have here three components of what God asks from us when the Torah says “Tamim Tihiye Im Adonai eloheicha - You must be complete with the Lord your God”. Courage, responsibility and openness are important virtues that we have to try to achieve, in order to improve ourselves and be better human beings.

Shabbat Shalom!
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