

TAKING TRUTH TO HEART I

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

When Avram was ninety-nine years old God appeared to him and said, "I am the Almighty. Walk before Me and be perfect." (Bereshith 17:1)

Tamim - perfect - means that there is no contradiction between one's inner feelings and one's external actions - that one's actions are in perfect harmony with the feelings in one's heart. Although every mitzvah is precious in God's eyes, one done in such a fashion is especially dear, for it is an unequivocal declaration of Divine greatness. Because it is often difficult to achieve absolute synchronization between one's heart and one's actions, this praise is reserved only for the truly righteous.(1)

One who studies Torah is expected to strive to attain this quality, and if he is satisfied by superficially acting out the precepts that he has learned, he lacks an important characteristic of a Torah scholar.(2) In accordance with this, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach would not give his approbation to a book on ethics unless he knew that the author's daily life was a reflection of all that he had written. Since an approbation confirms the acceptability of the book's author, not just its contents, he felt that such a recommendation would not be absolutely true if he gave it to someone who professed values that he did not live up to.(3)

In its proper form this attribute is meant to permeate every aspect of one's being, especially speech. A person who lacks tamimuth is hypocritical, saying one thing while he really means something completely different. King Dovid expressed this eloquently when he said, "Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from deception."(4) Evil is associated with the tongue and deception with the lips, because although an evil person acts improperly, at least he does not disguise his bad intentions. Since his behavior is consistent with his intentions, he is identified with the tongue, which is a single entity. A deceitful individual, however, pretends to befriend others, while in his heart his intention is to harm them. Like the deceitful person, the lips are split across the middle and divided in two.(5)

1. *Rabbeinu Bachyeh on Bereshith 17:1.*

2. Yoma 72b.

3. Me'or HaGadol, p. 137.

4. Tehillim 34:14.

5. Vilna Gaon commentary on Mishlei 2:12.

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