



# Make up your mind

## Further Thoughts on Parashat Shoftim

“How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). These words of Eliyahu ha-navi (Elijah the prophet) are meant for us to hear today, at the beginning of this Season of Teshuvah. We are being called to make up our minds (*metanoia*) and turn (*shuv*) to the LORD. After all, what is more important to you than your relationship with the LORD God of Israel? Is there anything more important than this?

The first Torah reading for the Season of Teshuvah addresses this very issue: “You must be wholehearted with the LORD your God” (תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ) (Deut. 18:13). In the Sefer Torah (i.e., Torah scroll), the first letter of the word *tamim* (“wholehearted”) is written extra LARGE in order to emphasize the importance of the word. Notice also the little word “with” (עִם) that follows in this verse. This hearkens to Micah 6:8: “What does the LORD require of you but to do justice (*mishpat*), and to love kindness (*chesed*), and to walk humbly (*hatznea lechet*) with your God?” Having a humble heart walks with the LORD. Humility begins with the awareness that 1) there is a God and 2) you are not Him.... It is the practice of “knowing before whom you stand” and living your life in light of this fundamental truth.

The word *tamim* (תָּמִים) means “finished,” “complete,” or “thoroughly made.” For example, *tamim* is used to describe *completed* years (Gen. 47:18); *healthy* animal sacrifices (Lev. 22:21-22); *nourishing* vines (Ezek. 15:5); *truthful* speech (Amos 5:10); *finished* building projects (1 Kings 6:22); and so on. In our relationship with God, *tamim* means being “blameless” in the sense of being wholehearted, resolute, and entirely committed to walking “with” Him in this world. Psalm 119 begins, “Happy are those whose way is blameless (*tamim*), who walk in the instruction of the Lord.”



## אֲשֶׁרִי תְּמִימֵי־דֶרֶךְ הַחֲלָכִים בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה

ash-rei te-mi-mei **da**-rekh, ha-ho-le-khim be-to-rat Adonai

“Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the teaching of the LORD”

(Psalm 119:1)

Here we see that “walking in the instruction (Torah) of the LORD” is the *means* by which we are able to walk humbly with God. The study and practice of Torah, then, helps us to become *tamim*: wholehearted, resolute, and committed to God. Walking in God’s truth also makes us happy (i.e., *me’ushar*: מְאַשֵּׁר, from the verb *ashar* that means to “walk straight”). As we walk in the truth of God, we begin to experience inner peace and a sense of abiding joy...

The Scriptures state that a “double-minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). The word translated “double-minded” is *dipsuchos* (δίψυχος), a word formed from *δύς*, “twice” and *ψυχή*, “soul.” The word describes the spiritual condition of having “two souls” that both want different things at once. It is therefore a state of inner contradiction, of having two separate minds holding contradictory thoughts. “How long will you go limping between two opinions?” Notice that the word translated “limping” is *posechim* (פֹּסְעִים), from the same root as Passover (i.e., *pasach*: פָּסַח): “How long will you *pass* from one thing to another?” How long will you play “hot potato” with your commitments?

Having a double-mind makes us “unstable in all our ways.” Such a cross-eyed approach leads to disorientation and confusion. The Greek word used to describe being “unstable” (*ἀκατάστατος*) is the same word used to translate being “storm-tossed and not comforted” in last week’s Haftarah portion (LXX: Isa. 54:11). The image of a ship being tossed in the sea pictures a state of distress and peril. Interestingly, the description of being “not comforted” is *lo nuchamah* (לֹא נִחַמָּה), which comes from the very word translated as “repent” or “regret” (*nacham*). When we are double-minded, we are “storm tossed” and unable to experience the comfort that comes from genuine repentance. We are like “a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6).





On the other hand, singleness of vision concentrates the will and produces wholeheartedness, conviction, stability, inner peace (shalom) and genuine character. As Kierkegaard said, “purity of the heart is to will one thing.” “I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8).

Someone might ask, how do we stop being “double-minded”? This is the essence of the problem, isn’t it? How do we stop being of “two minds,” experiencing that ambivalence of both wanting and not wanting something? In other words, how do we repent - both in the sense of “changing our minds” (metanoia) and in the sense of practically turning to God (teshuvah)? How do we find that purity of heart that wills one thing?

The antidote for having a “double-mind” is explicitly given in the Scriptures: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (ἐγγίσσατε τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐγγιεῖ ὑμῖν), cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8). Note that the verb used in this verse (“draw near!”) means to come *close enough to touch* someone or something. Understood in this light, we are encouraged to come so close to God that we are able to “touch” Him -- and to be touched by Him as well. Drawing near to God is God’s way of drawing near to you... In other words, as you draw near to God, He will draw near and touch you.

In practical terms, here are some specific things we can do to “draw near to God so that He will draw near to you.” First we can simply pray and earnestly cry out to God for help. The LORD is not indifferent to our suffering and has promised to give us the Holy Spirit to help us. But genuine prayer requires honesty and confession (ὁμολογία), which means agreeing with the truth about your condition. This means, among other things, identifying the ways you have withdrawn from your relationship with God. Indeed, the word *homologeō* (ὁμολογέω) literally means “saying the same thing” - from ὁμός (same) and λόγος (word). There’s little use trying to pretend before God or to rationalize your own double-mindedness before Him. God knows the number of hairs on your head; He surely knows the condition of your heart!

Second, we must vigorously challenge ideas that attempt to seduce us away from the truth and thereby divide our affections. We must learn to take “every thought captive” to Messiah and be on guard for subtle appeals to compromise (2 Cor. 10:5). If we find ourselves in a state of recurring temptation, we must examine the underlying assumptions that are at work in our thinking. If we dig deeper, we are likely to discover that we doubt that God cares for us, or that we are fearful that God will not meet our needs. We must therefore counter such assumptions with God’s revealed truth, and that means regularly studying the Scriptures to remind ourselves about what is real rather than what is illusory.



We then can learn to look at life as it really is - a spiritual world, a “valley of decision,” a corridor that irresistibly leads to the world to come. Each soul is on a journey to meet with God for judgment... God does not leave us comfortless. He has promised to never leave nor forsake those who trust in Him. We can set the LORD “always before us” (Psalm 16:8) and walk with Him during our sojourn here in this temporal world.

Third, we can *practice* our faith by keeping up with Torah study, observing Shabbat (and the other appointed times), enjoying fellowship with other believers, singing to worship music, giving tzedakah, ministering to others in need, etc. These are the *mitzvot* of our lives, the “works of love” (John 15:12). Our faith is not meant to be a “head trip” or an intellectual exercise: we are meant to *live it out* in the world. And as we live it, our faith itself becomes strengthened and authenticated. Just as loving others *increases* - not decreases - the love we ourselves have, so with the practice of faith. The more we believe, the more we receive. The practice of our faith is upbuilding and encourages the inner resolve to be single-minded... “Upon three things the world does stand: upon the Torah and upon worship and upon acts of lovingkindness.”

Finally, on a *spiritual* level what ultimately changes the heart is God’s salvation, of course. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail” (John 6:63). This salvation is not simply freedom from the penalty of sin but freedom from its power. Often, however, we are slow to realize this, and God allows us to revisit the various “waste places” of our own lusts until we have become sick of ourselves -- “to the bones.” We have to be willing “to give up our sickness.” Usually that means that we must experience repeated failures until we have “learned from the heart” that the LORD - and the LORD *alone* - is our Healer and Deliverer. Heartache and despair can lead to “godly grief (λύπη) that leads to genuine repentance in our lives (2 Cor. 7:10).

Ultimately “Salvation is from the Lord,” and brokenness of our spirit is God’s gift to us... “Blessed are the poor (πτωχός) in spirit.” This word pictures someone crouching as a helpless beggar, totally dependent on God for help. If you are struggling, ask God to help you surrender your “heart sickness” to Him.... It’s HIS work, not your own, that saves... God alone truly changes the heart. Repentance is a miracle from heaven given to you, personally...





A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field” (Isa. 40:6). “All flesh is grass” (כָּל־הַבָּשָׂר הָעֵצִיר) - we are here today but gone tomorrow. We have only so many chances to turn to the LORD and make up our minds that we will serve Him. Our Torah portion this week intimates, “man is a tree of the field,” i.e., עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה, Deut. 20:19). The righteous man is described as a “tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth fruit in his season” (Psalm 1:3). If you stand in front of a tree to watch it grow, however, you will see nothing. But if you care for the tree, nurture it over time, and provide for its needs, eventually you will see its fruit appear. God gives us each a season to repent, but if that proves fruitless in our spiritual lives, eventually we will be “cut down” (Luke 13:6-9):

“A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it but found none. So he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, but I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ But the vinedresser answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

As Yeshua also admonished: “Remember (*zachar*) how you have fallen; repent (*metanao*) and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your menorah from its place unless you repent” (Rev. 2:5). If you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - Yeshua will “spit you out of His mouth” (Rev 3:16). These are sober words that remind us that time is short for us all. Our lives are not our own; we were redeemed at a great cost to God Himself (1 Cor. 6:19-20).



We must *decide* whether we will serve the LORD or Baal. We must quit “limping between two different opinions.” You cannot serve two masters. God wants us to make up our minds. He wants us to declare our loyalty in response to His love. *Now* is the time. *Today* is the day. We don’t have all the time in the world... May the LORD help us all to wholeheartedly draw near to Him now. Amen.

