

BADERECH

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Sincerity

Festive gatherings at 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, Chabad-Lubavitch world headquarters are, and have always been, lively, meaningful and full of holy excitement. Sometimes, the thousands of men present wearing long black kapotehs and the highly charged atmosphere create a bit of a confusing hullaballoo. Once, for a moment, a young boy got mixed up in a crowd of celebrating chasidim; father and son lost track of one another. Thinking he had found his father, the child innocently grabbed hold of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's hand and wiped his dirty face on the sleeve of the Rebbe's *kapoteh*.


Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l

The next day, the Rebbe received a note from the mother of the child, begging forgiveness, saying she was embarrassed and "pained" at what had happened. The mother soon received her note back with a question mark and exclamation point inscribed after the word "pained". The Rebbe wrote at the bottom, "On the contrary: He brought me great pleasure. One cannot begin to measure the heartfulness, simplicity, innocence, and sincerity of a child — if only half these qualities could be found in adults."



וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ צַיִד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה וְיַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֹהָלִים

"And the young men grew up... Eisav was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Yaakov was an *ish tam*, a 'wholesome man', a dweller in tents" (25:27).

The Hebrew word *tam*, sometimes translated as 'perfect', is more accurately 'innocent' — while implying simplicity, purity, wholeheartedness, sincerity, and completeness.

Temimus is our foundation and touchstone, the pathway of the righteous. While Yaakov Avinu is called *ish tam* in our *sedra*, he is not the first to embody this holy trait: Hashem also praises Noach as an *ish tzadik tamim*, Avraham Avinu is encouraged to walk with God and be *tamim*, and Yitzchak Avinu manifests *temimus* at the *Akeidah*.

In the teachings of Maharal of Prague (*Nesivos Olam*, Nesiv haTemimus), *temimus* is considered a most desirable *midah*, referred to as שיא החיים, 'the apex of life'

and a primary goal in character development — our purpose in this world.

The challenge and opportunity Hashem lays before us is one of striving toward *temimus,* accurately translated as 'sincerity' or 'wholeness'. The common mistranslation of *temimus* as 'perfection' can be severely damaging to our spiritual growth and personal development. The *Ribbono shel Olam* neither desires nor expects 'perfection' of us; the entire system of *teshuvah* and the possibility of forgiveness is based on inevitable sins and mistakes. Human beings are necessarily 'imperfect', and so the drive to be perfect veers away from the way Hashem created us. Not only is a perfectionist image unattainable, a 'need' to attain it is unhealthy. Lurking behind such narcissism is often low self-esteem, a *lack* of wholeness. Perfectionism and true *temimus* are actually opposites.

On the verse defining Yaakov Avinu as an *ish tam,* Rashi comments: כְּלִבּוֹ כֵּן פִּיו, "... as in his heart, so in his lips". Yaakov was a person who spoke what he thought; he simply could not lie. His words and his thoughts were completely connected. This is one way that he revealed complete *temimus*, integrity, and *sheleimus,* wholeheartedness. This is also how Yaakov embodied the Midah of *Tiferes*, which is a quality of *k'lil,* 'bringing together' or connectivity.

Rebbe Nachman explains the inner significance of Yaakov's efforts to acquire the *bechora,* 'blessing of the firstborn'. On a deeper level, to be a 'firstborn' means to see things as though for the 'first' time. Yaakov experienced life with newness, wonder, innocence and *temimus.*

Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli taught that there are three things we can learn from an infant: how to laugh, how to cry, and how to keep constantly busy. For children, everything is natural and new, often learned or experienced for the first time. Curiosity, openness and simple enjoyment pervade their consciousness. Indeed, if we were to open our hearts and enter the internal stance of *temimus,* these qualities could be found in us adults as well.

May the birth of Yaakov Avinu this week awaken in us a renewed commitment toward cultivating *temimus* in our own lives and *avodas Hashem,* Jewish practice. May we let go of perfectionism and merit to serve God in simplicity, sincerity, earnestness, and wholeheartedness.

Excerpt from newly released **Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah**, (Mosaica Press). ■

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Mazal Tov to
Deena & Steve Sattler and family
on the birth of a grandson

