

Parashat Lekh Lekha: Walking Before God

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Bereishit 17:1	
וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן-תְּשָׁעִים שָׁנָה וַתֵּשַׁע שָׁנִים וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי־אֵל שְׁדֵי הַתְּהֵלֶךְ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תָּמִים:	When Abram was ninety-nine years old, GOD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be <i>tamim</i> ."

1. Meanings of תָּמִים

Modern Translations of תָּמִים	
The Jewish Publication Society, <i>JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh</i>	Blameless
Rabbi Joseph Hertz, "The Hertz Chumash"	Whole-hearted
Rabbi Charles Kahane, <i>Torah Yesharah</i>	Highest Degree of Perfection
ArtScroll Publications, <i>Rashi Commentary on the Torah</i>	Perfect
ArtScroll Publications, <i>Ramban Commentary on the Torah</i>	Perfect
Professor Everett Fox, <i>The Five Books of Moses</i>	Wholehearted
Adam Cohn, <i>Modernized Tanakh</i> (Based on JPS 1917)	Innocent
<i>Koren Jerusalem Bible</i>	Perfect
Professor Richard Elliott Friedman, <i>The Bible With Sources Revealed</i>	Unblemished
Professor Robert Alter, <i>The Five Books of Moses</i>	Blameless

Rashi on Bereishit 17:1	
וְהָיָה תָּמִים. אָף זֶה צוּי אַחֵר צוּי, הָיָה שְׁלֵם בְּכָל נְסִיווֹתָיו; וּלְפִי מִדְרָשׁוֹ הַתְּהֵלֶךְ לִפְנֵי בְּמִצְוֹת מִלֵּה, וּבְדָבָר הַזֶּה תְּהִיָּה תָּמִים, שְׁכָל זְמַן שְׁהַעֲרֵלָה בָּךְ אֶתְהָ בַעַל מוֹם לִפְנֵי. דְּבָר אַחֵר וְהָיָה תָּמִים, (עֲקֹשׂוּ אֶתְהָ חֶסֶר ה' אֲבָרִים, ב' עֵינַיִם, ב' אֲזָנִים, וְרֹאשׁ הַגִּוְיָה) שְׁאוּסִיף לָךְ אוֹת עַל שְׁמֶךָ, וְהָיָה מְגִין אוֹתִיּוֹתֶיךָ רַמ"ח כְּמִנֵּי אֲבָרֶיךָ:	AND BE PERFECT — This, too, is a command following upon the previous command: be whole-hearted in all the trials I impose upon you. According to the Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 46:4), however, it means: walk before Me by observing the precept of circumcision and through this you will become perfect, for so long as you are uncircumcised I regard you as having a blemish. Another explanation of BE THOU PERFECT — at present you lack the power of controlling morally five organs, viz., two

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

	eyes, two ears and the membrum. Therefore will I add a letter (i. e. the letter 'ה' the numerical value of which is five) to your name (אברהם which equals 243) so that the total of the letters of your name (אברהם) will become 248, corresponding to the number of limbs of your body (cf. Nedarim 32b).
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Ramban on Bereishit 17:1	
<p>וְהָיָה תַּמִּים מִצֹּחַ אַחֲרֵת עוֹד בְּעֵינָיו הַזֶּה, כְּטַעַם "תַּמִּים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ" (דברים יח יג) אַחֲרֵי אֲזָהָרֵת הַשֵּׁם "לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּךָ קֶסֶם קְסָמִים מְעוֹנִין וּמִנְחָשׁ וּמְכַשֵּׁף" וגו' (שם יח י). וְהֵעֵינִי בְּשִׁנְיָהֶם שִׂיאָמִין בְּלִבּוֹ כִּי הִקְבֵּה לְבָדּוֹ הוּא בַּעַל הַיִּכְלִית בְּתַחֲלָה וּבְסוֹף, הוּא הַיִּכּוֹל לַעֲשׂוֹת וּלְבַטֵּל, וְלֹא יִשְׁמַעוּ אֶל מַעֲנֵנִים וְאֶל קְסָמִים אוֹ לְמִנְחָשׁ וּמְכַשֵּׁף, וְלֹא יֵאָמִין שִׁיבָאוּ דְּבָרֵיהֶם עַל כָּל פְּנִים, אֲבָל יִגְזֹר בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁהַכֹּל בְּיַד עֲלִיּוֹן הָעֲלִיּוֹנִים, שֶׁהוּא "אֵל" וְהוּא "אֵל שְׂדֵי", עוֹשֶׂה טוֹבָה שְׁלֵמָה בְּמַזְל וּמִבְּיֵא רָעָה בְּהִיּוֹת הַמַּזָּל טוֹב וְרָע, כְּפִי שִׁיְתֵּהֶלֶךְ הָאָדָם לְפָנָיו, "מִפְּרִי אֲתוֹת בְּדִים וְקְסָמִים יְהוֹלֵל" (ישעיהו מד כה). וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאֲמָרוּ (שבת קנו) צֵא מֵאֲצֻטְגִּינֹת שְׁלָךְ וְכו'...וְהִנֵּחוּ מָה שֶׁפִּרְשִׁיתִי:</p>	<p>וְהָיָה תַּמִּים. This is an additional commandment in this matter, similar in meaning to the verse, <i>Thou shalt be whole-hearted with the Eternal thy God</i>, which follows God's admonition: <i>There shall not be found among you any one that ... useth divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or sorcerer</i>, etc. The purport of both verses is that one should believe in his heart that the Holy One, blessed be He, alone is the Omnipotent from beginning to end. He has the power to do and to undo; therefore, he should not listen to soothsayers, diviners, enchanters, or sorcerers. He shall in no way believe that their words shall be fulfilled, but he should decree in his heart that everything is in the hand of the Supreme One, who is God, God Almighty, who doeth a person good, which was not predestined by his constellation, and bringeth evil upon him despite a constellation that was good and auspicious. According to the way a man walks before Him, <i>He frustrates the tokens of impostors and drives diviners mad</i>. It is this which the Sages had in mind when they said: "[God said to Abraham], 'Go forth from your astrological speculations, etc.'" Now Rashi explained: <i>"And be thou whole-hearted..."</i> The correct interpretation is as I have explained.</p>

2. Walking With God vs. Walking Before God

Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 30:10	
<p>אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ (בראשית ו, ט), רַבִּי יְהוּדָה וְרַבִּי נְחֵמְיָה, רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אָמַר מִשָּׁל לְשָׂר שְׁהִיּוּ לוֹ שְׁנֵי בָנִים אֶחָד גָּדוֹל וְאֶחָד קָטָן אָמַר לְקָטָן הֵלֶךְ עִמִּי וְאָמַר לְגָדוֹל בּוֹא וְהֵלֶךְ לְפָנָי. כֹּךְ אֲבָרְהָם שְׁהִיָּה כְחוֹ יִצְחָק (בראשית יז, א): הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנָי וְהָיָה תַּמִּים, אֲבָל נֹחַ שְׁהִיָּה כְחוֹ רֵעַ, אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ.</p>	<p>"Noah walked with God." Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nehemya, Rabbi Yehuda said: This is analogous to a prince who had two sons, one older and one younger. He said to the younger, 'Walk with me,' and he said to the elder, 'Come and walk before me.' So too, of Abraham, whose strength was great, [God said,] "Walk before Me and be faultless" (Genesis 17:1). But Noah, whose strength was lesser, "Noah walked with God."</p>

David Hartman, <i>A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism</i> , 49-50	
<p>Noah's utter silence and acquiescence in God's plan to destroy all of life stand in sharp contrast to Abraham's heroic confrontation with God. Noah is not portrayed as a person actively responsible for the fate of others. He "walks with God"; that is, he agrees to be led...By contrast, Abraham walks before God. He challenges God by appealing to universal moral principles. He is fully awake to his responsibility for others and confronts God on their behalf. Noah was not weaned from childlike dependency on his Creator and could not stand in moral confrontation with God.</p>	