

## And the Angels of G-d met him. (32:2)

The word *va'yifga* connotes an unexpected encounter. When the angels encountered Yaakov *Avinu*, it was an unusual experience for them. As *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, explains, Yaakov *Avinu* was the first of the *Avos*, Patriarchs, who merited to have *mitaso sheleimah*, that all of his children were righteous and followed in his ways of serving Hashem. Even after living for twenty years in the home of the evil Lavan, they emerged spiritually unscathed. The level that Yaakov achieved was incredible for the angels to behold. It was a momentous experience for them to see such a family on earth (amid physicality and materialism) emerge so spiritually pure.

How did this happen? How does one succeed in imbuing his family with such G-dliness? How does one (so to speak) bring Hashem “down” into his home, into his life? The answer lies at the very beginning of the *parsha*, when Yaakov had an otherworldly experience, *Vayifga ba'makom*; “And he encountered the place” (ibid. 28:11). It was in this place that our Patriarch had his famous dream, in which “he met the Divine.” This *vayifga* was his momentous experience; in which he encountered Hashem in this world. In order to imbue one's home/life/family with G-dliness, he must see/experience G-d in his life, in this world. He must sense that Hashem is everywhere, a part of everything that happens concerning him and around him. When one feels Hashem/*vayifga ba'makom*, then one can bring Heaven “down” into his life, so that *vayifgeu bo malachei Elokim*.

Bringing Heaven down to earth, imbuing one's earthly endeavor with Heavenly meaning and focus, is what defines the *tzaddik*, righteous person. The *tzaddik* sees Hashem in every aspect of his life. The *tzaddik*, however, is a human being like the rest of us, but, as the root of the word *tzaddik* implies (derived from *tzedeq*, just/correct), the *tzaddik* acts exactly as his Creator wants him to act. A *tzaddik* embodies Hashem's paramount conception of the human being. While the *tzaddik* does everything that the human being does, he does it on a more elevated plane, a Divine level. To the *tzaddik*, everything has purpose; everything has meaning: that purpose and meaning are linked to Hashem. Thus, everything that the *tzaddik* does allows him a greater connection to Hashem.

We find that even the term *tzaddik* is enhanced with the added appellation, *tamim*. Noach is characterized as a *tzaddik*, which is enhanced with the added appellation of *tamim*. Noach is characterized as a *tzaddik tamim*, which is (at first glance) translated as a wholesome/complete *tzaddik*. The commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, offer their own understanding of these terms, breaking them up into two levels, or standards, of ethical/moral commitment. *Ibn Ezra* and *Sforno* say *tzaddik* applies to action and *tamim* to thought. *Ramban* opines that *tamim* defines righteousness, i.e., complete in righteousness. *Rabbeinu Bachya* defined *tzaddik* as a person who is careful with other people's property; one who distances himself from any vestige of thievery or impropriety. *Tamim* is defined as *shaleim b'chol midosav*, one who is perfect in all of his character traits. A *tamim* is ethically flawless in his demeanor. His ethics are impeccable, all rendered so by his commitment to Heavenly standards.

*Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*, relates the story of an English lawyer, a Jew by birth, but one who knew very little of his religious heritage. He was the paragon of integrity and ethicality. He defended a businessman who, he discovered later, was irreputable, a scoundrel who had fooled him. The judge in the case felt that somehow the lawyer was also involved, and he sought to have him disbarred. The lawyer did not know what to do. His only error was in defending a thief. He turned to his good friend, a deeply-religious Jew, who advised him to pray to Hashem for salvation.

The lawyer refused to pray. Apparently, earlier, at one point in his life, he had promised Hashem that he would never again ask Him for anything. He told his friend the incredible story of his “promise to Hashem.” He had reason to be in Australia for a high profile case. Since it would take some time to resolve the case, he took his seven-year old daughter with him for company.

One day, the young girl suddenly developed a high fever. This was the lawyer’s only child, and he immediately brought her to a respected physician. After running a number of tests, the doctor rendered his grim diagnosis: the girl was succumbing to an infection that was invading her body. She had very little time to live. When the lawyer heard the news, he broke down. He did not know where to turn. He remembered that the last time he had been in *shul* was many years earlier, at his *bar mitzvah*. He went in search of a *shul* where he could pour out his heart to Hashem.

The lawyer walked for hours until he came to the *frum*, observant, Jewish neighborhood. He saw what appeared to be a *shul*, and he entered. As it was midday, the *shul* was empty of congregants; so the lawyer had the sanctuary to himself. He approached the *Aron Kodesh* and began to cry bitterly. “Please Hashem, I make only this one request. I promise I will ‘never’ bother you again. Please let my little girl survive. She is all I have!” He stayed a while, crying his heart out until he was spent. Upon returning to the hospital to visit his daughter, he was greeted by the doctor, who exclaimed, “Your daughter has opened her eyes!” It was clearly a miracle, which the lawyer attributed to his fervent plea to Hashem.

“Do you understand why I cannot pray to Hashem? I gave my word that I would never ask Him again for anything. How can I go back on my word?” The Torah scholar explained that Hashem looks forward to sincere prayer, and this would not be considered breaking his word. He listened. He prayed to Hashem. The Almighty listened, and he was found innocent, and he was able to continue practicing law.

*Rav Sholom* concluded the story with the following inspirational words, “We see from here how Hashem causes events to occur for the purpose of bringing those who are sincere and wholesome in their faith closer to Him. Imagine how much He will do for someone who is also G-d-fearing and fully committed to Torah and *mitzvah* observance.”

Ethical perfection often demands that one be a *vatran*, acquiescent and compliant. A demanding person will never achieve *temimus*. This is demonstrated by the following story (which appeared on these pages a while ago). A wealthy young widow became ill and was called to her eternal rest. As

she lay on her deathbed, she spoke to her only daughter, who was then of marriageable age, “I am leaving you my entire fortune on the condition that you visit the *Rosh Yeshivah* of a certain *yeshivah* and ask for his very best student as a husband. This money is only on the condition (obviously, it was contingent that the boy and girl would be attracted to one another) that you marry the best *bochur* in that *yeshivah*.”

The daughter adhered to her late mother’s behest, and, after speaking with the *Rosh Yeshivah*, met with his suggested match for her. The relationship went well; they liked one another, and, before long, they were engaged. All was good and well until a few weeks prior to the designated wedding day, the *kallah*, bride, heard rumors that, indeed, an even better student was in the *yeshivah*. She should have trusted the *Rosh Yeshivah*, but this is how rumors wreak havoc on people’s lives – especially the gullible and unassuming.

The *kallah* became distressed, and the *chassan*, groom, not wanting to cause her any added anxiety, “suggested” to her that she would best be served by following her emotions and looking into the other young man. They parted on good terms. The *kallah* arranged to meet the other “best” student, and a match made in Heaven achieved fruition. The young couple was married. The ex went back to learning in the *yeshivah* where he once again achieved “best student” status. Everyone was happy.

Six months passed, and the *Rosh Yeshivah* of a preeminent *yeshivah* in Yerushalayim visited the *yeshivah* where this “best” student was learning and asked his *Rosh Yeshivah* for his best student. He was searching for a young man whom he could groom to one day assume his position as *Rosh Yeshivah*. The suitable choice was, of course, our original *chassan*, who, by now, in addition to his scholarship, had developed an enviable reputation for his extraordinary *middos* and high ethical standards. A position such as this was the dream of every *yeshivah* student. It is a level to which everyone aspires. Yet, when the position was presented to the student, he demurred. At first, he refused to give a reason for his refusal, but, after some prodding by his *Rosh Yeshivah*, he relented and explained why he had said no.

The student was well-aware that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but he felt that he could not treat his original *kallah*, who was now happily married to the “best” student whom she made sure became her husband, in this manner. How would she feel when she discovered that the young man whom she had passed over had just become a respected *Rosh Yeshivah* of a distinguished *yeshivah*? She would begin to question her husband’s scholarship: Perhaps she should have stayed with her first *chassan*; should she forfeit her mother’s inheritance?

The bachur explained, “I could not allow this to occur. I could not hurt this girl. Thus, I was *mevater*, graciously refused, the position. Better I should not be a *Rosh Yeshivah* than aggrieve my original *kallah*.”

We now have what I feel is an insight into the meaning of *tamim*.