



תמים תהיה Keep the Faith

■ Seeing the Future

What is the source of the very prevalent and intense human desire to see into the future? It is not only a form of curiosity regarding the unknown. It is based also on the fear and uncertainty inherent in our present situation, one of perpetual instability.

The almost universal urge to tell the future led to the rise of sorcerers, witches, wizards and practitioners of black magic. The phenomenon became so widespread that the Torah saw fit to warn gravely and repeatedly against it – especially after it became well-entrenched among the Canaanites living in the Holy Land that Israel was to inherit. We read in the Torah portion of Shoftim:

כִּי אַתָּה בָּא אֶל הָאָרֶץ... לֹא תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּתוֹעֲבַת הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם.

For you are coming to the Land...

*do not learn to do the repulsive practices
of those nations. (D'varim 18,9)*

לֹא יִמָּצָא בְּךָ... קִסָּם קְסָמִים מְעוֹנִין וּמְנַחֵשׁ וּמְכַשֵּׁף...

כִּי תוֹעֲבַת ה' כָּל עֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים...

*There must not be found among you... one who practices
divinations, an omen-teller or a witch... Those involved in these
practices are an abomination to G-d. (verses 9-12)*



The eager chase after all sorts of seers and fortune tellers can cause havoc and ruin for both the individual and the entire nation, no less than the reliance on idols of wood and stone. The Torah describes this phenomenon as an “*abomination to G-d*,” for which He expelled the Canaanites and replaced them with Israel:

וּבְגִלּוֹל הַתּוֹעֵבֹת הָאֵלֶּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מוֹרִישׁ אוֹתָם מִפְּנֵיהֶּ.

*And because of these abominations,
Hashem is enabling you to inherit them.* (verse 12)

The Torah demands that the Jewish People adopt a totally different approach:

תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

Be totally faithful to Hashem your G-d. (verse 13)

This is the approach called *temimut*. Though the above translation employs the word “faithful,” the word תָּמִים, *tamim*, can have many meanings, such as “perfect,” “complete,” and “innocent.” We must therefore ask: What does the Torah mean when it commands us to be *tamim* and have *temimut*?

■ With G-d, or Before G-d?

To decipher this mitzvah, let us consult another verse in which a similar command appears – to our Patriarch Avraham:

וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו: אֲנִי אֵל שַׁדַּי הַתְּהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי וְהָיָה תָּמִים.

... Hashem appeared to Avram and said to him:

*“I am the Lord Shad-dai,
walk before me and be perfect.”* (B'reshit 17,1)

The most blatant difference between this command and the similar one to the Nation of Israel is that Abraham is asked to “*walk before G-d and be tamim*,” while Israel is instructed to “*be tamim with Hashem your G-d*.”

That is, Avraham is bidden to fulfill his part of the Covenant even before G-d fulfills His part. Avraham, walking “*before G-d*,” thus shows a very high level of trust and belief in Hashem, fulfilling what is required of him even while G-d’s promises remain unfulfilled. Even if it takes hundreds of years or more, Avraham knows that G-d will surely fulfill every detail of His promises, and performs his part “*before G-d*” does.

The Nation of Israel, on the other hand, is asked only to walk *with* G-d – like Noah: אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים הַתְּהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ, *Noach walked with G-d* (B'reshit 6,9) – or even



to walk *after* Him, as in Parashat Re'eh, אַחֲרַי ה' אֲלֵהֶיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ, *After your G-d you shall walk* (D'varim 13,5). Israel need not fulfill its covenantal obligations before Hashem fulfills His; Israel is permitted to carry out its side of the bargain at the same time as G-d, or even afterwards.

There is thus no need for sorcerers and seers to tell Israel what will be. Moshe tells Israel to be *tamim*: “You must be loyal to the commitment that you took upon yourselves – namely, to hearken not to the sorcerers, but to the words of the Prophets!”

One question that arises at this point is this: To what commitment is Moshe referring? When did the Children of Israel agree to listen to the Prophets and not to fortune-tellers?

To answer this, let us return to Parashat Yitro and the dramatic account of the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. The Torah describes the thunder and flames and the frightening atmosphere, leading the people to exclaim to Moshe:

דַּבֵּר אֶתְּהָ עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאַל יִדְבֹר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים פֶּן נָמוּת.
*“Speak to us yourself, and we will listen;
 and have G-d not speak to us, lest we die.”* (Sh'mot 20,16)

The people are afraid that they will not be able to survive hearing the voice of G-d directly. They therefore ask Moshe to mediate between them and G-d. This request appears in greater detail in the beginning of the Book of D'varim, when Moshe reminds them that they approached him and said:

הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה רָאִינוּ כִּי יִדְבֹר אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם וְחָי.
 וְעַתָּה לָמָּה נָמוּת כִּי תֹאכַלְנוּ הָאֵשׁ הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת
 אִם יִסְפִּים אֲנַחְנוּ לְשָׁמֹעַ אֶת קוֹל ה' אֲלֵהֵינוּ עוֹד וּמָתָנוּ.
*“Today we saw that G-d speaks to man and he can live.
 But why should we die when this great fire consumes us,
 by continuing to hear the voice of Hashem our G-d?”* (D'varim 5, 20-22)

At this point, the Israelites make a firm commitment to hearken to Moshe's words:

קָרַב אֶתְּהָ וְשָׁמַע אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר ה' אֲלֵהֵינוּ,
 וְאֶת תְּדַבֵּר אֵלֵינוּ אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֹר ה' אֲלֵהֵינוּ אֵלֵיךָ וְשָׁמַעְנוּ וְעָשִׂינוּ.
*“You, Moshe, should approach and listen to what G-d tells –
 and then relay to us all that Hashem has spoken to you,
 and we will hear and we will do.”* (verse 24)



Here in Parashat Shoftim, Moshe reminds Israel of this commitment, and explains that it means listening not only to Moshe himself, but also to all the other true prophets after him. He states:

נְבִיא מִקְרִבָּה מֵאֲחֵיךָ כְּמִנִּי יִקִּים לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּן.
 כָּל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאֲלָתָּ מֵעַם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחֹרֵב... לֹא אִסַּף לְשָׁמַע אֶת קוֹל ה'.
*A prophet from amongst you, from your brothers, like myself,
 G-d will establish for you, and you must listen to him -
 just as you asked of G-d at Horev [Sinai],
 to hear G-d's voice no longer.* (18,15-16)

Moshe clearly emphasizes: “Hashem has accepted your request, exactly as you asked.” Not only that, Hashem appreciates and praises the request:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי, הֵיטִיבוּ אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרוּ!
 נְבִיא אֲקִים לָהֶם מִקְרִב אֲחֵיהֶם כְּמוֹדִי,
 וְנִתְּתִי דְבָרִי בְּפִיו, וְדִבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶם אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶנוּ.
*And Hashem said to me: “They have spoken well;
 I will establish for them a prophet from amongst their brothers,
 and I will place My words in his mouth,
 and he will tell them all that I command him.”* (verses 17-18)

Hashem accepts what Israel has asked, and will in fact give them additional prophets who will strengthen the ties between G-d and Israel. In return, Bnei Yisrael must fulfill their obligation to abide only by the words of the G-d-sent prophets, detaching themselves totally from all the wizards and magicians:

כִּי הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה יורֵשׁ אוֹתָם אֵל מְעַנְנִים וְאֵל קְסָמִים יִשְׁמָעוּ,
 וְאַתָּה לֹא כֹן נָתַן לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ.
*For these nations that you are to possess,
 they hearken to diviners and soothsayers - but as for you,
 Hashem has not given you things like these.*
 נְבִיא מִקְרִבָּה מֵאֲחֵיךָ כְּמִנִּי יִקִּים לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּן.
*A prophet from among you, from your brothers,
 like me [Moshe], Hashem will establish for you;
 to him you shall hearken.* (verses 14-15)



■ Be Perfect

How does all of the above help us understand the central command that headlines this article, namely, to be *tamim*, perfect and innocent? How does *tamim* relate to fulfilling promises?

The answer lies in an up-close analysis of the word *tamim*, which generally means “complete, whole, no blemish.” In Parashat Haazinu, towards the end of D’varim, Moshe tells Israel as follows:

הַצּוֹר, תְּמִים פְּעֻלוֹ, כִּי כָּל דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט...
The deeds of the Mighty One are perfect,
for all His ways are just... (D’varim 32,4)

All of G-d’s actions are ethically perfect, because all His ways are just. Laws of justice are the necessary mechanism by which society preserves and protects ethical values. And what are these ethical values of G-d, in the merit of which G-d’s actions are perfect? The answer appears in the continuation of the above verse:

אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאִין עָוֹל, צַדִּיק וְיָשָׁר הוּא.
He is a faithful G-d, never unfair; righteous and upright He is.

This verse must be understood as describing two pillars of G-d’s ethics – the “outer” and the “inner” characteristics of the verse: “*Faithful*” goes with “*upright*,” and “*never unfair*” corresponds with “*tzaddik*” (righteous) - from the same root as *tzedek*, meaning justice.

“*Faithful G-d*” means that He is loyal to fulfill His commitments; He is “*upright*” and consistent. On the other hand, He is also “*never unfair*,” meaning that He acts with justice, rendering Him “*righteous*.”

G-d’s actions are perfect in both parameters: that of loyalty and trust, and that of righteousness and justice.

In teaching Israel this lesson to be *tamim*, Moshe stands and declares: *Be tamim in all ways to Hashem your G-d* – loyal and reliable, just and not immoral. Make sure, on the one hand, to remember that just as Hashem keeps His word and fulfills His obligations to you, so must you be reliable and trustworthy in return. You asked Him to “fade back” at Sinai and allow others to transmit the message; this He did, surrendering the opportunity to reveal Himself directly to you, sending you His message via Moshe instead, and later via His Prophets. You must therefore also be loyal to your own



request by adhering to His Prophets, and not seeking out false comforts and predictions from sorcerers.

Secondly, remember how Hashem took you out of Egypt and took care of all your needs in the desert; do not return this favor by following the lies of sorcerers. In this way, be just; be a *tzaddik*.

In short: Be *tamim*, complete in your faith, upright and consistent in keeping your word, and do not do an injustice to Hashem your G-d.

■ Temimut

Rashi, father of all commentators, gives us another glimpse into the world of *temimut*, from the angle of sincerity and completeness. Commenting on this very verse - *Be totally faithful to Hashem your G-d* – Rashi says, “Conduct yourself with Him with simplicity, depend on Him, do not inquire of the future; accept whatever happens to you straightforwardly.”

This concept of *temimut* is parallel to the period of childhood. A child trusts implicitly that his parents will always do what is best for him; he sees no need to constantly question them. We, too, must not seek to “outsmart” Him by seeking the secrets of the future, but should rather accept all that happens as His plan.

This is the heart of the loyalty expressed by Israel in the famous words *naaseh v'nishma*, meaning, “*We will [first] do, and [then] we will listen.*” This is how the Nation of Israel reacted when they were offered the Torah: “We will carry it out first, and ask questions later.”

This is also the secret of the Ministering Angels, who are known as *cherubim*, from the Aramaic word *k'ravaya*, meaning “like infants;” their faces were like those of babies. As the Gemara teaches:

R. Elazar said: When Israel said “we will do” before “we will hear,” a Heavenly Voice was heard asking them: “Who revealed this secret, used by the Ministering Angels, to My children?”

[How do we know the angels knew this secret?] As is written: “Bless G-d, you powerful angels of His who do His will, to listen to His word” (Psalms 103,20) – first they “do His will,” and only afterwards they “listen to His word.” (Shabbat 88a)

The willingness to follow G-d’s instructions even before hearing them is an expression of total trust in Hashem. As we see so clearly in this beautiful verse:



כֹּה אָמַר ה' זָכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ, אֲהַבֵּת כְּלוּלְתַיִךְ,
לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה.

*So says G-d: I remember the kindness of your youth,
your love as a bride,
when you followed Me in the wilderness,
in a land that was not sown. (Jeremiah 2,2)*

Elsewhere, the same Prophet elaborates on the unmitigated trust we have in Hashem:

כִּי אֲנֹכִי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת הַמַּחְשְׁבֹת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי חֹשֵׁב עֲלֵיכֶם נְאֻם ה'
מִחֲשָׁבוֹת שְׁלוֹם וְלֹא לְרָעָה, לָתֵת לָכֶם אַחֲרַיִת וְתִקְוָה.

*For I have known the thoughts that I think about you,
says G-d - thoughts of peace and not of evil,
to give you a future and hope. (29,11)*

To be *tamim*, then, is to be totally trustworthy, as well as trusting of Hashem.

