



Parashat Shfetim
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We find in Parashat Shoftim the famous exhortation, “*Tamim tiheyeh im Hashem Elokekha*,” which literally means, “You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God” (18:13). This verse appears in the context of the Torah’s prohibitions regarding various forms of sorcery, witchcraft and fortune-telling. The commentators generally agree that this verse relates to this theme, requiring that we display complete faith in God by refusing to resort to alleged forces of magic and the like.

Nachmanides, in his critique of Maimonides’ listing of the Biblical commands, claims that Maimonides neglected to list this command of “*Tamim tiheyeh*” among the 248 affirmative commands. According to Nachmanides, this verse introduces an obligation to believe that God knows all future events and exerts full control over the world, such that we have no need to resort to magicians and fortune-tellers. Since God exerts unlimited control over the universe, all predictions of fortune-tellers are subject to His will and can thus be easily overturned. This verse commands us to firmly believe this concept and thus feel no need to consult with practitioners of witchcraft.

Maimonides, however, did not view this verse as introducing a Biblical command, and different theories have been proposed to explain his reasoning. Nachmanides himself suggested that Maimonides considered this exhortation too broad and all-encompassing to comprise a single *mitzva*. A command to place one’s trust in God, rather than in other alleged forces, is a basic tenet relevant to the general command of believing in an omnipotent Creator, and thus for this reason, perhaps, Maimonides could not consider the command of “*Tamim tiheyeh*” one of the 248 affirmative commands.

Rav Asher Zelig Weiss, in his *Minchat Asher* (Parashat Noach), notes that an additional reason emerges from Maimonides’ comments in *Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim* (11:16), where he cites this verse. In this passage, Maimonides strongly argues against the existence of supernatural forces and all forms of sorcery. He contends that when the Torah banned the use of superstitious devices, it did so because these devices are worthless. One must not, in Maimonides’ view, acknowledge the usefulness of witchcraft, and think that the Torah nevertheless forbade resorting to such media. Rather, we are bidden to reject outright the claims of sorcerers, and view them as deceptive charlatans who exploit the naiveté and imagination of the boorish masses. Maimonides concludes, “And for this reason the Torah said when it warned against all these kinds of vanity, ‘*Tamim tiheyeh im Hashem Elokekha*’.”

In other words, Maimonides interprets this verse as presenting the reason for why the Torah forbade resorting to witchcraft. It does not introduce a new obligation; it rather calls upon us to be thinking, rational people, who could never acknowledge the validity of witchcraft.

Understandably, then, Maimonides did not list “*Tamim tiheyeh*” as one of the Torah’s affirmative commands. He maintained that this verse commands not a separate obligation, but rather the proper perspective toward the prohibition against witchcraft,

which the Torah presents in the preceding verses. It teaches us to realize the fallacy of the claims of sorcery, and that they serve no constructive purpose whatsoever.