YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #254: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXIV) – The Prohibition of Bamot (XLI)**

### "You shall be Whole-hearted with the Lord your God"

 To complete our examination of the prohibition relating to sorcery, we wish to understand, based on the verses in the book of *Devarim*,how the Torah views the struggle with the abominations of the nations.

 The Torah states in the book of *Devarim*:

When you are come to the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There must not be found among you anyone that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that uses divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination to the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. You shall be whole-hearted with the Lord your God. For these nations, which you shall dispossess, hearken to soothsayers, and to diviners: but as for you, the Lord your God, has not permitted you so to do. The Lord your God will raise up in you a prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like me; to him you shall hearken; according to all that you did desire of the Lord your God in Chorev in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said to me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like you, and will put My word in his mouth; and he shall speak to them all that I command him. (*Devarim* 18:9-18).

 The Torah states that in contrast to the abominations of the nations, members of the people of Israel must be whole-hearted with God. Rashi (ad loc.) explains this idea:

Walk before him wholeheartedly, put your hope in Him and do not attempt to investigate the future, but whatever it may be that comes upon you accept it whole-heartedly, and then you shall be with Him and become His portion. (v. 13, s.v. *tamim tiheye*)

 The requirement here is not only to refrain from following after abominations, but rather there is a positive expectation that one must put his hope in God, be with Him, and become His portion.

 However, the Torah continues and presents an alternative to the abominations of the nations, namely, prophecy, whose role it is to inform man of God's will. Prophecies do not come to define the future, but to tell a person how he is to act and how he can shape the future. On the other hand, the great evil of inquiring about the future is that a person subjugates himself and nullifies with his own hands his freedom of choice.[[1]](#footnote-1) If everything is already determined and the future is known this weakens a person's determination to act and to change things.

The Ramban in his strictures to the Rambam's *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* counts the verse, "You shall be whole-hearted with the Lord your God," as a positive commandment, as opposed to the Rambam who does not count among the 613 commandments directives that embrace all of the *mitzvot*. The Ramban writes as follows:

We have been commanded to be wholehearted in our dealings with Him, as it is stated: "You shall be whole-hearted with the Lord your God." This implies that we direct our hearts exclusively to Him, believing that He alone is the Doer of all and it is He who knows the truth regarding the future and it is from Him that we should ask that which is to come, from His prophets and pious ones… We should not consult soothsayers, nor believe that their words will be authenticated. We should rather realize that everything is in the hand of Heaven. It is the Almighty who changes the order of the constellations, in accordance with His will, "that frustrates the omens of imposters, and makes diviners mad" (*Yeshaya* 44:25).

…"Learn not the ways of the nations, and be not dismayed by the signs of Heavens for the nations are dismayed by them" (*Yirmeyahu* 10:2). It is also stated in the last chapter of *Pesachim* (113b): "From where do we know that one must not consult astrologists? Because it is stated: 'You shall be whole-hearted with the Lord your God.'" The *Sifre* likewise comments: "If you have done all that has been stated in the context, then you are whole-hearted with the Lord your God."

The same precept was referred to in the covenant made with Avraham when it was stated: "Walk before Me, and be whole-hearted" (*Bereishit* 17:1, and Ramban, ad loc.). Avraham was the opponent of his Chaldean neighbors, who attributed power to the sun, moon and stars. He had realized that there was one Creator and Governor. He was commanded, therefore, to be whole-hearted in his service of God…

Presumably the Rabbi [the Rambam] considered this precept to be a general exhortation to walk in the path of the Torah in the sense of: "Happy are those that are upright (*temimei*) in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord" (*Tehilim* 119:1). For this reason he did not include it in his enumeration. But, as is evident from the words of the Sages, the approach that we have outlined is the correct one. (Ramban's strictures to the Rambam's *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, commandment 8)

 We have already demonstrated that the Rambam himself in *Hilkhot Avoda Zara* (11:9) writes that all these things that the gentiles do are "falsehoods," and for this reason the Torah admonishes us: "You shall be whole-hearted with the Lord your God."

### The nature of Prophecy

 Nechama Leibowitz discusses another aspect of the severity of the various prohibitions that the Torah lists here:

You might ask: What is the foundation of the Torah's objection to all these practices of the heathen nations, of its vigorous rage against all this mumbo-jumbo? The answer is that sorcery is not only a vain and false belief that brings no benefit but causes no damage. Rather it is the very negation of all the principles of the Torah. For the objective of sorcery is to overcome the will of the Creator, to force Him to reveal His mysteries, to attain against His will knowledge of His secrets. Thus writes the scholar Yechezkel Kaufmann in his book: *Toledot ha-Emuna ha-Yisraelit*, vol. I, p. 497): "Divination is one of the forms of heathen rebellion against God, heathen pride, self-confidence and ambition to be like the gods. The Israelite must be whole-hearted with the Lord his God and only consult Him." (*Iyyunim be-Sefer Devarim*, p. 178)

 Rabbi Yosef Albo in his *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* (III, 8) also views the command to be whole-hearted with God and prophecy to be the path that the Torah presents in contrast to all the abominations of the heathen nations. He relates especially to the matter of predicting the future.

The Divine inspiration which we said was necessary in order that we may know through it what things are acceptable to God and what things are not, man cannot acquire by himself without Divine consent. For it is not natural that the spirit of an intellect devoid of matter should rest upon a material thing. For this reason all the ancients thought it impossible that the Divine spirit should rest upon man, and that the latter should prophesy by means of a supernatural power and foretell the future. And therefore the ancient peoples used to make images and burn incense and offer prayers to the stars to bring down the spiritual influence of some star upon one of their images, in order that through it the spirit of the star residing in the body of the star should rest upon a man, who is a corporeal being, so that the latter might foretell the future through the spirit of the star exerting an influence upon the person. This is the meaning of divination.

And inasmuch as men are eager to know all the things that are going to happen to them from day to day, the ancients used to follow the diviners and pursued the study of astrology. Some nations practiced magic and served evil spirits, depending upon their intellectual status. Some served the demons of fire and caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, others served the demons of the air. Rav Hai writes in a responsum that there are demons composed of the element of fire, and demons of the element air… Others again smoked and burned incense… The Ramban, in one of his discourses, on the authority of those familiar with sorcery, describes the process as follows: A man and a woman stand by the grave, one at the head and the other at the foot, holding a little bell between them, pronouncing formulas of adjuration and sounding the bell. The woman watches, and the man inquires, and information is given to them of what will happen to them in the near future, as Shaul inquired of the woman who had a familiar spirit. He says, too, that those who inquired of the demons relied much upon this method of inquiry.

 It is necessary to relate to the entirety of the abominations of the nations and to understand that they engage in those practices in order to gain knowledge of future events:

All these practices are forbidden in the Torah because they are unclean and done in the service of evil spirits: "There must not be found among you anyone that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that uses divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer." And the reason given is: "For all that do these things are an abomination to the Lord." The meaning is that God is holy and His ministers are holy and pure, therefore you must keep away from all these things which are impure. This is the reason, also, why the Torah legislates concerning uncleanness, and provides the penalty of being "cut off" for one who enters the Temple while unclean. The reason is that the spirit of uncleanness may cause the holy spirit to depart from the Temple.

Then the Torah makes it clear that the other nations indulged in those practices in order to obtain a knowledge of the future, thinking that it cannot be obtained in any other way, and that the holy spirit of God never rests upon a human being: "For these nations, which you shall dispossess, hearken to soothsayers, and to diviners," because they think that there is no one else that one can hearken to, "But as for you, the Lord your God, has not permitted you so to do," i.e., it is not as they think, but, "The Lord your God will raise up in you a prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like me," one upon whom the holy spirit of God will rest, and from him you will learn the future. You must not grieve in thinking that you have no way of knowing the future, as the other nations have, and that you are without this privilege. It is not so, for you will be complete and perfect with the Lord your God. The meaning is that you will not merely have the ordinary human privileges, but also this one. This is the reason for doubling the letter *mem* (*tamim*), as if to say, you will want for nothing in association with Him, for He will reveal to you the future also through His prophets, and you need not follow the diviners or the service of evil spirits or inquire of ghosts and familiar spirits in order to obtain knowledge of the future. For though these agencies do impart knowledge of the future, nevertheless as they are connected with the spirit of uncleanness, they keep man away from his perfection, and man cannot on their account have human perfection and soundness, because it is impossible to know from them what things are acceptable to God and what things are not. This is the meaning of the expression: "You shall be whole-hearted with the Lord your God," indicating that the idolatrous nations are not possessed of human perfection, but you shall be perfect with the Lord your God, having both perfections through the prophet who prophesies by the holy spirit and by the will of God, for through him you will know what things are acceptable to God. The expression, "with the Lord your God," denotes that the prophetic spirit is given to the prophets for the sole purpose of admonishing mankind to observe the Torah, to worship God and to do the things which are acceptable to Him in order that man may be whole-hearted with God, and not for the purpose of foretelling the future, as will be explained in the twelfth chapter of this book.

 On the one hand, we must be whole-hearted and perfect with God, and God will inform us about future events by way of His prophets who will tell us the things that are acceptable to Him. On the other hand, the purpose of prophecy is not to reveal the future to us.

The argument from reason is that the diviners, the image worshippers, those who consult ghosts and familiar spirits, and those who indulge in other practices in order to strengthen the power of imagination so as to know the future, cannot determine the things which are acceptable to God, because they have no means of knowing this, seeing that it is above nature and the spirit of uncleanness and the powers of the spheres, from which they obtain all their information. And for this reason they are not always correct in their prognostications…

From all this it is clear that it is impossible to know all the things that are acceptable to God in any way except through the will of God, i.e., through the medium of a special inspiration coming from Him for this purpose.

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 Rabbi Yosef Albo presents human perfection as doing the things that are acceptable to God, in contrast to knowing future events which is the goal of the various types of diviners.

 With this we conclude our examination of the matter of turning to sorcerers in the Torah. We tried to clarify the essence of the prohibition, and the means proposed by the Torah to contend with the abominations of the nations, both by being whole-hearted with God and by attaining the level of prophecy.

 To complete the discussion, we will return to our analysis of Shaul's appeal to the sorceress of Ein Dor.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Rav Shaviv in his book, *Mi-Sinai Ba* (p. 236), formulates this as follows: "Fortelling the future or shaping it." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)