

# INNOCENCE IN THE HAND IS BETTER THAN TWO BIRDS IN THE BUSH

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Shoftim

### Innocence in the Hand Is Better Than Two Birds In The Bush

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 778 - "I'm Bar Mitzvah" - Do We Believe Him? Good Shabbos!*

The pasuk [verse] teaches, "You shall be innocent (tamim) with the L-rd your G-d" [Devarim 18:13]. Rashi interprets: Walk with Him with innocence (temimus) and accept what He has in store for you; do not try to divine the future; accept what the Almighty gives you with perfect faith.

According to the Ramba"n, this pasuk is a Biblical commandment. This is one of the places that Nachmanides disputes Maimonides in enumerating the 613 commandments. The Ramba"m does not count this as a mitvah; he holds it is merely good advice. The Ramba"n disagrees -- he does count being innocent and not trying to "outsmart" the Master of the Universe or figure out the future to be a mitzvah.

Rav Schach wrote a letter in which he was very critical of the practice he observed in many to seek out the future through palm reading or "kesubah reading" or the like. All such people who advertised such services, he insisted, were charlatans and frauds who were trying to make a quick and dishonest dollar. He forbade relying on the amulets and advice of people who obviously do not have the knowledge that they are allegedly sharing with people. Despite the fact that some practitioners had long white beards and appeared religious, Rav Schach emphasized that a person may not consult with or rely on the advice of such people, citing the pasuk in this week's parsha "You shall be Tamim with the L-rd your G-d" and referencing the Ramban's comments on the pasuk. Rav Schach concluded his letter: "We must only rely on Hashem, everything else is hevel [vanity].

Our Sages teach a homiletic story regarding Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon]. The Medrash teaches that the wise king knew the language of the birds (sichas haTziparim). A person came to Shlomo HaMelech and asked that Shlomo HaMelech teach him this language. At first, the king

refused but the man pestered him until he finally relented and taught him sichas haTziparim. The fellow was then walking in the field and heard two birds talking with one another. One bird told the other "You see this fellow; his entire flock of cattle are going to die within the next couple of weeks." The man went home and immediately sold his entire flock of cattle at the very first opportunity. Lo and behold, two weeks later the entire flock died. The man avoided a major financial setback!

Sometime later, the man was again walking in the field and heard one bird tell another that the fellow they saw was going to have his house and everything therein burn down within two weeks. Again, he sold his house and all his possessions lock stock and barrel. Sure enough, two weeks later the house burned to the ground. Again, he avoided catastrophe!

When he next went out to the field, he heard one bird tell the other that the fellow near them was going to drop dead the following week. He then went back to Shlomo HaMelech and desperately asked for his advice what to do. Shlomo HaMelech said "I told you that I did not want to teach you the language of the birds! You did something terribly wrong and G-d wanted to give you a punishment. He was going to punish you through the death of your cattle. However, you "outsmarted Him" and found out - through the birds - how to avoid that punishment. The punishment would have been for your benefit - that financial setback would have shaken you up and forced you to repent and amend your ways.

Then the Almighty was going to get you to do Teshuva by burning your house down, but again you avoided the tragedy and hence the opportunity to repent. Your sins however now remain and the only option that you left the Almighty is to bring about your death as punishment for those sins.

There are two lessons to this story.

The first lesson is obviously the pasuk in this week's parsha: Be innocent (tamim) with the L-rd your G-d. Accept what comes your way. Do not always try to figure out how to "outsmart" the Almighty by seeking out His hidden plans for the future.

The second lesson is much easier in concept than in practice. It is much easier to teach academically than to apply practically. We should not encounter such tests. However, if troubles do befall us, we need to believe and realize that they are the best thing that could happen for us. This is a lesson that we have taught many times in the past. When such things happen we should take the attitude that: It could be worse. G-d is sending me a warning. This is a kapparah [atonement], and ultimately everything that G-d does is for the best.

Whether the story with Shlomo HaMelech is literal or is a parable is beside the point. The lesson that this story teaches is "you shall be innocent before the L-rd your G-d" and we have to believe that "all G-d does is for the best."

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter

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