

Divine Entrapment (Reeh)

“One must be aware that one is continually being tested in what one wishes most in order to make clear whether one’s heart is on earth or in heaven.” -Pir Vilayat Khan

The Bible presents a thorny theological issue with the case of a false prophet. The false prophet is someone, usually charismatic, eloquent and powerful, who may have the ability to read divine signs and even foretell the future. He would seem to be someone with the authority of God, but there is something off about him, something that just doesn’t add up.

The false prophet changes something. It may be a little thing; it may seem inconsequential. What the false prophet changes is the law. He reinterprets the Law of Moses against the structure and tradition of the sages. We don’t know his reasons, but the bottom line is that he is wrong.

How can God allow a being such as a false prophet to exist? How can God bless an individual with prophetic ability that will mislead the people of Israel from their faith, beliefs, traditions and rules?

Ibn Ezra on Deuteronomy 13:4 explains very simply, based on the verses, that God sends the false prophet to test us. He wishes to test us and demonstrate that we can overcome those tests. We should not be swayed by the charismatic leader. We should not be fooled by holy charlatans. We should not be tricked by apparently divine signs. We need to think for ourselves. We need to understand the laws and traditions and not rely on magical incantations or otherworldly promises. We must remain strong in our faith, in the unbroken traditions and the chain of law that has kept us as a people to this very day.

May we see tests of faith for what they are and pass them with flying colors.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the International Arts and Music Festival in Jerusalem (Chutzot Hayotzer). Great event!

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