

*PARASHAS RE'EH*

# The Love Test

He is everything you would expect a prophet to be. He has a flowing white beard and eyes that glitter with fire. He is wise and learned, and he seems to have supernatural powers. And he claims to be the bearer of an important prophetic message. But there is one problem. His message runs contrary to the dictates of the Torah.

How are we supposed to deal with such a person? The answer appears in this week's Torah portion. "If there should arise in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of dreams who will show you a sign or an omen, and if the sign or the omen should materialize as he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us follow other gods whom you do not know, and let us worship them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer of dreams, for G-d your Lord is testing you to determine if you still love G-d your Lord with all your heart and all your soul."

Why did Hashem allow this false prophet to display "signs and omens"? In order, the Torah explains, "to test us, to determine if we still love Him with all our hearts and souls."

Two questions immediately come to mind: If anything, such a scenario would seem to be a test of our faith or our fear of Heaven. Why does the Torah consider it a test of our love, of all things? Furthermore, what is the purpose of testing our love? Surely, the Creator knows whether or not we love Him. A test of faith would present us with a choice, an exercise of our free will, just like any other commandment in the Torah, but a test of love only determines a fact - which is already known to Him.

The solution to this puzzle can be found earlier in the Torah when Bilaam attempts to curse the Jewish people. "But G-d, your Lord, did not want to listen to Bilaam," the Torah tells us. "And G-d your Lord transformed the curse into a blessing, because G-d your Lord loves you." Why did He find it necessary to transform the curse into a blessing? Why wasn't it sufficient to nullify the curse and render it impotent and harmless?

The answer, explain the commentators, lies in the next phrase, "Because G-d your Lord loves you." Such is the power of love! A person who loves cannot bear to hear anything negative about the object of his love. His beloved is pure and good and beautiful, a paragon of virtue and grace. Because of His love for the Jewish people, Hashem found the very sound of Bilaam's curse abhorrent, even if defanged and

rendered harmless. Only by transforming the curse into a blessing was His love fulfilled and satisfied.

Similarly, when we are confronted with a false prophet who attempts to tear us away from our beloved Creator, the Torah tells us, "You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer of dreams." We must turn a deaf ear to him. It is not enough to ignore, reject or disdain his words. That only shows good intellectual judgment, not passionate love. We must place our hands over our ears and blot out those terrible words from our earshot, from our very consciousness. We must show that the love burning in our hearts makes us wince and cringe at each blasphemous syllable, that we cannot bear to listen.

*"I am having serious problems with my wife," a man told a great sage. "We bicker. That wonderful feeling we had when we first married is gone."*

*"Indeed?" said the sage. "I'm not surprised. You see, I've heard she was unfaithful to you."*

*"What!?" screamed the man. "That cannot be! She is a fine, loyal woman. My wife would never do such a thing. Take those words back right now! How can you say such a terrible thing about my wife? I can't even begin to tell you what a wonderful person she is."*

*"Fine, I take them back," said the sage. "But if she is such a wonderful person, perhaps your problems are not serious after all. Eh?"*

Sometimes, when the pristine love in our hearts is buried under the rubble of everyday life, the shock of hearing our beloved maligned will reawaken the dormant love and fan its embers into a flame once again.

Unfortunately, the same can happen to our love for the Creator. Therefore, in order to revive our love, He sends false prophets who speak dreadful, blasphemous words. And if there is still some love in our hearts, we clap our hands over our ears, unable to listen.

In our own lives as well, the ubiquitous blandishments of contemporary society whisper in our ears and lure us away from a faithful Jewish life. But if we allow ourselves to be scandalized, if we to turn a deaf ear to the modern false prophets and embrace our own ideals and values, we will undoubtedly feel a new surge of love for our Creator, a love that will blossom forth and suffuse "all our hearts and all our souls."