

## WHY WE ERR? By Rabbi David Algaze

*“If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream, and he will produce to you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes about, of which he spoke to you saying, “let us follow gods of others...” (Devarim 13:2ff)*

This passage is the definitive statement in the Torah that G-d will not change His mind and that no precept in the Torah will ever be abrogated. Despite any miracle performed by any person, if his message is that the Torah needs to be changed, that a “new” covenant need be established, this is the indubitable sign of the falsehood of that prophet. The Torah and G-d’s covenant are forever unchanged and unchangeable and any claims to the contrary are to be regarded as utterly false. Just as truth does not sustain changes, the Torah in its entirety and Israel’s chosenness in history will never be altered. But the false prophet will have brought “proofs”, performed miracles—how can we disregard his words? The answer lies in an understanding of the position of error in the universe.

The world, our lives and everything that exists is full of errors, mistakes, flaws. Every few years we discover, yet again, that our perceptions were wrong, that our theories were faulty or that our priorities and our decisions were incorrect. What we thought was right yesterday appears to be wide of the mark today. Why do we err?

Rav Yerucham Leibowitz (*Da’at Hohma Umussar* II,44) explains that mistakes are not accidental; they are part of the fabric of Creation. The phenomenon of the false prophet is an example of this condition. He is given the power to produce wonders, effect miracles and possess a spiritual power in order to entice people and lead them astray. Why would G-d permit such an impostor to be able to have these powers and perform miracles? Rashi answers that G-d is testing our faith. As the Torah says, *“For Hashem your G-d is testing you to know whether you love Hashem your G-d...”* (Devarim 13:4)

We see from this that negative forces are sometimes given the ability to seduce us and make us take the wrong turns in life. This is what we call the Satan, that is the power to “derail” us from the right path. Satan means “derailer”, or “spoiler” whose function is to attempt to disrupt our lives and seduce us into abandoning Hashem. This is the basis for all errors in the world: the power that G-d conferred to the Satan. The basis for all our mistakes is a misperception, a blind spot that prevents us from seeing correctly. The Satan always shows us chimeras, mirages and illusions. The secret not to fall into its trap is to

remain steadfast in our faith and our belief in G-d. We should be always vigilant about the next test, the next mirage that the Satan will put in our path and realize that in this world there always will be tests along the way.

The traps and deceptions vary with the times and with the nature of each individual. To some it could take the form of physical or material attraction; to others it could be a political ideology and yet to others it could take the form of an intellectual misconception. Science and technological advances could be used to prove the “falsehood” of a belief in the Divine, a form of “and the sign or wonder comes about” that may lead some to dispose of their faith and reject spirituality altogether.

While the deception may work in some, it does not affect others. A wrong theory may lead some astray but others are impervious to the “miracles.” Why is that? The Torah replies that the difference lies in the degree of love of Hashem. Among those whose love for G-d is weak, any trap may ensnare them quickly. However, people whose faith is strong and who love G-d with all their heart are not so prone to error and are often spared from the appeal of delusion and deceit. This is evident in the fact that scientific theory or new discoveries does not disturb the faith for some scientists while for others the fact of scientific explanations and any new “wonder-theory” immediately confirms and validates their negation of G-d. The great American scientist writer, Carl Sagan, commented that for anyone to be a real atheist, he would have to possess compelling evidence against the existence of G-d, and no such evidence exists. Yet, there are many who find it easy to deny G-d while hanging on to some scientific “proof” or fact not because the evidence is actually compelling but because they lack a “love of G-d.” Perhaps, from a psychological perspective, the need to deny the Divine may precede the finding of such facts or theories.

Genuine love must often withstand challenges and trials. It is no different with the love of G-d. That is the reason that we are presented with these delusions and temptations. It is our ability to stand firm in the face of such appeals and mirages that ultimately confirms and strengthens our faith. Just as love becomes stronger after a crisis and a test, the love of G-d becomes more potent when we overcome the desire and refuse to be ensnared by the “magic” of Satan and his multifarious tricks.

At every turn in life, we may expect that this challenge may rear its head. We need to be prepared for this ubiquitous and unavoidable test in order to show that we “love G-d with all our hearts and all our souls.”