

If there should stand in your midst a prophet... and he will produce to you a sign or a wonder... and the sign or the wonder comes about... do not listen to the words of that prophet... for Hashem, your G-d, is testing you. (13:2,3,4)

The false prophet attempts to sway the nation away from Hashem, to seduce the people to worship idols, by offering “proof” that he is the “real thing” and that his message is Heaven sent. He produces a miracle, a wonder that is undeniable, that gets the people thinking: “Is it possible? Could he be for real?” Hashem instructs us not to listen to him, because he is part of a test to ascertain and confirm our nation’s true conviction. Do we truly believe in Hashem, or is it only a matter of convenience, something we do as long as there is no pressure?

In his *magnum opus*, *Mesillas Yesharim*, **Ramchal** develops the theme of “ordeals of a person,” in which he states that “life is nothing but a series of challenges of various degrees and varying forms.” A Jew must overcome these tests in order to demonstrate his fidelity to Hashem. The tests are commensurate with a person’s spiritual plateau. Those on a lesser plane-- whose capacity for seeing the truth is limited-- will be given minor tests, while those who are on a higher spiritual level will be tested more stringently. Avraham *Avinu* was put through ten ordeals, with the most trying being Hashem’s command that he sacrifice Yitzchak *Avinu*.

Our *parshah*’s theme is: *Ki menaseh Hashem Elokeichem eschem*, “For Hashem, your G-d, is testing you.” The Torah predicts the scourge of false prophets who will preach blasphemously in an attempt to undermine the Torah’s principles and impugn our commitment to Hashem. They will even have the power of manipulating our minds by performing supernatural wonders to evidence their authenticity as Hashem’s intermediaries. We are admonished not to listen to them, to ignore their miracles which, albeit may seem real, are only situations whereby Hashem tests our commitment to Him.

Miracles do not sway our people. Heavenly intervention, regardless of its nature and efficacy, provides insufficient reason for us to question our loyalty to Hashem. *Chazal* relate an intriguing episode that took place during a *halachic* dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and the *Chachamim*, Sages, who issued the majority ruling. The *Talmud Bava Metzia* 59b describe how Rabbi Eliezer invoked a number of Heavenly miracles to prove his point. The *Chachamim* were not moved. They were in the majority, and the *halachah* was on their side. Finally, a *Bas Kol*, Heavenly Voice, emerged and proclaimed, “Why do you dispute Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion, when, in fact, his opinion prevails everywhere else in *halachah*?” *Chazal* replied, *Torah, lav baShomayim hee*: “The Torah is not in Heaven.” This means that even a Divine decree cannot alter what the Torah has already decided.

Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon explains this difficult passage in the *Talmud* as a test of the

Chachamim's spiritual ardor. Would they adhere to the Torah's rule of *Acharei ha'rabim l'hatos*, we follow majority rule, or would they be overwhelmed by Divine Revelation and miraculous phenomenon?

Horav Yeruchum Levovitz, zl, derives an important principle from this *Talmudic* passage. During the course of our lives, we are confronted with various ordeals, situations that challenge our faith. While each and every one of us does not experience the same form of tribulation, we all receive the dose that coincides with our individual capacity, the personal tolerance level that we can manage. The test consists of confronting the occurrence/ordeal and acknowledging that it is only a test. Regrettably, some individuals are not prepared to accept the "why" of an ordeal. They devise all sorts of rationalizations in an attempt to justify yielding to physical desires and rejecting Hashem's mandate. Only after every attempt at rationalization has failed do they attribute it to Hashem testing us.

Hashem gives the false prophet supernatural powers, because He wants to test us. It says so clearly in the Torah. This is, however, insufficient for some people, because they want to believe the prophet; they want to be swayed by his powers. We must remember that life is only a test. We have no option for failure.

The **Baal Shem Tov** gives a parable of a king who wanted to test the loyalty of his subjects. He engaged someone to circulate among the populace, spreading rumors in an effort to incite a rebellion. There were some fools who succumbed to the arguments and machinations of the king's agent. The wise people asked, "Is it possible that a king who is as powerful as our ruler would tolerate such brazenness against him? The fact that his person has been permitted to make such statements is an indication that the king is actually using him to test his subjects' loyalty."

The same idea applies to life. Only a depressed fool would believe the defiance that has been provoked by the false prophets throughout the ages. True, they have succeeded in swaying many. *Klal Yisrael*, however, realizes that it has all been a test.