

Shabbat R'eih ShaLom



by Phyllis Chesler

At first, I was incensed by the commandment to execute a “prophet” or a “dreamer of dreams.” (13:6). Wasn’t Yoseph such a dreamer? And didn’t the most honorable prophets subsequently arise in the land, including D’vora, Elisha, Ezekial, Isaiah, Shmuel, and Yirmiyahu? How to make sense of this? By a close reading and by consulting those far more learned than oneself.

A distinction must be made between a true prophet and a false one; the false prophet may predict the future and/or perform miracles but he advises us to “naylcha aharei elohim ahareim,” to go after other gods. (13:3). That constitutes a capital offense.

However, the RambaN acknowledges that “There is a prophetic potential in the souls of some people by which they know of things to come without the person knowing from whence it comes to him.” Thus, some people who are innocent of idolatry may still “see” things that others do not. Nehama Leibowitz, citing Abravanel, R. Yose, R. Akiva, and the RambaM, concludes that everything, including miracles performed by idolaters, is still the work of G-d. Indeed, we are told that G-d may merely be testing us “ladat hayishem ohahvim et Adonai elochem” to

see if we love Adonai (our) God (13:4). She concludes:

“Anyone who summons us to violate the Torah...even if he causes the sun, moon, and stars to stand still as in the days of Joshua, we must pay no heed to him... we are not to subscribe to his teaching since truth cannot be established by miracles or any visual spectacle.”

I’ll say this much: Only the true G-d, who has been suffering human cruelty, greed, egotism, selfishness, and violence, has learned enough to know that we must be commanded to “end poverty so that there will be no one destitute among you.” (15:2). We must feed the convert, the orphan, and the widow if we ourselves are to be blessed by G-d. (14:29).

Smart G-d, willing to settle for our “love,” not at all sure about our ability to obey.