



Shabbat Shalom

Re'eh

Deuteronomy 11:26 – 16:27

Particularly today, it is imperative that we weigh everything we see, every impression we absorb, against the immutable word of God.

This week's portion includes a number of laws pertaining to people who exert an undue influence over others in order to sway them away from obeying God's commandments. The first refers to a false prophet, the second to an individual who sways his relatives or close friends, and the third, to wicked individuals who influence an entire city. In all three cases, the objective of the influencer is to draw people away from God and towards pagan worship. In all three cases, the influencer is punished by death.

The first case is that of the false prophet. In this case, the source of the undue influence is the fact that the so-called prophet is able to perform wonders and uses these so-called miracles to sway others to believe the truth of his words. But God is very clear on this point – if his message is inherently false, then, regardless of the wonders and miracles he may perform, this man will be deemed a false prophet. God has already given us His law, His commandments, and will never change them. If someone should come along and try to change anything fundamental, such as the belief in one God, Scripture tells us clearly that he is not to be believed, regardless of the wonders and miracles he is able to perform.

But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery... (Deuteronomy 13:6) [Deuteronomy 13:5]*

It is God's redemption of the Nation of Israel from Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea and the accompanying miracles, which provide the evidence of God's sovereignty on this earth. Our sages noted that a simple maid present at the parting of the Red Sea experienced a greater revelation from God than the prophet Ezekiel; such was the power and force of that great event. So, no matter the signs and wonders that an individual may be able to perform afterwards, he cannot rescind the messages that God has given us in His Torah.

The second evil influencer is someone who takes advantage of his personal relationships to try and sway someone away from true belief. In this case, it is social pressure which is so dangerous. The friend will begin his evil work in secret (Deuteronomy 13:7*) [Deuteronomy 13:6] but his influence has such potential danger that he must be stopped before he reaches the masses.

In the third instance, an entire city has been swayed and is worshipping pagan gods. But the process begins with a small few – with wicked persons who are themselves residents of the town (Deuteronomy 13:14*) [Deuteronomy 13:13] and who succeed in influencing the rest of the population. Perhaps, this is a case of a private influencer succeeding with one, and in so doing, spreading his influence further until an entire city is gone.

All three instances present the source and ultimate danger of the negative influence itself. In the first instance, the source of the danger is the natural tendency of human beings to trust miracle-workers and their willingness to discard solid faith in the face of the supernatural. The second two instances reflect the power and influence that come from relationships.

It is these sources of influence that speak to us so powerfully in every generation. Particularly today, when so many are attracted to "spiritual" ways, and miracles both real and imagined are being manipulated by a charismatic few in order to sway entire communities, it is imperative that we weigh everything we see, every impression we absorb, against the immutable word of God. And when modern living is so often characterized by alienation, the influence of one who seems to care, who whispers in your ear until he has swayed you and then has swayed you to sway others, is particularly dangerous. Again, everything must be weighed against the immutable word of God as expressed in His holy word.

* Deuteronomy 13:5-13 is Deuteronomy 13:6-13 in the Jewish Bible