


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 11 June 2010 - 29 Sivan 5770
Sedra Korach

THE NEED FOR DISTINCTIONS

ARE THERE DISTINCTIONS? ARE SOME THINGS HOLY? ARE SOME THINGS MORE holy than others? Are some people more in touch with holiness than others? Or is everything and everyone the same?

The intriguing events of the Sedra¹ have been explained in terms of a conflict about distinctions. Korach accused Moses of setting himself apart from others. “Why do you set yourself up over other people? Everyone in the community is holy!”²

At first glance, the idea sounds attractive. Chassidic teachings emphasise the spirituality which is latent in everything and everyone. Everything has a Divine purpose, which will eventually be realised. Even the sinner has a Divine spark within him or her. So surely this claim is quite right. Everyone and everything is holy: so why make distinctions?

However, the claim that there are no distinctions can also be seen as a product of a static view of existence and the task of life. Korach’s claim leads to religious stasis and even stagnation.

Let us consider the question in terms of the life of one individual. Let us imagine this person to be knowledgeable of Torah and highly observant. He or she keeps all the rules, or most of them. Now comes



In Memory of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
the Lubavitcher Rebbe g"hz
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the question of 'distinctions' in the life of this person. Is there progress? Is there a spiritual goal for which one can strive? Are there sacred moments, glimpses of inspiration, discoveries?

Or is there simply the same conventional "observant" life-style, from day to day, month to month, year to year...? "I am holy", says this person. "I am observant, I keep the rules. Please do not ask any more of me. Do not tell me there is more to be achieved".

The person who wants stasis for himself, is also likely to want it for others. "Let people be the way they are. Leave them alone. Do not try to change anyone. G-d accepts them the way they are". This is Korach's claim. Everyone is holy, so leave them alone. There is no progress to be made, and nothing to be achieved.

Contrasting with this is the dynamic of the Torah, expressed by Moses. Of course everyone has infinite holiness - in potential. To realise something of that potential, we have to strive to move forward. The first step in such movement is to see that there is a direction, there is something to be achieved. Today should be better than yesterday, and tomorrow should be better still, both for oneself and for others.

How is this dynamic state of mind achieved? Through the concept which is presented in the Sedra as the antithesis of Korach: the Priesthood, and the special gifts which are given by other people to the Priests, such as the First Fruits³. This means, by recognising that there *are* distinctions. The Priests serving in the Temple have a special sacred quality. The First Fruit which was given to them in Temple times represents the way we consider the details of our own lives. That which is most precious and most valuable should in some way be dedicated to the Divine. Time for Shabbat, time for prayer, time for Torah study; charity; a Jewish education for one's children. This is a dynamic process, in which one makes increasing demands on oneself, and also one seeks to encourage others⁴.

Helping us achieve this are the contemporary forms of Moses, such as the Lubavitcher Rebbe, whose Yahrzeit will be this Tuesday (3 Tammuz, 15 June). The Moses of the generation provides the insight and the inspiration so that each person can perceive the ladder of distinctions in his or her own life, and start to climb higher...

1. Numbers chs.16-18. 2. Num. 16:3. 3. Num.18:8 ff. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.2 p.326 ff.

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SEDRA KORACH

KEEPING LAWS

“Beep Beep” honked the car behind them. “Stop beeping us!” shouted Leah from her back seat in the car, hoping the beeping car would hear them. But there was no indication that it did. “Shhhh....” said her mother, who was driving.

It was a Monday afternoon, and a school half-holiday, so Leah was going shopping with her mother in the West End of London. The trouble is that they were having a hard time finding a place to park. “Oh here, I see a parking spot” said Leah’s mother. She parked the car on a funny kind of corner and they quickly hurried off to go shopping.

One and a half hours later, Leah and her mother trotted back to the car, carrying bags of new clothes they had bought. Suddenly they were horrified to see a parking warden giving a ticket to their car.

“Is this your car?” asked the warden, as Mom pulled out her keys. “Yes, it is” she replied.

“Didn’t you see the notice?” he asked. Suddenly both mother and daughter saw it, attached to a lamp-post: “Accident Black Spot. No Parking at Any Time”.

“I’m so sorry, officer,” began Leah’s mother. “So you should be,” said the traffic warden. “You parked in a very dangerous place. Two weeks ago there was a very bad accident here, just because someone was parked in this spot. There could have been an accident again because of your car”.

“I’ll try to not to make the same mistake again,” Leah’s mother said to the warden. “I still have to give you a ticket,” he replied. Leah’s mother took the white parking ticket and put it in her handbag. They got back into the car and carefully drove away.

Leah was fuming. “How much was the ticket for?” she asked. “Don’t worry,” said her mother. “A lot...” “That’s crazy!” said Leah. “I am so angry at that warden! I don’t want you to pay anything. Those wardens are so nasty...”

“Well,” said her mother. “He was right that where we were parked was dangerous. And the notice said that it was an accident black spot. I should have known better. And even if it wasn’t an accident black spot, if you are not allowed to park there, don’t do so.”

Leah’s mother had her eye on the future. One day not very far ahead Leah herself would be driving the car, and her mother was trying to prevent having to pay for a stream of parking tickets...

“It reminds me of the Sedra,” she continued. “There are rules in the Torah, and Korach was trying to rebel against them. He said to Moses, who are you to tell us rules, I’m going to do what I like.” “Mummy, are you really going to compare the rules in the Torah to the stupid traffic laws!” said Leah.

“Listen, you’re right, Torah laws come from G-d, and traffic laws are made up by people. Still, the Sages tell us ‘the law of the kingdom is law’. It’s true that some traffic laws are just for convenience, but others are to save lives. Like not to speed. And in this case, not to park on that corner...”

“Well, obviously you would not have sided with Korach,” said her daughter. “Look, there’s a real parking place free just near that kosher restaurant. Let’s go and have something to eat...”

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