

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
פרשת קרח תשכ"ז ד"ה ויקח קרח בלתי מוגה
Published for Shabbat Sedra Korach
5 Tammuz 5783, 24 June 2023¹

DIVIDED IN ORDER TO BE ONE

KORACH EXPRESSES THE CONCEPT OF 'DIVISION' AS IS SEEN IN THE TARGUM AT THE beginning of the Sedra: 'And Korach divided'. He and his followers divided in a conflict, *machloket*, against Moses and Aaron. *Ethics of the Fathers (5:17)* tells us their conflict was not *leShem Shamayim*, for the sake of Heaven. This contrasts with the *machloket* of Hillel and Shammai, generally understood as their many disagreements in the Talmud on halachic issues, which *was leShem Shamayim*, for the sake of Heaven.

The Sages tell us that Korach and his followers were a re-incarnation of the 'Generation of Division', which tried to build the Tower of Babel. Before that time, humanity had been unified, with one language. Their attempt to set themselves up as an idolatrous rival to G-d by building a Tower led to their division into different peoples and languages.

The source of all such division is the first division in the Torah which was on the second day of Creation, when G-d said 'let there be a firmament in the midst of the water'. The firmament divided the upper waters from the lower waters. The negativity implicit in this division, which is the source of all future division, is seen by the fact that the Torah does not write "it is good" regarding the work of the second day, unlike the other days of Creation. The division of the waters is the source of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, of the division associated with the Tower of Babel, and eventually also the rebellious division of Korach.

¹ Maamar Vayikach Korah 5727 (1967). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Korach 5774. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

Let us consider that original division. The division of the waters led to the division between the spiritual and the physical. The upper waters express the realms of spirituality and holiness, the 'hidden world'. The lower waters, which later drew aside to reveal the dry land surrounded by sea, express our physical domain and activities, the 'revealed world'.

Midrash Rabbah² gives an interesting image to explain this process. There was once a King who built a Palace which he filled with dumb servants. They would get up early and express their praise of the King, which they did by making signs. They were very devoted, but the King wanted praise which was audible. So he brought servants who could speak, so that they could declare their praise. Unfortunately they rebelled against the King, and said 'there is no King, the Palace is ours alone'³. Thus there is the upper spiritual realm, which without question recognises G-d, the realm of angels. This does not satisfy G-d. He wants a realm of physical human beings. The problem is, by virtue of their physicality, they often do not perceive G-d's power and even sometimes deny Him altogether. The goal is that there should be a physical realm, but that it should be a vessel for the Divine. The division into spiritual and physical is really in order that there should be a greater ultimate unity and recognition of G-d.

This began to be achieved at the Giving of the Torah, when the division between the spiritual and the physical was bridged. The Torah gives laws which concern physical people and their daily activities, bringing holiness into eating and every aspect of life.

This brings us to the positive machloket for the sake of Heaven of Hillel and Shammai. Hillel expressed Kindness (hence the students of Hillel were lenient in their halachic rulings). Hillel represents achieving unity by an abundant flow of G-dliness from above to below. Shammai expressed Severity (hence the rulings of the students of Shammai rulings were more strict), which means a movement from below to above. A movement from below to above implies a concern that the lower realm has the right level of preparation for G-dliness.

Hence Shammai was stricter. But both Hillel and Shammai, in their different ways, seek a unity between the physical and the spiritual.

The ideal is a combination of both, hence they are both part of our Talmudic tradition, and we need both dimensions in our service of G-d. There is a similar distinction between Moses and Aaron: Moses sought to make sure that all was correct according to the Torah (like Shammai), while Aaron was like Hillel,

² Bereishit Rabah, beginning of ch.5.

³ This point from the Midrash is not quoted in the Maamar.

bringing peace between people, and sometimes seeming to slightly cut corners in order to do so⁴.

This is why the disputes of Hillel and Shammai are called LeShem Shamayim, for the sake of Heaven. For they achieve a unification between Shamayim, Heaven (which means Zeir Anpin, the six upper Sefirot), the upper realm, and Shem, Malchut, Kingship, the lower realm. Their discussions lead to the unification of the spiritual and the physical through the halachah which emerges from the combination of their varied perspectives.

By contrast Korach's conflict was not LeShem Shamayim. He did not seek this unity between the spiritual and the physical. He would rather leave the physical unconnected with holiness, like the Tower of Babel of the Generation of the Division, which symbolized the power of Man against that of G-d. This is because, Korach, being a Levite, expressed ultimate Severity. Severity, if not tempered by Kindness, sees nothing redeeming about the physical realm. His goal was to connect himself with the Divine and leave the physical to itself. It is Divine Kindness, rather than Severity, which sees the lowly physical realm as a domain where G-d can dwell.

Ethics of the Fathers (5:17) says the Machloket of Korach will not last, which is not a condemnation but a positive prediction, that ultimately the physical will not be dislocated from the spiritual, as Korach wanted, but joined. Hence on the third day of Creation 'it was good' was said twice, once for that day and once for the second day, the day which had the division of the waters, the spiritual source of all conflict.

Indeed, through the power of Teshuvah, all can become a vehicle for holiness. That which was in a negative position, reaches an unparalleled higher level, as took place with the Priesthood which was strengthened as a result of Korach's attack.

Ultimately all negative conflict will cease, and be transformed into peace and unity, through the coming of Moshiach⁵.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁴ The Sages tell us that Aaron would make peace between conflicted people by telling each one that the other really wants to make peace (Avot of Rabbi Nathan, 12:3).

⁵ The concluding section of this discourse has not reached us. The last sentence is a suggestion of the way the discourse might have ended.