

## Bitter and Sweet Almonds

The beloved chassidic master, Imrei Emes zt”l (1866-1948), the rebbe of Ger, once shared a story of doting in-laws who would host dinner each week in their home for their two beloved son-in laws and their families. One of the son-in laws was a vegetarian, the other loved meat. The in-laws were dedicated to preparing meals that each would thoroughly enjoy. They even set up two tables in the dining room so that each family could comfortably eat their meal without any issue of mixing foods. Each week they would both come, sit at their respective tables and eat with their family. After a number of years the in-laws lost their fortune and were now virtually penniless. No longer having the means to provide meat or dairy delicacies, they now served bread, onions and scraps of potatoes. Out of habit, the families continued to sit and eat at separate tables. The mother-in-law saw this and cried out, “Now that we are eating a bit of bread, scraps of onions and potatoes, why are we still sitting separately?”

The Rebbe of Ger said that this parable describes the circumstance of the Jewish people today. “In the past, unfortunately, we have had divisiveness. One could suggest that there

were legitimate reasons why we splintered from one another. But today, after so much suffering and loss we are left impoverished. Tragically, we are the ‘she’erit ha’pleta’, a ‘surviving remnant’ (Ezra 9:14). Is it not time to all sit together?”

It is a rarity to find in the Torah a detailed account of a story followed by a stated moral lesson. However, In Parshat Korach we discover exactly this. The Torah dramatically depicts the rebellion of Korach and then states: “...and do not follow the ways of Korach and his company, as the Lord spoke regarding him through the hand of Moshe” (Bamidbar 17:5).

The Talmud counts this directive as one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. One is forbidden to persist in argument and strife. “Whoever maintains a machloket, argument with one another, transgresses a negative command (Talmud Sanhedrin 110a).

The Mishna contrasts the type of argument initiated by Korach with the Talmudic arguments of Hillel and Shamai. Engaging in an argument that is for the sake of heaven has enduring value. In the words of the mishna, “What is an example of a dispute for the sake of heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shamai. What is an example of one not for the sake of heaven? Korach and his company” (Pirkei Avot 5:19).

Rav Yisrael Salanter zt”l (1810-1883),



the founder of the Mussar movement, understood the Mishna very differently. The literal reading of the Mishna states: "One who argues l'shem shamayim, 'for the sake of heaven', the argument endures." When one views their side of the argument being 'for the sake of heaven' one is absolutely convinced of one's own righteousness and is unwilling to give an ear to the other side. Better to be less sure that your side of the argument is 'for heaven's sake'. It will then be more likely that an argument 'will not endure', and will simply fade away.

The father of Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of the Holy Land, was Rav Shlomo Zalman HaKohen Kook zt"l. On one occasion he visited a shtetl, a community in Lithuania. After he arrived there, just before Shabbat, it became absolutely obvious to him that the community was ridden with machloket. A deep dispute divided the people into two camps. Many came up to Rav Kook and pleaded with him: 'Please, use your drasha in shul in order to resolve the dispute and bring peace back to our ranks'.

It so happened that the parsha of Korach was being read. Rav Kook stood up and this is what he said: 'After the Korach rebellion, Aharon the Kohen was commanded to place his rod in the tent of meeting. Miraculously, his rod produced almonds'. Rav Kook asked, 'Why almonds?'

He explained that in the first chapter of the Mishna, Masechet Ma'asrot, reference is made to almonds and there the Mishna says, sometimes you can have an almond which starts out being bitter and then becomes sweet and sometimes you can have an almond which starts out being sweet and then it becomes bitter. Rav Kook explained that machloket is like the almond which starts out being sweet and then it becomes bitter. It is sweet, unfortunately for some people because they enjoy it. They love seeing this side versus that side, who is saying what about whom. And they themselves might take sides and wonder who is going to be victorious and who is going to lose out, but it always ends up being bitter. However, shalom – peace in a community, is like the almond, which starts out being bitter but then becomes sweet. It is bitter because it is so difficult to achieve peace and it often involves compromise; one needs to uproot oneself from one's deep-rooted, heartfelt positions in order to make an advance for the sake of peace. But once we achieve shalom, it is sweet for everyone concerned.

The Torah gives us a mitzva of v'lo tihyeh k'Korach v'adato - one should not be like Korach and his assembly. Such controversies bring so much bitterness in our midst - there are clearly no winners.

Rav Kook carried his father's teaching close to his heart. It was a defining



feature in his life and a driving force in his own worldview. He wrote sharply about the dangers of divisiveness: “There is no end to the physical and spiritual evils of dividing the nation into sectors... the imagined division undermines the foundation of all holiness... (Orot Hatechiya 20)”

With the restoration of the Jewish nation to its land, Rav Kook believed that togetherness was more critical than ever. “The moment the Jewish people become unified, anticipate the redemption (Midrash Rabba Parsha 98).” Love and unity are the keys to unlock the door that will bring the final Redemption.

Rav Kook’s use of the phrase ‘imagined division’ connotes his belief that, in truth, there is no way to split the indivisible bond that permeates the nation of Israel. Just as there is unity in God Himself this, same quality exists within His nation. The Zohar, the source book of Kabbala, regards our mundane world as the *alma d’peruda*, the world of disunity. The function of man on earth is to overcome this *pirud* or schism and reestablish the divine harmony which God intended.