

He Separated Himself

פ"ג

Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

Parshat Korah

This *parsha* begins by saying **Korah took**. In the Targum (the Aramaic translation), it is rendered as “Korah separated himself.” What, then, did Onkelos (to whom the Targum is traditionally ascribed) mean? From what did Korah separate himself?

Our master and teacher Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk, in his *Noam Elimelech*, teaches, “The creation of the human being is from the spiritual worlds. One’s principal dwelling place is therefore in the supernal sphere. This will enable one to maintain a constant flow of light between the ‘lower’ physical world and Ayn-Sof [the Endless, the Source of all spiritual light]. One who ‘sins’ [acts in a negative way] separates oneself from the supernal spiritual worlds. The body and soul of such a one are then restricted to this world. . . . And this is the meaning,” Rebbe Elimelech concludes, “of ‘and he separated himself,’ as Korah separated himself from the supernal spiritual worlds.”

Rebbe Elimelech teaches, first, that our source, our real place of residence, is the spiritual world. When we are in this physical world, it often seems that it is our home, and then, when we pass from this life, those who remain here feel that we have gone from this world to another world, a spiritual world. Rebbe Elimelech teaches a different truth. Even when we are in this physical world, we can find our home in the spiritual world, and indeed it is our mission to do so.

Let us not misunderstand. Rebbe Elimelech does not propose that we separate ourselves from this physical world. This is the world in which G*d has placed us, and it is our obligation to live responsibly in this world in which G*d has placed us. As our master and teacher Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz teaches, the path to holiness lies through the world of action. We may offer an analogy. We put in long days on

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our jobs – in the office, on the road, in the field. Once our work is done for the day, however, we go home. We may spend far more time at work than at home, but we know – most of us do – which is primary. And we do our work – even though our homes are the more important – to the very best of our abilities. Just so, even while we keep our eye on the ultimate, the spiritual, we live in the physical world to the very best of our abilities.

Korah, Rebbe Elimelech teaches us, separated himself from the world of the spirit. Not actually, of course; it is a connection that can never be broken, that is inherent in who and what we are – beautiful, beloved children of G*d, created in the Image and after the Likeness of our Divine Parent.

Our G*d-relationship is of such intimacy that neither we nor G*d (!) can affect its nature. Our actions, negative or positive, can move it along the spectrum between overtness and hiddenness, but the closeness, the intimacy, can never be lost. Korah did not, despite Rebbe Elimelech's way of expressing it, separate himself from G*d nor from his own spiritual connection. He did, however, separate himself from an awareness of his spirituality.

The Buddha was asked by a disciple, "Are you enlightened?"

"No," he replied.

"Are you a master?" the disciple continued.

"No," the Buddha answered again.

"Are you a guru?"

"No."

"Are you a saint?"

"No."

"Well, then," the disciple finally asked in frustration, "what are you?"

"I am awake!" the Buddha exclaimed.

May we, unlike Korah, become and remain awake to the reality of our spirituality.

Shabbat Shalom.

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