

KORACH (NUMBERS 16:1-18:32)

A Good Fight With Your Wife

2010 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Ah, there's nothing like a good fight with your wife! ... You DO fight with your spouse, don't you? You really should, you know.

This week we read about the Mother-of-all-Arguments, “Korach vs. Moses.” Korach gathered a following of 250 malcontents and challenged the authority of Moses. Korach accused Moses of pretending to speak for G-d. Korach claimed that Moses' goal was to create a nepotistic regime consisting of himself, his brother Aaron, and some close relatives. Korach and his gang ended up on the wrong end of a Divine endorsement. G-d showed Korach et al who was boss by creating a miraculous earthquake. The earth opened up and swallowed them alive.

The Talmud (Avos, 5:20) gives us an insight into arguments:

“Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will have a constructive outcome; but if it is not for the sake of Heaven, it will not have a constructive outcome. What is an example of an dispute for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Shammai and Hillel. And a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his followers.”

Shammai and Hillel were two early Talmudic authorities whose arguments cover almost the entire gamut of Jewish Law. Their disputes are chronicled and analyzed throughout the Talmud. (In most cases, the bottom-line ruling is in accordance with Hillel, although there are a few exceptions.)

Shammai and Hillel argued about how to serve G-d properly; it was an argument for the sake of Heaven. They live on in our memories with love and respect. Korach and his cohorts were rabble-rousers looking to make trouble; they came to an ignominious end.

There is, however, a problem with the above-quoted passage. It is not parallel. It compares “*the argument of Shammai and Hillel*” with “*the argument of Korach and his followers.*” *Shammai and Hillel* are opponents, while *Korach and his followers* are teammates.

What it should have done was to compare “Shammai and Hillel” to “Korach and MOSES!” It should have said that *“an example of a dispute for the sake of Heaven is Shammai vs. Hillel, and an example of a dispute not for the sake of Heaven is Korach vs. Moses.”*

In reality, the comparisons ARE parallel. In each case, the Talmud is only listing one side of a dispute. Korach and his bunch were on the same side, battling G-d and Moses. Shammai and Hillel too were on the same side, in service of G-d and His Torah.

The Talmud tells us that the Academies of Shammai and Hillel, each followed the rulings of their respective teachers. The two groups disagreed in matters of whom one may marry, what one may do on the Sabbath, what is ritually pure and what isn't, and a host of other issues. Yet, they loved and respected each other, each realizing that the other's concern was for the sake of Heaven.

Korach & Company formed an unholy alliance for the sake of defying Heaven. They were united against Heaven.

G -d said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make for him a helper for him.” (Genesis, 2:18) Although I translated the end of the verse as, *“a helper FOR him,”* the literal translation is, *“a helper AGAINST him.”* The Talmud (Yevamos, 63a) interprets this as having a double meaning: If he is worthy, his wife will be *“a helper for him.”* If he is unworthy, she will be *“against him.”*

One of the rabbis in my Yeshiva in Israel used to come into the dorm every morning to make sure we were up on time for Services. A quick knock and a “Good morning, Yerachmiel, are you up?”, and then on to the next room. I must confess that one wake-up was not always successful.

I met my wife in Israel where we were both students. After getting engaged, we returned to the U.S. for a few months for the wedding. Two weeks after the wedding we were back in Israel, ready to resume our studies.

I went to visit my Rebbe. “Rebbe,” I joked, “she's even worse than you! After you left the room I could roll over and go back to sleep! She doesn't let me do that!”

He quoted the interpretation above about a wife being *“a helper for him”* if he is worthy and *“against him”* if he is unworthy. He pointed out that when all is said and done, the verse still says *“a helper AGAINST him.”*

It is possible, he explained, for your wife to help you and still be against you. It depends upon whether you are receptive to her help. “Make sure,” said my Rebbe, “that you are both on the same side!”

It is OK to argue WITH your wife. As long as you are working together to accomplish positive things, it is for the sake of Heaven. The problem is when you argue AGAINST your wife.

That's when the ground starts to shake.

Have a great Shabbos.

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