

G-d said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate between water and water...and it was so...And there was evening and there was morning, a second day." (1:6-8)

Although Hashem created the heavens on the first day they remained in a state of transition. He solidified them on the second day, creating a separation between the waters above and the

waters below. For a deeper explanation of the meaning of this division between waters, one should delve into the various commentaries on the Torah. For our purposes, we look to the end of the *pesukim* where the Torah writes that "it was so," followed by the statement that this was the second day. This is the only day of Creation about which the Torah does not say "*ki tov*," "it was good." *Rashi* explains that the phrase "*ki tov*" applies only to the finished product, the culmination of an endeavor. The waters, which Hashem began to create on the second day, were not completed until the third day. The *Midrash* gives us an alternative reason. Since the waters were divided on that day, the concepts of separation, division and, ultimately, strife were introduced to the world. Dispute, disunity, strife and discord are not constructive. Hence, the day did not warrant the appellation of "*ki tov*."

On the first day of Creation, Hashem separated between light and darkness. Yet, the Torah writes "*ki tov*" in regard to the first day. The commentators explain that on the first day, it was a division between two unlike entities, light and darkness. At times, such a separation is healthy and even encouraged. However, when two waters, which are of the same essence are split it is not a good omen.

We may certainly apply this idea to our own daily path of life. Unity among people is essential, as long as they hold the same perspective and moral belief. When an individual's doctrines and actions are antithetical to another's moral principles, the people must separate from one another. Peaceful coexistence among people is the only way society can thrive. Discord and controversy undermine and, ultimately, destroy communities. Peaceful coexistence cannot reign at the expense of subverting and crippling one's ethical and moral tenets.

When two waters which are of the same essence split, it is more than a negative sign, it is a tragedy. When Jews quarrel, when brothers feud to the point that their feelings of brotherhood are subjugated, it is heartbreaking. When religious beliefs cloud one's vision of kinship, it is devastating. Our people have suffered long and hard, but have remained one People. It is lamentable that there are people who would overlook their heritage in order to promote their own misguided agenda.

I recently read a poignant story which, unfortunately, provides a sad commentary on the human

condition and the nadir to which some people descend. In the slave labor camp of Plashuv, a Jewish prisoner was aroused one night by a conversation between two *kapos*. These *kapos* were concentration camp police who were "selected" from among the Jewish prisoners themselves to carry out the orders of the Nazis in expediting the Final Solution. Their survival was dependent on proving their fidelity to the Nazi beasts in carrying out heartless acts of cruelty against their own brethren. That there was always a steady supply of recruits for this malevolent work is truly an unfortunate page in our history. The Jewish prisoner who was suddenly awakened listened to the following conversation between two *kapos* on duty.

One of them was crying, to his comrade's astonishment. Cruelty was part of their lifestyle, and whatever sentiment they might have had was long gone. Tears were an expression not commonly found in a *kapo*.

"Why the tears? What happened?"

"Do not ask. Something occurred today that shook me up terribly," he responded.

"I do not understand you. What could possibly move you? I escorted my own father to his death, and you watched as your mother was shot to death. What could possibly bring you to tears?"

The weeping *kapo*, amid brokenhearted sobs, answered, "Today was different than anything I have ever experienced. I was taking an old *chassid* to be killed, when suddenly he stopped and looked me straight in the eyes and said, 'Yes, we deserve this horrible punishment. We truly are guilty and warrant this fate. If one Jew is capable of leading another Jew to the slaughter, then something is very wrong with our nation, and we have to answer for it – even with this punishment!' Whenever I think of that old man's words, I tremble with disgust and loathing."

This story and the old *chassid's* piercing words should evoke within all of us a sense of introspection. Are we guilty of the same through indifference? Does one have to lead a fellow Jew to his death, or does a lack of empathy – or even a tinge of hatred for someone who does not believe as we do – warrant Hashem's anger? I hope we never find out.