

**Guide to Lecture 10: Heraclitus**

**A) Introduction to Heraclitus (ca. 540-480 BC)**

- a) Misanthropic, noble family but gave up politics; arresting and enigmatic style.
- b) Common notions about Heraclitus: all is fire; cannot step into the same river twice; all is in flux.

**B) Beliefs, Themes**

- a) Humanity misguided; normal wisdom and tradition lacks insight.
- b) Knowledge from gods appears as a *sign*; a sign is in between full disclosure and total mystery; astrological signification and a Golden Dawn prayer.
- c) The Cosmic *Logos*: common to all, and knowing it like being awake; but most people are asleep.
- d) Cosmology: harmony and a tension of opposites; unity in difference; the universe as Fire and Strife and as a judge; stepping into the same river twice; elemental change is a kind of “death.”
- e) Unity of opposites or contraries:
  - i) The road up and down are one and the same.
  - ii) The beginning and the end are common on the circumference of a circle.
  - iii) Day and night are one.
  - iv) (Cosmic) exhalations responsible for seasons, hot and cold, etc.
  - v) These beliefs are more than mere metaphors; they are emblematic of the cosmos.

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- vi) These beliefs should be taken as a whole and in context; Heraclitus is trying to express *one* thought. A theory about astrology and Greek grammar.
- vii) Relation between Hebrew letters, planets, and contraries drawn from the *Sefer Yetzirah* (see below).
- viii) The world as eternal.

<b>Contraries</b>	<b>Planet</b>	<b>Letter</b>
Life and death	Moon	Gimel, ג
Peace and war	Mars	Peh, פ
Wisdom and folly	Jupiter/Mercury	Kaf, כ/Bet, ב
Riches and Poverty	Mercury/Jupiter	Bet, ב/Kaf, כ
Grade and indignity	Sun	Resh, ר
Fertility and Solitude	Venus	Dalet, ד
Power and Servitude	Saturn	Tav, ט

### **C) A synthesis of Heraclitus**

- a) Unity in diversity, and strife, is a metaphysical principle and real feature of things. Comparison with Anaximander, using the “quantitative” and “qualitative” infinite; relation to God’s transcendence. Two kinds of tension: the Indefinite vs. the Definite, and the conflict between things in the realm of the Definite itself.
- b) Why Heraclitus chose Fire as the principle; its physical activity expresses something conceptual or structural.

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- c) Things do not change willy-nilly; tension and harmony as providing structure.
- d) The quadruplicities match the three-fold character of change and finitude in Heraclitus: they express the fundamental structural dynamics of finite things generally. Quotes from Sahl bin Bishr's *On Elections*.
- e) Living in harmony with the Cosmic *Logos* combines knowledge and ethics.

**D) The Fire vs. the Logos.** How different are they? Different answers will lead to different types of ethics, such as Gnosticism or Stoicism.