

And it will be that when he hears the words of this imprecation, he will bless himself in his heart, saying, “Peace will be with me.” (29:18)

People invariably delude themselves into thinking that it will happen to someone else. One can go merrily about his miserable life, doing what he wants, ignoring the admonitions and punishments that are slowly creeping up on him. When he wakes up from his delusion, it is often too late. Hashem has given him every opportunity to return, but he is ignoring it. While this is true for most, there are those who, because they are under the influence of a misguided leader, sadly follow him until they all descend to infamy.

A classic case of the above would be the sons of Korach and their counterparts – the sons of the two hundred fifty heads of the *Sanhedrin* who were ensnared in Korach’s vicious web of evil. The Torah teaches that *U'bnei Korach lo meisu*, “The sons of Korach did not die” (*Bamidbar* 26:11). *Chazal* explain that Korach’s sons repented at the very last moment. They were Moshe *Rabbeinu’s talmidim*, students, and – when it made a difference between life and death – they remembered their *Rebbe’s* lessons well.

Let us analyze this. Korach was the despotic “wannabe leader” who led a mutinous rebellion against Moshe. He was joined with Dasan and Aviram, two of Moshe’s nemeses, who were involved in every issue to cast aspersion and cripple Moshe’s leadership. In the past, it was basically these two and whatever riffraff they could rally to their cause. Now, it was a national rebellion, an attempted coup, supported by the most distinguished leadership of two hundred and fifty heads of the *Sanhedrin*. They all gathered with the support of their families and friends to see who would emerge triumphant – Moshe or Korach.

It all went down when Hashem intervened: Korach, Dasan and Aviram and their supporters were swallowed up by the ground. The two hundred and fifty heads of the *Sanhedrin* and their supporters were consumed by fire. Apparently, the only ones to repent were the sons of Korach. Why? What did they know that no one else knew?

In his commentary to *Bamidbar* 26:11, the **Netziv, zl**, explains this anomaly, thereby allowing us a window to understanding the curse that hangs over one who is misguided. Korach was an egomaniac, for whom nothing was sufficient. All the money, power and prestige that he possessed and experienced were insufficient to appease his lust for power and reverence. He was almost there, but “almost” was not enough. He wanted it all – and he wanted it his way. He connected well with his henchmen, two malcontent and malevolent individuals, Dasan and Aviram, who from day one were bent upon making life miserable for Moshe. These evil men formed an evil conglomerate whose sole purpose was impugning Moshe’s integrity and undermining his leadership. Contending that Hashem was not supportive of Moshe’s decisions, they insisted that Moshe was playing the nepotism card and favoring those closest to him.

Korach's children naturally followed their father. After all, he was a distinguished and revered leader. At first, they probably had some difficulty distinguishing between their father and their *Rebbe*, Moshe. At first, they both gave the impression of respectability. When push came to shove and the mutiny was in full progress, Korach's sons finally had the opportunity to discern between the evil Korach and the righteous Moshe. They decided to follow their *Rebbe* – even though it meant opposing their father. What is right is right – and what is wrong is wrong. They could not support their father. It was a simple question of black versus white. Unless someone is blind, he chooses white, which *Bnei Korach* ultimately did.

The sons of the head of the *Sanhedrin* were not so fortunate. Their fathers were not evil men – only misguided individuals who were willing to perish in the flames because they believed that what they were doing was the right thing. How tragic was their end – how more tragic was the punishment that spread to their supporters and family. Their sons had only one color to view – to them it was not black and white, because their fathers were also righteous – albeit ill-advised. Their erroneous alignment with Korach was their – and their children's -- undoing.

If an activity is prohibited – outreach does not permit it. If tradition has no record of it – it continues to be unrecorded. This is how the original divisions within the spectrum of Jewish belief took root. It began with confused, ill-advised Jews who wanted change, because “change” would make Judaism more palatable to a greater number of disenchanted Jews. They either did not realize or did not care that we follow *halachah*, rather than our emotions. Unfortunately, they have had their successors in every generation. The end result is always the same: Judaism is not strengthened. On the contrary, splintering weakens the base and causes the newly-initiated to lead lives that are far from observant.