

## The families of the children of Kehas would encamp on the side of the Mishkan to the south. (3:29)

*Rashi* explains that specifically concerning *Bnei Kehas*, the Torah underscores that they were to the south side of the *Mishkan*, indicating that a special significance was attributed to the southern campsite of *Bnei Kehas*. He quotes *Chazal* (*Succos* 56b) that posit, *Oy l'rasha v'oy lishcheinav*. The tribe of Reuven encamped on the south next to Kehas, rendering Reuven vulnerable to the negative influence of Korach who descended from Kehas. As a result, the sons of Reuven, Dasan and Aviram, followed by the 250 heads of the *Sanhedrin*, joined the Korach controversy, which ultimately led to their untimely deaths. *Rashi's lashon*, verbiage, is *She'nimshechu imahem*, "For they were drawn along with them." He does not write that they followed them or that they were lost/destroyed with them. He intimates that their joining forces with Korach was not a decisive, resolute decision, but one of weakness in which they had fallen under the sway of Korach.

*Horav Zaidel Epstein, zl*, derives from here the power of a negative influence, even if it is passive, accomplished by osmosis. A person can fall victim to subtle negativity as the tribe of Reuven did. Suddenly, one who had been viewed as distant and strange becomes close and familiar. When *Bnei Reuven* saw how Korach degraded Moshe *Rabbeinu*, how he spoke to him condescendingly, humiliating him publicly, they were adversely affected.

One does not withdraw from a lifetime of observance impulsively. It begins as innocuous activities, which he otherwise might not have done. Once he becomes used to what he had once viewed as a transgression, however, he descends to the next rung, until he has fallen into the abyss. *Rav Zaidel Epstein* relates a story of a European Jew who immigrated to America prior to the Holocaust. Making ends meet in Europe was becoming more difficult. As the social climate shifted against the Jew, it became increasingly difficult to earn a living. The story is about a *ben Torah, yeshivah* student, who was diligent in his study of Torah and equally G-d-fearing. He married, and Hashem blessed them with a growing family. He earned a meager living which, even by European standards, was insufficient to feed his family. The couple decided to leave Europe for America with the hope that their material needs would be met there. They did not take one thing into consideration: In America, *Shabbos* observance meant Sunday. *Shabbos* was a regular day of work. He lost track of how many times he was fired on Friday.

His brother, who had arrived earlier and was running a successful knitting factory in the Midwest, invited him to join him there. He would hire him to work with no demands regarding *Shabbos*. His wife was suspect of her brother-in-law's offer. She refused to move. They decided that the husband would move alone and send his paycheck to his wife to support his family.

All went fine for the first few weeks. The man worked all week, and *Shabbos* was his day of rest. Every worker in the factory showed up for work on *Shabbos* except for him. A short while later, his brother told him that the other workers were complaining that they worked all week, while the

boss's brother stayed home and spent time in the synagogue. His brother asked if he would just come in and sit in the shop – not working – just sit around. At first, he was reluctant to do so, never having been anywhere but his home and *shul* on *Shabbos*, but, after all, his brother had been kind to him. What could be so wrong if he just sat around?

All was quiet until, one *Shabbos*, the machine that held the knitting machine in place came to an untimely end. The foreman asked him if he would just hold the machine in place, in order for the knitting to continue. No *Shabbos* desecration other than touching/holding the machine which was *muktzah* (set aside for weekday use and Rabbinically prohibited). In short, once he had done this, he was on the way to complete digression and working on *Shabbos*. This is the meaning of *nimshach*, being drawn/sucked into sinful behavior. Subtle acquiescence leads to full blown participation.

The *Chafetz Chaim* heard that in Radin an observant bookseller was selling inappropriate material, such as books and novels by secular authors who were under the influence of the *Haskalah*/Enlightenment movement. (Such reading material can have a devastating effect on one unschooled in Torah outlook.) The sage asked that the man appear before him. He asked him to bring all the questionable reading material to his home. The man came and brought the books. The *Chafetz Chaim* immediately burned each one. (I am certain that he first paid for them.) He said, "I will not allow such reading material to be disseminated in Radin!"

"But, *Rebbe*, a man has to earn a living. This is what sells. Should I allow my family to starve?" the bookseller countered.

"Do not fret," the *Chafetz Chaim* responded. "I will find suitable work for you." A few days later, the *Chafetz Chaim* summoned the man to his home with a job proposal, "One of the workers at the local church died suddenly. His job was to ring the bell in the church on Sundays to remind the people to come to the service." It was a strenuous task, but the man would earn a living.

"*Rebbe*, I am an observant, G-d-fearing Jew. How can I summon gentiles to church?"

The *Chafetz Chaim* replied, "Better that you summon gentiles to church, than you cause the minds of Jews who do not know better to be poisoned."