

And the sons of Eliav: Nemuel and Dasan and Aviram, the same Dasan and Aviram who were summoned by the Assembly, who contended against Moshe and Aharon. (26:9)

The Torah seems to find it necessary to once again introduce the reader to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* arch nemeses, Dasan and Aviram. One would think that these two evildoers would be remembered for their continued evil throughout the nation's nascency. Indeed, their first incursion took place in Egypt when they argued with Moshe and followed up by informing on him to Pharaoh. They told Pharaoh that the Jews had left Egypt, and they later broke the rule not to leave over the *manna* that descended from Heaven to the next day. They led the charge of *Nitnah rosh v'nashuvah Mitzraimah*, "Let us appoint a new leader and return to Egypt" (*Bamidbar* 14:4). Their last act of infamy was joining with Korach to impugn Moshe's leadership. With such an ignominious history, is it really necessary to remind us who these two miscreants were?

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, teaches us an important principle in human nature. Regardless of the evil, the nefariousness of the sin notwithstanding, people become complacent to the point that it almost becomes acceptable. It certainly no longer shocks us. The passion and anger which well up in us when we first hear about – or become exposed to – the incursion slowly dissipates, so that the second time we hear it, it no longer comes across as outrageous. With each act of evil, we become more accepting.

Thus, the Torah once again relates the names of those two wicked men as being the ones who, throughout the nation's journey from Egypt, did everything in their power to undermine Moshe, and, by extension, mutiny against Hashem. Unfortunately, repeated exposure to sinful behavior, as was evinced by Dasan and Aviram, can desensitize people over time, leading to complacency or indifference towards it. The initial shock or outrage that such behavior provokes is diminished with each added offense.

We are a generation who due to indifference born of repeated offenses, has become heedless of the effect of these offenses on us and our families. With repeated exposure to the immoral, unethical and violent activities of some of the leaders of contemporary society, we have become desensitized, to the point that we no longer react, ignoring the impact that it has already had on us.

Sadly, this attitude has slowly worked its way into the observant mindset as well. There used to be a time when *aveiros*, sins, were an anathema. People were ethical, observing *mitzvos* with a simple approach: This is what *halachah* dictates; therefore, this is how we will perform the *mitzvah*. We did not look for dispensations or ways to get around obligations. *Shabbos* was *Shabbos* – regardless if one was home or traveling. Likewise, kosher, with all the *hiddurim*, strict demands, was in force wherever we were. Morality, which has always been the bedrock of *Yiddishkeit* with its demands on *tznius*, has become victim to contemporary society's culture. Today, how one dresses and how one acts is determined by where one lives. There used to be a time when, if one saw a

fellow Jew, albeit non-practicing, acting as such, it would outrage, annoy, sadden us. Today, it is acceptable. Repeated exposure desensitizes.

During World War I, the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*, together with his *yeshivah* (Radin), were forced to flee to a small community in Russia, far off the beaten path of Jewish observance. It was a Jewish community, but observant Jews were rare. One *Shabbos*, as he was walking on the street, he chanced upon a man smoking a cigarette. He immediately ran back to the *yeshivah* and delivered a powerful, tear-filled discourse during which he repeatedly wept saying, "Oy! That I saw an act of *chillul Shabbos*."

A short while later, another similar encounter between the *Chafetz Chaim* and a blatant *chillul Shabbos* occurred. He once again returned to the *yeshivah* and delivered a *shmuess*, discourse, weeping incessantly over the *chillul Shabbos* that he had observed. He then commented that he felt that the second time he saw the *chillul Shabbos*, the flagrant commission of the sin did not impact as severely as it did the first time. Only a *Chafetz Chaim* who meticulously weighed and measured every tear that he expended could make such a powerful statement. What can we say?