



This week, we read how Korach, Datan, and Aviram, the ring-leaders of the rebellion against Moshe, were swallowed up by the earth. The additional 250 insurgents were burned by a fire that went forth from G-d (Bamidbar 16). Why, we might ask, weren't Datan and Aviram consumed along with the other rebels; why did they join Korach in the ground?

A useful insight is provided by the Rambam who distinguishes between three sets of individuals smitten by slander: the slanderer, the subject of the criticism, and the one who listens, who is most affected. That is because while the involved parties can settle their differences, the onlooker, who joined in the quarrel for the sake of it, will yet be left with a bad taste after the two sides were reconciled.

Rabbi M. Miller remarks that the "listeners", Datan and Aviram, heeded to evil speech; they were subject to "an irrational passion, not easily eradicated". Having no personal stake in the dispute, they enjoyed the sensation of degrading another human being. For R. Zaichyk, it is like one who contracts a disease from another: His illness continues to develop, even while the original sick person was cured.

King Solomon noted that one who interferes in a quarrel that does not concern him is like one who grasps a dog's ears. There is no benefit, only that the dog will bite him! Datan and Aviram joined the dispute out of sheer mischief, out of no reasonable motive. And for this reason they were swallowed up in the pit, also known as the "Valley of Nothingness", the place of the negation of all existence that emerges from the separation of what is essentially one; it is that place of division, designated for the lovers of contention (after Maharal).

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