

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

The Perils of the Power of Teshuva



RABBI DOVID SPETNER


POSSIBLY THE STRANGEST EPISODE IN THE SAGA OF the *meraglim* (spies) is the behavior of the group known as the *Ma'apilim*. This group of Jews, after hearing of Hashem's decree that they must wander for 40 years and that the present generation will never enter the Land, awoke the next morning and declared that now they must go up to the Land "because we have sinned." Moshe warns them that they must not go and, as Moshe predicted, they were wiped out by the nations of Amalek and Canaan. What possessed this group—that recognized the national sin of rejecting the land—to then flout Moshe's command and Hashem's decree?

I would like to suggest a theory based on the Chofetz Chaim's understanding (*Shmiras Halshon Part II Parashas Shelach*) of the underlying cause of the sin of the *meraglim*. He understood that the *meraglim* fully believed that Hashem was capable of destroying the nations of Canaan. What worried the *meraglim*, and subsequently the Jewish people, was that the stronger and fiercer the nations of Canaan were, the more of an open miracle would be required in order to conquer them. Due to having worshipped the Golden Calf and other sins, the people felt that they were no longer worthy of having Hashem perform open miracles on their behalf.

Had the land not been so difficult to conquer, they would have been fine with a conquest that was within their natural means. However, a land with giants and strongly fortified cities was not naturally possible and sinners such as themselves would not merit the miraculous.

Their mistake (among others), the Chofetz Chaim writes, was that the people failed to appreciate the power of the *teshuva* that they had undergone after these sins. Hashem had forgiven them sufficiently for them to conquer the Land as He had promised.

With this approach, we can now offer a possible understanding of the *Ma'apilim* and their motivation. The key words are when they said that they must go up to Canaan "*ki chatanu* (because we sinned)." This indicates that they were doing *teshuva* for the previous day's refusal. They now understood that they had underestimated the power that *teshuva* had on their earlier sins. Now that they were doing *teshuva* for the sin of listening to the spies, they believed that now they must go up. They believed that Moshe, by refusing to join them, was making the same mistake they had made the previous day in not believing in the power of *teshuva*.

Their mistake of course, was not listening to Hashem and Moshe. Earlier, Hashem and Moshe had commanded them to go up to the Land and they believed they had a good rationale for why they would not be successful. They were wrong. Once again, they had a rationale for why they must go up now, despite Hashem and Moshe telling them not to. Once again they paid the price for believing in their own wisdom over the command of Hashem and His prophet. 



THE RABBI WAS ASKED

ADAPTED BY RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER FROM ME'AH SHE'ARIM BY RABBI YITZCHOK ZILBERSTEIN

Michael, a groom, soon to be married, went for a haircut late Friday afternoon before his *aufruf*, when the groom is called to the Torah on the Shabbos before his wedding. In the middle of his haircut, the barber suddenly had a heart attack and fell over. Commotion ensued and he was rushed to the hospital.

Meanwhile, Shabbos arrived and Michael was left with half his hair cut, and half his hair long. He would be too embarrassed to leave his house for the entire Shabbos, let alone to be called to the Torah in front of the whole congregation.

Q May Michael ask a gentile to finish his haircut on Shabbos?

A *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 340:1) rules that one who cuts two hairs or fingernails on Shabbos is liable for *gozez*, shearing. Chasam Sofer (gloss to *Shulchan Aruch*, *ibid*) writes that one who cuts his hair or nails in order to beautify his skin doesn't transgress the Biblical prohibition of shearing for it would be a *melacha she'en tzricha ligufa*, that is, a forbidden Shabbos work of which one does not need its direct result (he doesn't need the hair or fingernail itself, rather shorter hair or nails). Nonetheless, he transgresses the Biblical *melacha* of *memachek*, smoothing.

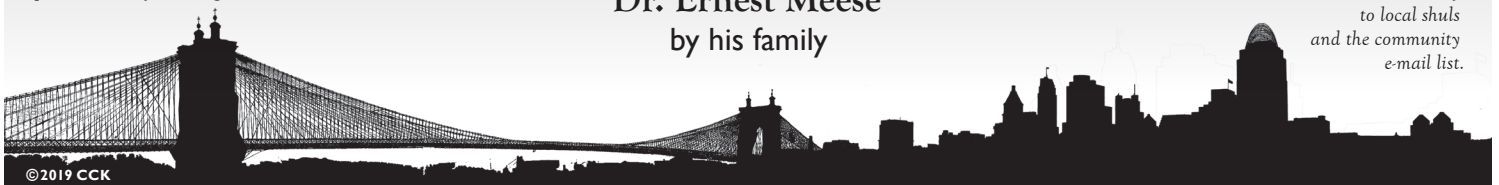
The prohibition applies only to one who cuts off his hair to beautify his skin. In our case, however, Michael, who had longer hair on his head just wants to shorten it, without even revealing his skull. We may pose that the prohibition will be Rabbinic, not Biblical.

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

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Since the prohibition is only Rabbinic, and Michael may be very embarrassed in front of anyone who sees him, we are concerned for his “personal honor” (*kavod habriyos*), and we may ask a gentile to finish the haircut. To avoid the Biblical prohibition of shearing or smoothing, the gentile should be cautious to not cut too neatly.

Additionally, in extenuating circumstances, we may rely upon the opinion of the *Itur* that one may even ask a gentile to perform a Biblically prohibited activity on Shabbos for a Jew (see *M.B.* 307:24). Preferably, though, the remainder of the haircut should take place before nightfall, during twilight, a time when many *Poskim* permit directing a gentile to do work for a Jew. 🕒

GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

HENRY GREW UP IN A HOME THAT WAS NOT RELIGIOUS, but his parents did send him to a Jewish school where he learned about his heritage. As his bar mitzvah approached, he became more and more inspired to become a Torah observant. His parents were members of a small Orthodox synagogue where his bar mitzvah would be held, but it was ten miles away and Henry would not join his parents on their car ride to the synagogue for his bar mitzvah. Henry informed his parents, “I will be sleeping in the synagogue the Friday night of my bar mitzvah.”

His parents were incredulous. “There is no way our child will be sleeping in an empty synagogue all by himself!” When they saw Henry’s determination, though, they relented and made a call to another member of the synagogue who lived closer to host Henry for Shabbos. Henry indeed got his way and thanks to his determination has been growing ever since. 🕒

GLIMPSES OF THE KOLLEL

A fairly new, advanced Talmud “chaburah” [study group] is dedicated to in-depth study of Gemorah Niddah. The chaburah meets Sunday

through Thursday nights and is currently guided by Rabbi Moshe David Zeffren.



A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

The atonement of which cardinal sin is discussed in this week’s *parasha*?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table and see who knows the answer! 🕒

BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

As Eastern European immigrants poured into America’s eastern cities, Jewish leaders began to worry that it would lead to an increase in anti-Semitic sentiment in America, and even more importantly it could prompt legislation curbing immigration. An ambitious plan was hatched to divert the immigrants from the eastern seaboard to a port which would facilitate the movement of immigrants into middle America, preferably west of the Mississippi, without concentrating too heavily in one area. The port of Galveston, Texas, was picked as the ideal spot to carry out what became known as the “Galveston Plan.” The first Jewish immigrants to come through these efforts reached Galveston in 1907. However, even before World War I broke out and effectively halted all immigration in July of 1914, the Galveston Plan had already failed. Many factors contributed to this: The majority of immigrants wanted to go to centers of Jewish life and not small towns in America’s heartland; the port of Galveston became known for high deportation rates for reasons even including “poor physique,” even though the people were perfectly healthy; and the overseas experience on the ship line that serviced the immigrants was worse than other companies. As a result, those wishing to immigrate avoided Galveston. In the end, approximately 10,000 Jews entered America through Galveston. 🕒

SOURCES: Brawley, Edward Allan. “When the Jews Came to Galveston.” April 2009. www.commentarymagazine.com.

Best, Gary Dean. “Jacob H. Schiff’s Galveston Movement: An Experiment in Immigrant Deflection, 1907-1914.” http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1978_30_01_00_best.pdf

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