

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

An Irresistible Suggestion

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR
ELI POLSKY

This is what that Hashem commands the daughters of Tzelafchad, saying: Let them get married to whomever they think best; however, they should marry into the family of their father's tribe. (36:6)

Rav Yehuda said, in the name of Rav Shmuel, "The daughters of Tzelafchad were allowed to be married to any tribe, as [the Torah] says, 'Let them get married to whomever they think best.' So how, then, do I fulfill [the next part of that verse], 'however, they should marry into the family of their father's tribe?' [Hashem] was merely giving them good advice—they should only get married to people appropriate for them" (Talmud, *Bava Basra* 120a).

This sounds kind of wishy-washy. What was Hashem telling them to do? Should they or shouldn't they stay within their tribe? Was Hashem just "giving out advice"? Getting "good advice" from Hashem is akin to being "advised" by a police officer not to speed, while he has his radar trained on you. Are you not going to listen to his advice? Only an idiot wouldn't take such "advice" seriously! Furthermore, our Sages teach that, as a rule, someone who is commanded to do something, and does it, will be rewarded more than someone who isn't commanded to do so, but does it anyway.

At first this may seem counterintuitive, but if we are attuned to the way our *yetzer hara*—evil inclination—works, we see that this does, in fact, make sense. The *yetzer hara* is always trying to seduce us to rebel. When we are commanded to do something, the stubborn side of us perks up and digs in. On the other hand, if someone is not obligated to do something, he will be motivated to make sure that he receives "extra credit" for volunteering! Having established that, why would Hashem deprive the daughters of Tzelafchad of an opportunity to maximize their reward? After all, commanding them to marry within their

own tribe would apply merely a hairsbreadth more pressure on them than Hashem would exert by offering them advice. They would listen to Hashem, either way! Hashem might as well set them up to maximize their reward for what they would eventually do, anyway!

If we consider the *yetzer hara*'s wily ways, we will also see that, in fact, Hashem was maximizing their reward. Getting advice is actually a step above being commanded. Even after a person works through any control issues and stubbornness, and he gives in and is ready to do whatever he was encouraged to do, he may hit another barrier—that he was never really commanded to do anything! All he was given was some advice, and he can still rationalize his way out of following it. So when the daughters of Tzelafchad not only quashed the natural urge to rebel, but also suppressed the instinct to justify doing whatever they wanted to do, their reward was much greater than it otherwise would have been.

This resonates very clearly nowadays, when we don't have prophecy, nor is it at all clear what Hashem wants us to do; we often can only rely on what we feel Hashem is "advising" us to do. This, of course, is a golden opportunity for the *yetzer hara* to whisper in our ear his siren song of confusion, and we might be tempted to justify not following the "fifth *cheilek*" of the *Shulchan Aruch*.^{*} But, of course, if we can get past the rationalizations and justifications, and ultimately do the right thing, we will be rewarded on a much higher level than we are for doing things which are clear-cut.

^{*}*Shulchan Aruch*, the *Code of Jewish Law*, written by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the sixteenth century, is comprised of four *chalakim* (volumes), each dedicated to a different area of law. It is sometimes said that there is a critical, but unwritten, fifth *cheilek*: common sense. 🕒

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

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

A certain bus company put advertisements on their buses which Aryeh, one of the drivers, felt was inappropriate. He wondered if it should be prohibited for him to drive around town, causing the passersby to see the advertisement, possibly transgressing the commandment of *lifnei iver*, 'do not place a stumbling block before the blind,' or perhaps he is not obligated to stop driving and lose his livelihood.

Q May Aryeh continue driving the bus?

A Perhaps he won't transgress the prohibition of *lifnei iver*. Maharil Diskin (*Kuntres Achron* 145) rules that a person is not obligated to lose money in order to prevent another from sinning. Here too, Aryeh wouldn't need to quit his job to prevent others from stumbling.

We may conjecture that Maharil Diskin ruled so in an instance where one can withhold from sinning but chooses to stumble. Here however, the innocent passerby has no interest in seeing anything inappropriate, and the driver causes him to stumble. Additionally, when one may cause many people to sin, perhaps he is obligated to lose money.

Furthermore, Aryeh began the job

➡ CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE ➡

Sponsorship & feedback:
parasha@cincykollel.org

Sponsored in honor of
all those who donated and made
the Kollel's campaign a success!

Cincinnati Torah
is distributed weekly
to local shuls
and the community
e-mail list.



THE RABBI WAS ASKED

CONTINUED

knowing that buses advertise inappropriate material. He initially should have declined the job unless he would stipulate not to drive buses with those advertisements. The best idea for Aryeh in his current situation would be for him to cover the advertisements before beginning his route, and he would be performing a great *mitzvah* simultaneously.

My brother-in-law, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, told me that perhaps Aryeh is permitted to continue driving the bus as is, because one doesn't transgress any prohibition of looking at inappropriate content when he sees it for the first time (see *He'emek Davar, Sh'mos 13:16*). Often, one sees something suddenly without warning, he has no time to prepare or look away. The problem begins where after the first innocuous glance, if one continues to look knowingly.

According to this, we may say that Aryeh need not sacrifice his job to prevent the passersby from looking at the advertisements. As explained, the first glance one isn't held accountable for, and if one continues to look at the inappropriate material, it's due to his own volition, and the action will not be attributed to the driver. 🕒

GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

Rabbi Harris of Brooklyn, NY, is privileged to learn with many people from all walks of life. One study partner of his, Jeff, who is a dentist, is gradually learning more about his heritage. As they were once learning over the computer, Rabbi Harris was interrupted several times by knocks on the door. Each time it had been someone raising funds either for themselves or some organization in need. After it had happened several times, Jeff had to ask, "Who keeps knocking on the door?" "Jews in need asking for a donation," Rabbi Harris replied casually. Jeff though was incredulous. "What? People just come to your door to ask for money?" "Yes," replied Rabbi Harris, "it is actually pretty standard that several people knock a day, not a big deal." Jeff still could not quite believe it. "Do you know any of these people?" "Not really, some come every year." "Wow! You don't know who they are and you still give them money?" Shrugging off the compliment, Rabbi Harris brought the conversation back around to what they had been studying. Jeff though did not forget. Several days later, Rabbi Harris received an

A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

What phrase in Parshas Matos does Moshe Rabbeinu use twice, once in singular and a second time in plural?

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

envelope in the mail from Jeff. In it was a large check and a note that read: "Dear Rabbi Harris, I as well want to take part in giving charity, please use this money to distribute to those who come to you in need." 🕒

BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

Rav Binyamin Papermaster, a native of the Kovno area of Lithuania, was at a young age already ordained as rabbi, trained as a *shochet* and *mohel*, and known as a popular *chazzan*. Still, he was looking for a position to support his growing family. A man on his way to Fargo, ND, stopped at the home of the Kovno Rav, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor, looking for a rabbi on behalf of the Fargo community. Rav Spektor told the man that Rabbi Papermaster was his man. Rav Spektor told Rabbi Papermaster that it was his duty to use his skills to attend to these Jews in far-flung Fargo. This charge was Rabbi Papermaster's inspiration to remain in North Dakota for the rest of his life. When Rabbi Papermaster actually saw the community in Fargo, it was clear that things had not been described truthfully, as there were not enough Jews for a *minyan*, and certainly not enough to pay a rabbi. However, while in Fargo, he heard of another community that needed a rabbi farther north in the city of Grand Forks. Grand Forks would indeed become Rabbi Papermaster's base of operations as he administered to Jews throughout North Dakota in places like Minot and Devil's Lake, and sometimes even as far as Winnipeg in Manitoba. Unfortunately, Rabbi Papermaster's young wife died before she could join her husband in America. Knowing that he needed a wife to succeed in his endeavors in the wilds of America, he wrote to his oldest brother, who suggested his own sister-in-law. Amazingly, she agreed to the match and, though she had never met him, traveled from Russia to become a mother to his four boys. 🕒

SOURCE: Levine, Dr. Yitzchak. "Rabbi Binyamin Papermaster, Forty-Three Years as a Rav in North Dakota." *The Hamodia*. 2009

Cincinnati Community Kollel

2241 Losantiville Avenue, Cincinnati OH 45237 • 513-631-1118 • kollel@shul.net • cincykollel.org

Please remember the Kollel with a gift in your will, trust, retirement account, or life insurance policy.

