

The son of a Yisraelite woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man... they fought in the camp, the son of the Yisraelite woman and Yisraelite man. The son of the Yisraelite woman pronounced the Name and blasphemed. (24:10,11)

Rarely do we see such an explosion of un-Jewish depravity as evinced by the blasphemer. Indeed, had his mother not been the only Jewish woman to have committed her own act of transgression with the Egyptian, this blasphemy would not have occurred. The mother planted the seed of infamy; the son executed his ignoble heritage that became his mother's legacy to him. Indeed, the mother's name is recorded for posterity in the Torah only after her son sinned. Parents must realize that, while they may ignore the personal ramifications of their ignominious behavior, they cannot disregard its effect on their children. The Torah underscores the consequences of the mother's moral encroachment. Amidst the horror of the son's crime, the Torah lays bare the mother's seeds of mutiny which germinate her son's blasphemy.

We often talk about kids at risk, ignoring the fact that, at times, they are products of parents at risk. Shlomis *bas* Divri achieved the sad distinction of having her name recorded in the Torah to impart a lesson to all parents: Your children are watching. You serve as an example. The mistakes you make today to satisfy your momentary desires – or to stroke your ego – will come back to haunt you, when your children outdo you!

Numerous lessons are to be derived from the episode of the blasphemer. Probably the lesson which should strike us most is how someone who had great spiritual expectations could so easily and quickly descend to the very nadir of depravity, because of what might appear to be a minor infraction. Veritably, there is no such thing as a minor infraction, since every transgression is committed in the presence of Hashem and violates our obedience to His dictates. Thus, the word "minor" is relative to other sins which seem more egregious in nature.

Rashi cites two opinions concerning what led to the blasphemer's downfall. Rabbi Berachiah taught that the blasphemer had difficulty understanding the process of the *Lechem HaPanim*, Showbread. Each week the week-old *Lechem HaPanim* was eaten, after being replaced by fresh bread. The blasphemer scoffed about this process, saying, "A king normally eats fresh bread. Why should Hashem have old, cold bread?" His disrespect incurred the ire of another Jew, who scolded him. The verbal altercation became physical, as they began pummeling one another. The blasphemer's reaction was to utter a curse.

It began by degrading one *mitzvah* in the Torah. It did not sit right with him. His ultimate reaction was blasphemy. *Aveirah goreres aveirah*; it all begins with one sin – however minor – which leads to another and another, until the ultimate transgression. This was a person who had stood at *Har*

Sinai and experienced the Revelation. That is no guarantee. One can be on the mountain and fall to the depths of depravity, if he allows that minor encroachment to filter into his mind. It all began with cynical scoffing. We may never disregard anyone's negative attitude, because one never knows where it might lead.

An alternative version of the strife focuses on the Torah's emphasizing the contrasting lineages of the two disputants, in connection with the words, *Va'yinatzu ba'machaneh*, "They fought in the camp," which implies that the dispute concerned matters of the camp – inheritance. Being that the blasphemer's mother came from *shevet Dan*, he wished to make his dwelling among members of his mother's family – with the tribe of Dan. They refused him, claiming that his father was not from the tribe of Dan, and was, in fact, an Egyptian. Moshe *Rabbeinu's* court decided with the tribe of Dan. This did not sit right with the petitioner, who, in turn, blasphemed the Name.

In other words, the debacle was caused by anger. He was a sore loser, becoming angry with the court, the judge – everyone who did not see it his way. Regrettably, this is not an isolated incident. If things do not work out "my" way, it means that: the system is corrupt; the rabbi has lost sight of reality; the court is out of touch with the times – all this and more. It gets worse. The disgruntled person who has just lost his case, not only does not settle by accepting the decision, but he becomes angry at everyone involved and ultimately blames the Almighty for all of his problems. All of this occurred because of a lapse: a "minor" cynism; a lack of accepting the court's judgment; a little bit of anger – which all led to his spiritual ruin.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, compares it to someone who was in a terrible car accident. He is now laid up in the hospital for months. His body is in a cast after he underwent numerous surgeries. He is in constant pain and agony. All of this due to one critical moment that he took his eyes off the road. That is all it takes: one moment; one mistake; one cynical moment: one anger. How careful we must be – regardless of our stature and achievements; one lapse can destroy a lifetime of accomplishment.