

BSD
WORLD ORGANIZATION FOR
THE KEDDUSHA OF THE BEARD
ANNOUNCEMENT 4

THE CHATAM SOFER EXPLAINS HOW THE FIRST JEWS
BEGAN REMOVING THEIR BEARDS

The origins of a Jew removing his beard came about through force, and not free will. Close to nine hundred years ago, the Jews of Germany were exposed to grave physical danger, suffering, and tribulation due to the cruel, barbaric Crusaders. In order to enable the Jews who were employed as traveling merchants to escape physical abuse and persecution, the Rabbis permitted a change in the mode of dress, and removal of the beard. The non-Jewish population at that time had dispensed with the wearing of the beard. The Jewish merchants were no longer conspicuous because of physical appearance, and were thus saved from the merciless attacks of the anti-Semites. When these beardless Jews returned from their travels, they were quite different from their fellow Jews. This slowly caused more Jews to remove their beards. The Rabbis and Scholars, who remained in their hometowns the year round, did, however, retain their Jewish appearance, while the great majority of German Jewry was clean-shaven. Those Jews who left Germany prior to the year 4856 (when the removal of beards began) and settled in Poland were not included in the lenient halachic decision, and have indeed retained their beards down to this last century, while in Germany beards were almost non-existent (Responsa Chatam Sofer, Orach Chayim 159)

(Ed. note: From these words of the Chasam Sofer, it is clearly seen that the original dispensation to allow the removal of beards was issued only under extremely hard-pressed conditions. Today, when there is no longer physical danger involved in wearing a beard, this leniency is no longer applicable).

Woe to the one who dares disturb his beard in any manner
(Zohar ha Kaddosh III, 130b)