

BRINGING THE HOLY INTO THE WHOLE RELATIONSHIP

Dedicated Filui nishmas Harav Yitzchok a"h
ben Harav Eliezer Tzvi Zev Zirkind

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any years ago, Rabbi Zalman Gurary a"h, as the principal of the Lubavitcher Yeshiva, received a letter from the Friediker Rebbe, in which the Rebbe wrote about the conduct of the students during recess.

The Friediker Rebbe was not pleased with the children's rough behavior,

coarse language and wild games. He instructed Rabbi Gurary to appoint a supervisor during recess so that the children should know that even while playing there remains a refined way to act.

THE CONCEPT OF TZNIUS as found in the Torah has five components: awareness of Hashem, unity of soul and body, maintaining boundaries, embracing our femininity, and sensitivity to others. When we learn to incorporate these five elements into our lives, we bring dignity and holiness into our relationships and create an environment where Hashem can feel at home.

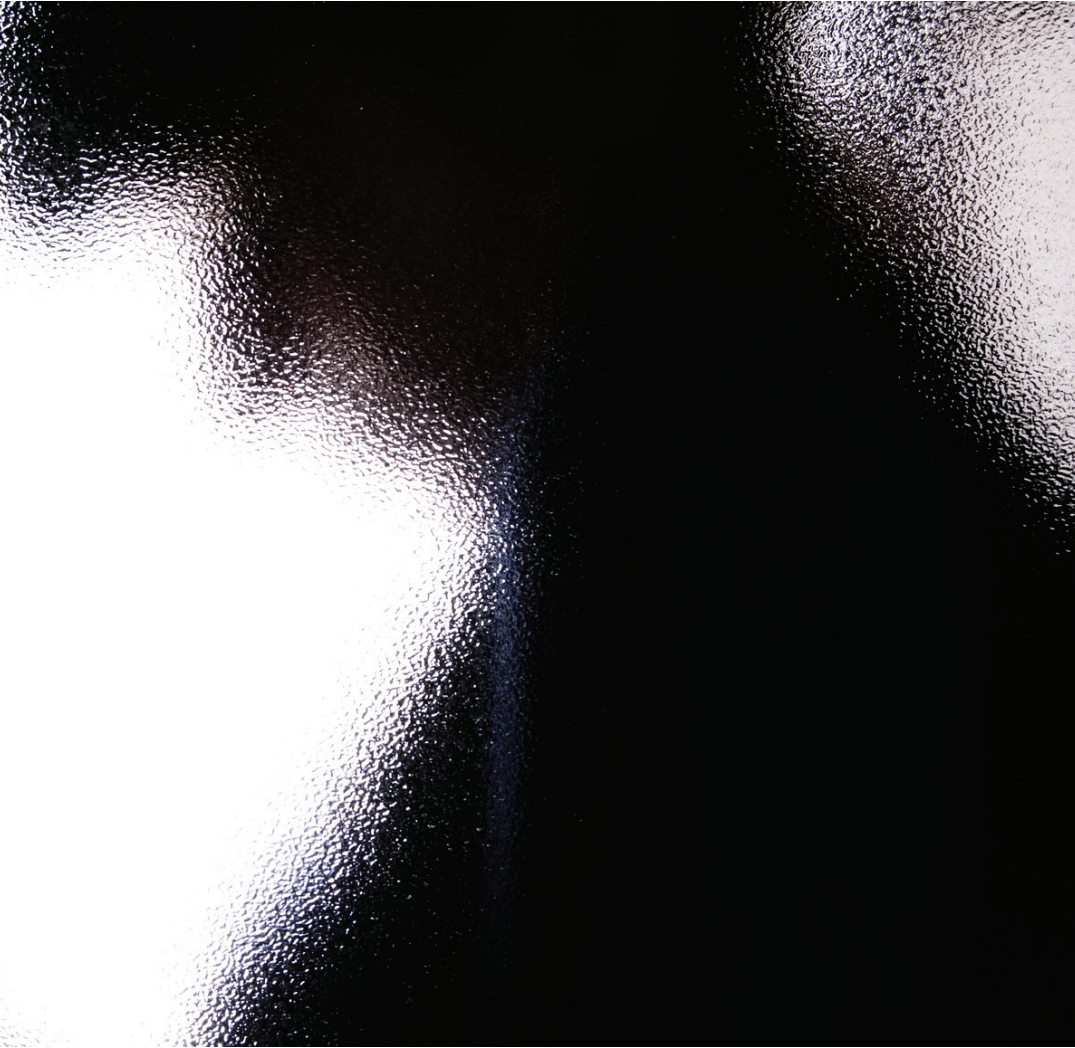
AWARENESS

The first aspect of tznius is to be mindful of the presence of Hashem, Who surrounds us at all times.

There are times and situations where we may think it's appropriate to let loose and forget any inhibitions. Torah teaches us (*Micha* chapter 6) "V'hatzneia leches im Elokecha." We must live modestly in the presence of Hashem—which is always.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (3:1) teaches us the laws of dressing and undressing, emphasizing that even in our bedrooms, we are cautious to ensure that we dress modestly.

One may wonder—what difference does it make when I am in my innermost chambers? Hashem is everywhere! After all, Hashem can see through my



clothing too.

When I was around twelve years old, I flew to New York, along with a group of friends, to spend Tishrei with the Rebbe. To say that we were excited would be an understatement.

After passport control we were off to customs, and there we were, a giddy group, with our suitcases on our wagons, racing through the nothing-to-declare lane. Since there was no one else around at the time, we really let loose and had a great time. It was even more fun because of the mirrors on either side of us.

A year or two later I was once again in the airport, but this time I was called to the side by a customs official and taken behind this mirrored wall so that my luggage could be searched.

I was shocked to discover that what I had thought was a mirrored wall was actually a one-way mirror. Two years before, my friends and I had lived it up going through this line, thinking we could behave as we pleased with no one watching. In reality, the custom agents were sitting behind the one-way mirror watching every person, his actions, his facial expressions, etc.

Since then, I am careful to walk through customs with dignity and the awareness that I am being watched. Shouldn't we walk through life like that?

There was once a poor *shochet*, Reb Mendel, who finally landed a job in a slaughterhouse. One time, Reb Mendel noticed that his yarmulke had fallen off at some point and he had even *shechted* a few chickens without it. Reb Mendel was very distressed, knowing that a *shochet* has to have extreme *yiras Shomayim*. He felt that he must have lost that sensitivity since he didn't even realize he was *shechting* without a yarmulke. He decided that he could no longer *shecht* and he left this job, knowing that he was losing his entire livelihood. Hashem later rewarded him for his integrity and he

eventually became very wealthy.

Acting modestly, even in private, reminds us of Hashem's constant Presence and creates a setting where He is most comfortable.

UNITY: SOUL OVER BODY

Before the *chet etz hadaas*, we know that Adam and Chava did not wear clothing, and yet there was no embarrassment. But as soon as they sinned, they suddenly became ashamed of their nakedness. Why?

Originally, the body was transparent to the soul that rested inside of it, allowing the holy light of the *neshamah* to shine through. One did not see the body as an entity unto itself, but only as a vehicle for the intense *kedushah* radiated by the *neshamah*.

After the sin, a dichotomy arose in the world. The body, seeking supremacy, attempts to conceal the *neshamah* and its holiness. Thus began our entire struggle: to remember that the body is merely a tool through which we can bring holiness into this physical world. The corporeal body is secondary to the purpose of the *neshamah*. Now we must strive to bring the light of the *neshamah* to the forefront.

Yiddishkeit and Torah train us to find the soul and see the depth in everything, helping us remember that the soul is the main player here.

In *Vayikra* 20:23, we find the mitzvah not to walk in the ways of the non-Jews.

The *Shulchan Aruch* expounds: Separate yourself from them in your dress, speech and actions just as you should separate yourself from their philosophy and religion.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (3:2) also explains which areas of dress this is referring to.

A. *Bigdai Gaavah* – Clothing that is arrogant, ostentatious and flashy.

B. *Bigdei Pritzus* – Clothing that is provocative and draws attention to certain parts of the body.

C. Strange, trendy clothes – Clothing of such outlandish appearance that no one would ever wear them if they weren't in fashion.

The whole point of the fashion industry (besides money-making) is to draw attention to the body, the exact opposite of what we, as Yidden, are trying to achieve. The Jewish way is to identify ourselves with the *neshamah*, thereby enriching every aspect of our lives, including our marriages.

Torah explains that intimacy is the union of two halves of one whole. We are born as two separate people, one male and one female, with different emotions and interests. When a couple marries and comes together, the two halves are reunited into one whole. Our connection to our spouse is a soul connection, one that transcends our daily struggles.

Unity between body and soul means to recognize that we, as Yidden, are much more than corporeal beings. Striving for oneness at the level of our neshamos creates a deeper, richer, kedusha'dike relationship.

PRIVACY: MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES

The Torah mandates that after a woman marries, and her father no longer supports her, it is incumbent upon her husband to provide for her. In the *kesubah* it states that a husband must

Some things just aren't meant for other people to know.

provide for his wife physically, financially and emotionally. Part of this support is a lump sum of money set aside for the woman in the event of a divorce, so that the woman has the means to live.

If a marriage terminates against the will of the woman, or if a husband undermines the marriage through any form of abuse, and there is no way to repair the marriage, he must give his wife this lump sum.

However, if it is the woman who undermines the marriage, and it is impossible to repair the relationship in a manner dictated by Torah, then the marriage cannot survive, and she is not owed a penny.

There are two categories of behavior with which a woman undermines the marriage. One falls under *Das Moshe*, and one is *Das Yehudis*.

Das Moshe refers to the laws of Torah MiSinai: The willful transgression of certain mitzvos on the part of the woman is

considered a betrayal of trust. Hashem regards women with the highest esteem. Their word is completely trusted, as is seen in the laws of *taharas hamishpachah* and *kashrus*, for example. There is no one overseeing the woman's observance of these vital mitzvos. Hashem trusts her to be honest and trustworthy. Therefore, if the woman intentionally deceives her husband in the observance of mitzvos, where he relies on her implicitly, she undermines the marriage. The *Mishnah* (*Kesubos* 72) brings examples from this category: She serves him food from which *maaser* wasn't taken, she has relations while *niddah*, or she serves him bread from which *challah* was not taken.

The second group of laws is called *Das Yehudis*, "the way of the Jewish woman."

Imagine driving down the highway and you see a sign saying "Work Zone—Slow Down." Failure to slow down in this zone holds the penalty of a double fine, perhaps points on your license. Most will take a quick look around, and if no one is around, they will drive through at normal speed.

Now imagine the sign said, "Slow Down, My Daddy Works Here." These words would touch your heart. You would slow down no matter what, to be sure you did not harm some child's father. The difference is you now *want* to slow down; it no longer seems like just a senseless rule. Slowing down is now a matter of common decency, humanity, and

caring for another.

Das Yehudis are behaviors and precautions that Jewish women instituted for themselves—and continue to institute in each generation—to safeguard the *halachos* of *tznius*, in recognition of their infinite value. If my body is only for my husband, it is valuable. I don't want to share it—not even the slightest bit! I will do anything to keep it sacred, keep it special and keep it mine. *Das Yehudis* includes safeguards which ensure that physical as well as emotional privacy is upheld.

So vital are the laws of *Das Yehudis* that they are considered binding in *halachah*. Whereas in most *mitzvos*, the application of a *halachic* ruling is entrusted to the Rabbonim, according to the principles of Torah, the proper fulfillment of “*Hatzneia leches im Elokecha*” was entrusted to the refined Jewish women of each generation.

The *Mishnah* brings some examples of a breach of *das Yehudis*:

She goes out in public with her hair uncovered (certain parts of hair covering fall under *das Moshe* but an extra level derives from *das Yehudis*).

She weaves in the *shuk* (marketplace)—an act that, by default, leads to exposure of the arms due to the back-and-forth pulling motion involved in the activity. Not that she goes out initially with uncovered elbows; even if she is not careful in her activities to ensure that she remains properly covered at all times, Torah considers that a breach of *tznius*.

Other violations of *das Yehudis* are chatting indiscriminately with other men, or speaking publicly of private matters.



At *Mattan Torah*, Hashem said *Anochi* and *Lo Yihye*. One may think that they are both the same idea. However, they are actually two concepts. *Anochi*—I am Hashem, I am yours. *Lo yihye*—there should be no other! Meaning, Hashem is ours to the exclusion of all others.

This same concept applies to our marriages. My husband is mine alone, to the exclusion of all others.

Not only physically are there things reserved exclusively for one's husband; there are other aspects of life that retain that same exclusivity. Some things just aren't meant for other people to know.

A friend of mine runs a school that is right next to the highway. One time, as part of a huge construction job, the fence of the yard was

removed and an orange rope was tied around the perimeter of the yard. The children were warned not to go past the orange rope, but with all the warnings and all the speeding vehicles whizzing by, the children were terrified to go remotely close to the rope. They literally kept their activities as close to the school wall as possible. In the process their whole play area shrank significantly.

When we maintain boundaries, we have more freedom to be who we are. When the gate was up, the children had the whole yard to play in; when the gate was removed, the area shrank.

So how big do you want this special and exclusive space with your husband to be? The choice is yours!

What goes on between couples within the privacy of their lives should not be broadcast to the world.

Broadcasting private matters on Facebook and other social media, telling the world how amazing your husband is because he did A, B and C, takes that special privacy outside the boundaries, into public domain. Everyone does not have to know *what* you love about your husband. There is infinitely more meaning in an act that you know is just between the two of you, knowing that no one but you will ever know about it. This shows that these actions were for your benefit, and yours alone, no public recognition involved. This allows for a real, true and deep relationship.

We need to be conscious of the types of pictures we post online, if they show a couple posing in close proximity.

Sometimes it is hard to remember this. Privacy is not popular. If you

don't have a picture to show everyone that you went out for your anniversary—it didn't happen. If it's not posted, it was unworthy. The more comments it gets, the more fun it was.

But remember: by making it public, you devalue it. It's no longer just yours.

Even if you post anonymously, remember that nothing in the online world really is anonymous anymore. Your identifying information is logged every time you visit a website, every time you post a comment. But even if your privacy is guaranteed and nobody will ever know the comment came from you, is it really appropriate to share intimate details of your life on a forum where anyone can read them? Is it appropriate to read other people's disclosures, tantalizing as they may be?

The laws of tznius train us to preserve the exclusivity of our marriage. Creating strong, secure walls allows us to develop our own unique and intimate relationship in which the Shechinah can dwell.

FEMININITY: EMBRACING OUR UNIQUE ROLE

There is a famous story about four brothers named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody.

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it.

Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought that Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. In the end, Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

This cute story contains a valuable lesson: there need to be distinct and defined roles for every person. Where there are not, no one takes responsibility. We each need to stick to our designated roles to ensure a wholesome outcome.

This brings us to the fourth component of modest conduct, found in *Devarim* (22:5). A man's garments should not be worn by a woman and vice versa.

Men and women have their own attire and it's not just about clothing. Torah teaches us to embrace our individuality and be grateful for these differences.

A wholesome marriage and family require both a man and a woman. The boundaries of *lo silbash* direct us to nurture our individual role as women, thereby contributing a very integral part of the complete marriage equation.

WHAT IS OUR ROLE?

Kol kevudah bas melech penimah—the glory of a woman is within. Within what?

Well, first of all, within her home. She is the *akeres habayis*, the mainstay of the home, making her home into a *mikdash*

m'at specifically through working with the physical. She creates a welcoming environment through her warmth and her soft, understated words, inspiring and nourishing her family with her feminine touch.

Another aspect of *penimah* is within herself—a woman's glory is her innate ability to deeply connect and tune in to another. A woman is graced with the ability to nurture and touch the hearts of others, particularly those of her husband and children. Her nurturing behind the scenes creates a deep sense of peace and security in the home. The sun is bright, bold and strong, necessary to the world to survive. The moon, too, serves a vital role, with a subtle light. Each has its time and place, its role to play in this world. Children need a mother and a father. They don't need two fathers.

Dressing and acting in a feminine manner helps us appreciate our special role as women. When each partner recognizes his or her unique contribution to the relationship, the result is a peaceful home in which Hashem delights.

RESPONSIBILITY: SENSITIVITY TO OTHERS

We live in a world of democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of dress, freedom from many things. It is easy to fall into the secular way of thinking, namely, that we should be free to wear what we please at any time. Why is it our problem that a man may see us and have immodest thoughts? Every man should learn to control his own thoughts and reactions. Why is this my responsibility? And who are *you* to tell *me* how to dress?

It is important to understand that men were created with a natural, deep attraction to a woman's body, for a very specific reason. Hashem invested the deepest powers of *ein sof* (the infinite, Divine origin of all creation), i.e. the ability to create, within a woman's body.

A *neshamah*, during its descent into this world, is hosted and nurtured within a woman's body. The beauty of the woman's body serves a sacred purpose—in the right time, the right place and with the right person.

Hashem gave us this tremendous gift to maintain and uphold, with deep sensitivity. However, along with this gift, and power, comes responsibility.

Which brings us to the final component: *Lifnei iver lo siten michshol* (Vayikra 19:14). Do not place a stumbling block before a blind person.

What happens when I put a stumbling block in front of a blind man? He falls! Why is that *my* problem? I didn't trip him up.

But who am I trying to kid? The person is blind, and therefore we have a responsibility to ensure that our actions do not cause him any harm, even indirectly.

A woman has a responsibility to dress as befits one who holds such power. She has the responsibility to do all that she can so that a man should not come to sin on her account.

The responsibility of *lifnei iver* is also a gift, for it helps us realize that our beauty is powerful. Being aware, at all times, of the effect of our dress and behavior on other men helps us appreciate the intimacy we share with our husbands.

When we consider the effects of our dress and behavior on others, we develop a sensitivity to the nuances of the male-female dynamic, making our marital relationship all the more powerful and holy.

THE POWER OF TZNIUS

There is the story of Reb Hillel Paritcher who had great *mesirus nefesh* to dress in a *chassidische* manner. When *chassidim* asked why he expended this tremendous effort to the point of sacrifice, Reb Hillel replied that clothing are very powerful. The garments one wears are *makif*, they surround the person, and therefore the clothing we wear can actually have a profound influence on us.

He explained that in Egypt, the Bnei Yisroel had fallen to the 49th level of *tumah*. They were about to, Heaven forfend, sink to the fiftieth level. However, the merit of the women who

did not change their Jewish mode of dress saved them from descending to that lowest level, veritably a point of no return. Reb Hillel then shared that among his possessions he had a hand-written note from Reb Pinchos Koritzer that said that right before Moshiach, the Yidden will once again plummet to a very low spiritual level. On account of a small group of Yidden who will maintain their Jewish mode of dress, the Yidden will be saved from sinking to the fiftieth level.

In 5752 (1991-1992) the Rebbe said that now, as we literally stand on the threshold of *Geulah*, there will be an addition in the way women will keep *tznius: lifnim mi'tznius* (above the standard). We are those women that the Rebbe empowered, and we are the ones in whose merit all of Bnei Yisroel will be redeemed from this *golus*, may it be NOW!■

A full-length version of this article, as well as many other resources on tznius, sholom bayis and taharas hamishpachah, can be found on mikvah.org. N'shei Chabad Newsletter thanks Mrs. Chanie Wolf, Mrs. Chaya Klein, and the rest of the staff at mikvah.org for their help with this article.

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