



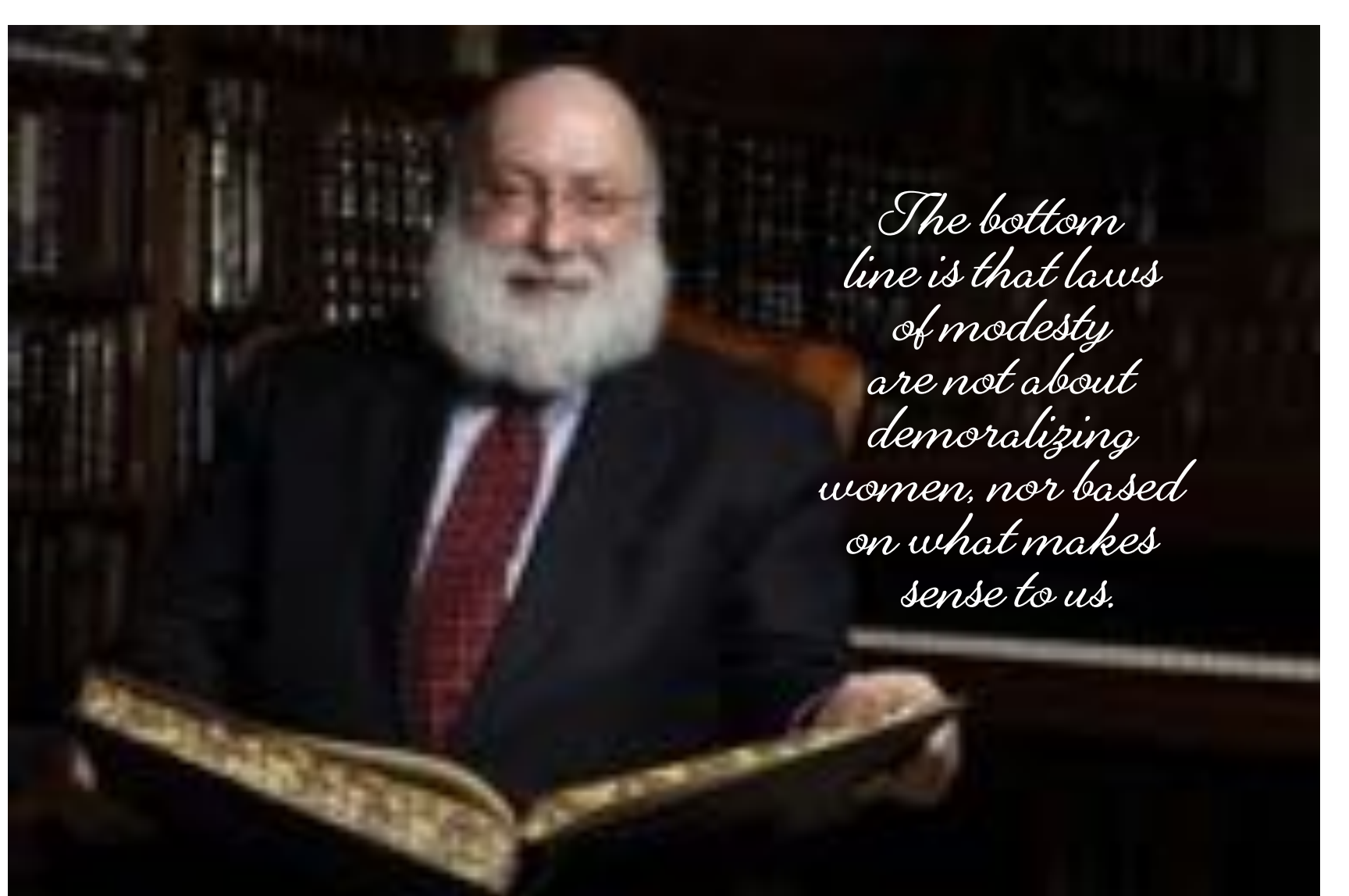
SHOULD WOMEN'S PHOTOS BE ERASED?

Q & A With
Rabbi Simon Jacobson

DEAR RABBI JACOBSON,

Can we get this clarified once and for all? Why is there so much reluctance to publish pictures of women and girls in *chareidi* publications? Of course we are not talking about photos of immodestly dressed women. But what is the issue with displaying photos of *frum*, modestly dressed women: Rebbetzins, *shluchos*, *chassidistes*, *eidele* girls? Are we saying that no matter how hard a woman tries to dress *tzanua* she will always be distasteful and lewd, so much so that she can't appear in material marketed to *frum* families? I just don't get it. It sends a terrible message to young girls and boys. It also bothers me that certain media promoted towards young *frum* children feature no grown women at all. How are they supposed to have *frum* female role models if they are not even allowed to look at them? How does this phenomenon align with the custom of some *chassidische* families to display pictures of the Rebbetzins in their homes? I also recall that in the late '80s and '90s the Rebbe sanctioned the publication of two books featuring photos of families of *shluchim* worldwide. The faces

Rebbetzin Chaya
Mushka as a
young girl.
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of the *shluchos*, who live with *mesiras nefesh* every day, were displayed prominently and were never edited out. Why can we not apply that standard today? When you don't allow their faces to appear in print, isn't it almost like you are pretending they don't exist? Many thanks for your level-headed commentary on so many important issues.

RABBI JACOBSON RESPONDS:

Firstly, as you know, this is not a platform for halachic decisions. Whatever I say is with the qualification that specific questions should be asked of your local Orthodox rabbi.

The general rule in modesty, in addition to certain universal principles, is that it depends on *minhag hamakom*, the standard in the community. If the standard in a community is not to publish photos of women, then the standard should be upheld for that community. It does not reflect negatively on the woman; it is simply what is

acceptable in that community.

In our community, the standard is not as absolute in this regard, as in your example of the Rebbe sanctioning the publication of *Sefer Hashluchim*, or displaying photos of Rebbetzins.

When a picture of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka was published in a journal, Rabbi Gavriel Zinner wrote to the Rebbe asking how this is okay since the *Gemara* in Sanhedrin (45a) states, "The *yetzer hara* prevails only over what an individual sees with his eyes." Furthermore, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules (*Even Ha'ezer* 21:1), "It is forbidden to gaze even at the colorful garment of a woman he recognizes." The Rebbe answered that this ruling does not apply to the picture of the Rebbetzin, and that the picture actually adds in *v'hachai yiten el lebo*, the living shall take to heart. [See the answer here, in the Rebbe's handwriting.-Ed.]

From personal experience, after the Rebbetzin's passing, my father, Reb Gershon Jacobson, published a picture of

the Rebbetzin in the *Algemeiner Journal*. Some people voiced complaints that it wasn't appropriate, but the Rebbe thanked my father. I'm not using this story as proof that this is what should be done in all cases. Different standards apply depending on the target audience and there is no black and white answer. The bottom line is that laws of modesty are not about demoralizing women, nor based on what makes sense to us. We need to address each situation individually with the help of a Rav *yirei Shamayim*.

I want to emphasize again that in any situation it is possible for people to use *tznius* in a negative way, to abuse and belittle women. But *tznius* is more about emphasizing the dignity of women, *kol kevudah bas*

melech penimah. The glory of a king's daughter is within. Women not being seen in print, or in generally not being seen as publicly and prominently as men, isn't pretending they don't exist; it is acknowledging that they are different than men, and naturally need more privacy and respect. A woman's role may be less public but it is no less important, whether or not her picture is prominently displayed.

Excerpted from Rabbi Simon Jacobson's weekly MyLife: Chassidus Applied Broadcast, addressing the personal and emotional needs of our community and answering the most pressing questions of our lives from the perspective of Chassidus. Visit chassidusapplied.com.

THE FEMININE APPROACH

SICHAH OF SHABBOS PARSHAS NOACH 5751 (1990)
REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM SICHOS IN ENGLISH

The Torah relates that after creating man and woman, G-d blessed them and charged them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the land and conquer it."

Our Rabbis understand the "conquest" of the world as referring to man's endeavors to transform this world into a dwelling place for G-d. That is to say: We can transform the world into a place where G-d's essence is openly revealed, in the same way that any individual manifests his essential personality totally and freely in his own home.

COMMUNICATION RATHER THAN CONQUEST

Men often try to conquer, i.e., to confront and overpower other individuals. In contrast, a woman typically presents a concept tranquilly and peaceably, with modest understatement, thus more

effectively allowing her listeners to join her in appreciating its worth.

To explain this concept using Chassidic terminology: Both *malchus* (kingship) and *memshalah* (dominion) are terms that reflect sovereignty. However, the manner in which this sovereignty is secured differs. *Malchus* refers to a situation in which a people willingly accept a certain individual as king; to borrow a phrase from the liturgy, "His children beheld His might... and willingly accepted His Kingship upon them." In contrast, *memshalah* refers to power which is acquired by force, against the will of the populace.

Malchus possesses a twofold advantage. Firstly, because the people willingly accept the king's authority, they are less likely to

rebel. There is, however, a deeper aspect; in this manner, a people's connection to their king is not merely external, but part and parcel of their own being. It is their minds and wills which accept him.

Similarly, men often choose to influence their environment by force. Thus, although they may attain their goals, the manner in which they do so often causes friction with those around them. In contrast, the inner dimension (*pnimiyus*) which characterizes a woman's approach makes the ideas which she presents attractive to others and causes them to be accepted as part of their own perspective. Indeed, men would be well advised to learn this approach from women and incorporate it in their own life-work. ❧

When a picture of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka was published in a journal, the well-known *posek* and *mechaber sefarim* Harav Gavriel Zinner wrote to the Rebbe asking how this is acceptable since the *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (45a) states, “The *yetzer hara* prevails only over what an individual sees with his eyes.” Furthermore, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules (*Even Haezer* 21:1), “It is forbidden to gaze even at the colorful garment of a woman he recognizes.”

In his response to Harav Zinner, the Rebbe writes that three conditions have to be present for a photograph of a woman in print to be problematic:

1. You “gaze” at the picture (rather than take a quick look).
2. The picture is in color rather than black and white.
3. The picture is of someone you know.

Since these three conditions do not apply to the picture of the Rebbetzin, there is no problem, particularly since not publishing the picture might minimize the impact of the article. The goal of the article is *v'hachai yiten el libo*—the living shall take to heart.

The Rebbe seems to be saying that through seeing a picture of the Rebbetzin, we are better able to accomplish *v'hachai yiten el libo* which is to internalize the lessons of her life and apply them to our own lives.

סיכום תמצות ריבוי



אשר נראה לי שיש צורך להבהיר שיש, נשאל ב"ה את הרב הגדול ז"ל האם ייתכן
 שיהיה נראה שאם נראה אשה "מפורסמת" עם חליפה כחולה, שחורה או לבנה
 יתאפשר לנו כפי שיש צורך להבהיר כי לא ייתכן שיש צורך שיהיה אשה
 כזו שיהיה ראויה, גם כ"ל במידה כ"ל ב"ה היא אשה ידועה לכולם ועל
 כבוד שיהיה לה אשה ידועה, כי יש לה חשיבות רבה יותר מכל
 אדם אחר ויש לה חשיבות רבה יותר מכל אדם אחר, ויש לה חשיבות רבה יותר
 מכל אדם אחר.

כבר

אשר נראה לי שיש צורך להבהיר שיש, נשאל ב"ה את הרב הגדול ז"ל האם ייתכן
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 מכל אדם אחר.

[וגם קי"ל באה"ע סי' כ"א ס"א ואסור] (1) [להסתכל אף בבגדי] (2) [צבעונים
 של אשה] (3) [שהוא מכירה] ומכלל הן אתה שומע שלילת האיסור
 דכאשר אין ג' הנ"ל, ובפרט - כל הג'

[ד] בסיום דבריו כתב: "וא"כ ה"ה בנ"ד ועכ"פ מדת חסידות להחמיר".
 כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א מחק התיבות "וא"כ ה"ה", וכתב: משא"כ [בנ"ד]
 וכתב על המשך דברי הנמען:

[ועכ"פ מדת חסידות להחמיר], אלא שע"ז יתמעט ב"והחי יתן אל לבו"
 - כנראה במוחש (ואולי זוהי סברת המוסיפים הנ"ל).

