



Tznius Saves Lives

The Rebbe's talks on tznius

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*This is the third in a four-part series of
excerpts from the Rebbe's talks and writings
on the topic of tznius.*

TZNIUS IMPACTS THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE PEOPLE IN IT

"Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov mishkenosecha Yisroel—How good are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Yisroel." Rashi explains that Bilaam gave this blessing because he saw that the entrances to the Jews' tents were not facing each other, which shows their respect for privacy, their *tznius*.

We see in Jewish life that when a person begins their day and needs to pray to Hashem, the first words they utter before saying *"Hodu"* are *"Mah tovu,"* the prayer literally proclaiming that Yidden are *tzniusdik*.

Tznius is a subject which has already been discussed quite often in the past.

It is not appropriate to say that since the times have changed and the styles have changed, a person shouldn't act like a *"chassan bein aveilim*—a groom among mourners." [This is an expression from the Talmud that teaches that a person should not stand out or differ from others in their environment and be obviously out of place.]

After all, in the case of *tznius*, when everyone else is dressed like "mourners," it is because they have detached themselves from Torah, which is the Torah of Life, and from *mitzvos*, about which it is said, *"...Chai bahem*. Live by them." The others, not the Torah-observant Jews, are actually the ones dressed like mourners, in the sense that they wear clothing which is not *tzniusdik*: the opposite of Torah, the opposite of Life. Yet a

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Jew may wonder: “How can a person go against this trend? How can I be different, act different, and feel different—like a groom amongst mourners? In fact, in the tractate of *Derech Eretz*, we learn the concept of manners, that we should be tuned in to our environment... Shouldn’t I behave with good manners in this case?”

For this, the explanation is straightforward: The Torah is not prone to change. Change can only take place where the Torah itself says that in certain instances, changes can be made, but not otherwise. One of the ideas in the Torah that cannot be changed is the idea of “*Mah tovu*,” *tznius*. Something else that also can never change is the reward for modesty that is promised in the future, as we see from the blessing mentioned in this week’s *parshah*, *Parshas Balak*. The Yidden merited that even a person from another nation saw that they were the appropriate recipients for the blessings because their lifestyle was based on the guidelines of *tznius*.

We are not talking about *tznius* practiced in a concealed way: that when no one will see, one can afford to dress modestly, but when in public, one must act in tune with the environment. Not

only is this idea of concealing one’s *tznius* not the true way for a Jew, but in fact the opposite is actually the case. We derive this important point from the actual words of Bilaam the Prophet; Bilaam saw the modesty of Am Yisroel from a distance. Bilaam does not refer to what happened inside the tent, but rather how the tent was positioned, how one entrance did not face the entrance of the next tent. Therefore, before he even saw the person living in the tent, he already could tell from outside how this tent was pitched, highlighting what its foundations were. From this, he immediately realized he was dealing with a modest family and a modest nation, and that modesty is the vessel through which to receive all the blessings.

The question still remains: If one finds oneself among “mourners,” how can one have the strength to act as a “groom”? How can one be so very different?? The answer for this is right in the beginning of the *Shulchan Aruch*: “*Shelo lehisbayesh mipnei bnei adam hamaligim*—don’t be ashamed before the scoffers.”

“*Maligim*” has two meanings: It can mean the “scoffers,” or “the devious, crooked ones.”

What does this mean? In our case, this means that the opposite of *tznius*, of modesty, is not only the opposite of Torah, but also the opposite of the straight path. The whole idea of immodesty is to stimulate the *yetzer hara* of another person, so that the other person should see a part of the body that is supposed to be covered. Precisely because it is not the straight path, this behavior is not causing someone’s mind to be wiser, it is not causing *derech eretz* so that he will have more respect for his father or mother or brother or sister, and it is not causing anyone to give more *tzedakah*. For all of that, there is no need to do what this person is doing to provoke the *yetzer hara*. In fact it is contradictory to all of the above.

When a garment, or a tent, or a manner of conduct, is the opposite of *tznius*, and this person meets another person who has an evil inclination but the evil is concealed and small—when this first person shows off the mode of immodesty, it awakens the dormant evil in the other person. And then the first person who behaved immodestly has a share in the evil of the second person. And though he doesn’t benefit from it,





he finds it worthwhile to provoke the evil in the other person. Why?

What is the reason a person is doing it? The answer lies in the second meaning of the word “*maligim*.” If a person was going in the right path, he or she would know that the ultimate goal in life is to become better, and also to exert oneself to help the people in their environment become better. A person who is going in the right path will do more good things for the second person and will certainly not be a bad influence on the other.

But when the person is in a state of deviousness and crookedness, not going in the right path, then what they think is a favor to the other person is actually doing harm to the other by provoking their evil inclination.

Certainly, men are no less obligated in *tznius* than women. *Tznius* is already mentioned in the beginning of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and most of the *halachos* apply equally or primarily in regard to men. Nevertheless, we see in a practical sense that in order to set up the foundation of modesty in Am Yisroel it must be done in a manner that when a total stranger sees the house of a Yid, he does not need to go into the house but the *tznius* is immediately outstandingly obvious to him, as in “*Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov mishkenosecha Yisroel*.” This *tznius* is dependent on “Yaakov,” which symbolizes Jewish women. (We learn this from the fact that it says in the *Mechilta*, when Hashem gave the Torah, He told Moshe, “*Ko somar l’bais Yaakov... eilu hanashim*—first speak to Yaakov, [indicating] the women.”)

Therefore, when Bilaam said, “*Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov*,” he indicated that the *mitzvah* of *tznius* all begins with “Yaakov,” with the woman, who is the *akeres habayis* (the primary influence or foundation of the home), and after that it is also given to the men, “*mishkenosecha Yisroel*.”

Bilaam saw the *tznius* of the Jewish people from afar, simply by looking at their tents. If the outsides of the tents reflected the women’s *tznius*, how much more so was there *tznius* inside the tents, not only among family members, but in the presence of guests.

Hashem does not demand more of us than we can do. Since the Al-mighty requests this of every one of *bnos Yisroel*, the daughters of Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel, and Leah, then in the same way that

our matriarchs lived up to *hachnasas orchim* in a manner of *tznius*, likewise, every Jewish woman and daughter can perform the *mitzvah* of *hachnasas orchim* in a *tzniusdik* manner.

And when they do so, this is when the home becomes “*Mah tovu*,” oh how good, with all the blessings mentioned afterwards in the *parshah* until the words “*Yisroel osech chayil—Am Yisroel is victorious*.” With this we will merit the building of the third Beis Hamikdash. And the main point is that we should merit to have children and grandchildren who keep Torah and *mitzvos*, with whom we will go together very soon to greet Moshiach.

Source: *Sichah of 12 Tammuz* (1970)

BRIEF RESPONSE FROM THE REBBE ABOUT SHEITEL

In regard to her letter about head covering—I have already stated my opinion on many occasions that covering the head with a kerchief in our times does not remain consistent, since on every occasion a woman is in a state of a *nisayon* (put to a test) whether to cover her full head or just part of the head, etc. This is in order not to feel uncomfortable from the mockers (although it is often in her imagination, or at times factual). But when one wears a *sheitel*, the *sheitel* cannot be removed when amongst people...

Source: *Igros Kodesh, Volume 16, page 330*

