

# THE YIDDISHE IMAGE

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לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי ש"י בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DRESS

A number of years before the Rebbe Rashab passed away, his brother the Razah moved from Lubavitch to Vitebsk, where he conducted sales of wooden logs. Vitebsk was a large, more modernized city, and his daughters began to dress in a more modern fashion. When word of this reached Rebbetzin Rivkah, it caused her much suffering and brought her to tears. Finding his mother weeping, the Rebbe Rashab asked what had happened, and she told him what she had heard about her granddaughters. The Rebbe Rashab was surprised, "Even when your father passed away you did not cry like this?" To which Rebbetzin Rivkah replied, "That was Hashem's will, but this is against His will!"

(מפי הרמ"ז גרינגלאס ע"ה)

In the זרה it is written that the Yetzer Hora begins his influence on a person by targeting his clothing, similar to Yosef Hatzadik, who was grabbed by his garment. One must strengthen himself to escape, exactly as Yosef did.

(זרה ח"א ע' ק"ז ע"ב)

The chossid Reb Peretz Chein once traveled to the Tzemach Tzedek together with another chossid, who had merited being by the Alter Rebbe, yet was now dressed in a more modern fashion. When they came before the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe did not recognize the other chossid and asked Reb Peretz who he was. After being told, the Tzemach Tzedek said in wonder, "Is that so? Had I known that clothing have such an effect on a person, I would have had mesiras nefesh for it!"

The Chasam Sofer compares the clothing of a person to the hands of a clock. When the hands of the clock are not moving, it is a sign that something inside the clock is out of order...

(למען ידעו ע' 273)

In a sicha said to women (כ"ה אייר תש"ל), the Rebbe spoke about the importance of keeping separate from the goyim by wearing distinctive clothing: "The zechus which enabled the Yidden to leave mitzrayim was that the men and women held onto the Yiddishe way of dress, and were not influenced by the garb, nor by the behavior of the mitzriyim around them. Knowing that they were an 'עם אחד', it was self understood that as Yidden, they should not lower themselves. For, does it make sense that just because a mitzri has decided to wear certain clothing, a Yid should copy him?! We can learn from this that we must not change our dress in order to imitate the goyim. The nations amongst whom we live will then respect us, for they will see that we stand by our principles, and through this we will be lead out of golus."

(לקו"ש ח"ה ע' 223)

When questioned regarding the importance of Yiddishe clothing, the Rebbe expressed surprise that there be any doubt in this matter, for this can clearly be understood from many of chazal's teachings and from halacha. The Rebbe mentioned the possuk in Navi which says that Hashem will judge those who wear goyishe clothing and also noted the writings of the Tzemach Tzedek against such dress.

(אגרות קודש ח"כ ע' ש"ב, צפני' א,ה)

Once, one of the children waiting to receive a coin from the Rebbe was wearing a 'צבאות ה' cap and was dressed in a shirt that had a childish, goyishe character on it. The Rebbe asked him if he is in צבאות ה', and when the boy nodded, the Rebbe inquired why he was wearing such a shirt...

When the Rebbe was shown pictures of a day camp in Morocco (תשמ"ג), the Rebbe noted that in one photo a child was dressed as an Arab and said, "It is not appropriate to dress like this."

(קובץ פניני העשור ע' 42, תשורה חורף תשנ"ט)

Yidden were always particular that the right side of their garments go over the left. The Rebbe mentioned this a number of times, and explained that this is done so that kedusha and chessed, which are associated with the right side, should be strong and prevailing.

(י"ב תמוז תשכ"ג, ש"פ אמור תשד"מ ועוד)

## DISTINCTIVE DRESS

During the time of the Alter Rebbe, the style in Russia changed, and collars were introduced to the jackets. When Reb Nochum, the Rebbe's grandson, was preparing for his chassuna, the Alter Rebbe called for him and asked him about his kapota, whether he would dress in the traditional way or follow the new fashion. "With a collar, of course," Nochum replied. The Alter Rebbe requested that he have it made without one, but Reb Nochum, then still a young bachur, argued, "Everyone else will have one, and I will be embarrassed." The Alter Rebbe promised him that if he would wear the kapota without the collar, he would merit being together with him in Gan Eden. He then asked his grandson that when his kapota will be ready, he should come to him dressed in it.

Before the chassuna, Reb Nochum entered the Alter Rebbe's room, dressed in his new kapota... which had a collar. The Alter Rebbe then tore off a small piece of fur from the inside of his coat. Years later Reb Nochum commented, "I was young and did not appreciate the greatness of such a promise."

The Rebbe explained that during that time and place, the challenge of clothing was extremely difficult. Had the Alter Rebbe been successful,

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it would have gotten rid of this challenge for generations to come. This is why the Alter Rebbe offered his grandson such a great reward.

(רשימו"ד החדש ע' 97, תו"מ חל"ה ע' 278 ועיי"ש)

Reb Hillel Paritcher wore a winter hat all year round, because during his time, it was decreed that all summer hats must have a visor. Reb Hillel, not wanting to follow the goyishe way of dress, wore his winter hat, which had no visor, throughout the summer months.

(רשימת דברים ח"א ע' רנא)

A maskil, trying to ridicule the tzaddik Reb Simcha Bunim of P'shischa, asked, "Did Avraham Avinu also wear a shtreimel and silk kapota?" Reb Simcha Bunim answered, "Exactly which kind of garments he wore – I do not know, but I do know that he looked to see how the goyim were dressed, and made sure to dress differently."

(שיח שרפי קודש)

At the time when the tzaddik Reb Mendel established himself in Rimanov, the Yiddishe townsman had begun dressing in goyishe styles. The tzaddik fought against this with mesiras nefesh, and set detailed regulations regarding their dress, in order to separate them from the goyim and not arouse their jealousy. Reb Mendel recorded his rules in the town records and promised that those who would abide by the laws would be bentched with all the brachos of the Torah.

(עטרת מנחם ע' 11)

Taking a walk in the village he was visiting, the tzaddik Reb Boruch of Gorlitz heard wailing and crying, so he instructed his meshares to find out what was going on. The meshares went to investigate and reported that a goyishe girl was crying because her father was hitting her. "Go check why she is being hit," the Rebbe prompted. Returning to the scene, the meshares learned that the girl was being beaten for having worn a certain hat, and he heard the father screaming and rebuking the girl, "Such attire which your mother and grandmother would have never worn, you will not wear!" When the Rebbe heard the details, he was very moved and took a lesson from this: If a goy, who has not received the Torah, has such feeling for the importance of keeping one's tradition, how much more so should yiddishe women and girls, who have received the Torah, feel this way and dress in the same spirit as their parents and grandparents.

(ברכת שלמה ע' 2 ערך בגדים)

In Lubavitch, they were very particular with the clothing that the bochurim wore. Arriving in the yeshiva, the Bochurim lacking the appropriate garb would be given: a special hat, long jacket, large talis katan and shoes. Years later, the yiddishe image was apparent in their children, who looked different from other boys their age. Their clothes were refined and properly covered them and their tzitzis showed under their clothes. An expression of Yiras Shamayim and 'eidelkiet' could be seen on their faces, especially by their long peiyos which extended down their cheeks.

(רשימו"ד ח"ג ע' רמג, דברי הימים גורקאוו ע' עה)

## BATTLING THE DECREES

In the year תר"ד, the Russian government passed a decree which forbid the customary Yiddishe way of dress, forcing the Yidden to change to a more modern attire and to cut off their lengthy peyos. This was brought about through the intervention of the maskilim, who wanted Yidden to mix among the goyim, but the Yidden responded with unwavering resistance and made every effort to annul the terrible decree.

At first, the government offered the option of paying a tax for the

Yiddishe 'levush', knowing that the Yidden would not change so quickly, and indeed many Yidden chose to pay the tax rather than dress like the goyim. However, some could not afford to pay.

The shaila was asked to all Gedolei Yisroel of the time, "What is one obligated to do in order to avoid this issue?" Some Rabbonim said that all must go on Mesiras Nefesh, for this was direct effort to take the Yidden away from Yiddishkeit (גזירת השמד). Others, including the Tzemach Tzedek, held that one is not obligated to give his life for this, being that the intention here was merely to have all citizens dress alike. A third group held that although mesiras nefesh was unnecessary, one was obligated to do all he can, including paying any sum of money or fleeing to another country.

The local police in each town went straight to work, mercilessly beating all those caught transgressing the decree, and publicly shaming and beating men and women when inspecting for their Yiddishe levush. Being unsuccessful, the police in some cities left the Yidden alone, while in other places they continued harassing them for many years.

(ע"פ היכל הבעש"ט גליון י"ב ועוד)

When the decree was placed upon the Yidden in Poland, the Gerrer Rebbe, the Chiddushei Harim, said that it was necessary to have mesiras nefesh for this. As time passed, the police realized that most Yidden were not following the decree, so getting tired of using violence, they became lax in their enforcement. Unable to tolerate this, the maskilim went to tell the Russian commissioner that there were some officers who were not doing their duties properly, insinuating that this was surely because of bribes that they had received from wealthy Chassidim. They added that the best course of action would be to force the Gerrer Rebbe to instruct the Yidden to follow the decree, and stipulated that if he refused, he should be imprisoned.

At midnight, the chief police arrested the Chidushei Harim and brought him to the town hall, where high officials ordered him to issue the instructions to his chassidim. When the Gerrer Rebbe refused, they threatened to shave off his beard. "Even if you do whatever it is in your power to do, I will not cause others to transgress." Realizing that words alone would not achieve anything, the officials imprisoned him in a cell with tough criminals. The Rebbe's imprisonment spread like wild fire. The tzaddik Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotzk reassured the Chassidim that there was nothing to worry about, for not only would the police not touch the tzaddik's beard and peiyos, but in his zechus, the decree would be annulled.

Meanwhile, outside the town hall, tens of thousands of Yidden came to protest, and they were joined by a number of Polish citizens. Soon the commissioner heard about this and was warned that this might trigger a revolt. A delegation of reputable Yidden and some Polish nobles met with the commissioner and complained about the treatment being given to a man of such greatness. He promised to free the Gerrer Rebbe at once, and about a week later, the decree was repealed.

(סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 356)

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