

TZNIUS: THE ROLE OF THE FATHER AND MOTHER

FROM A TALK BY RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL GLUCKOWSKY - RECHOVOT, ERETZ YISROEL

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Every Yiddishe parent knows the how to give their child the fundamentals of a good upbringing: Feed the child a good lunch, surround her with Yiddishe books, teach her parshios and mishnayos and brochos. Every parent knows that a Yiddishe child requires love and attention, stories of tzaddikim, tzedokoh and 12 pesukim daily, and, if at all possible, several summers in Camp Gan Israel. They teach their children to respect their elders and to be kind. Tznius, however, is often overlooked. If Yiddishe parents are knowledgeable about Tznius, and meticulous in its practice, and are mechanech their children in it, this will have an unlimited effect on the strength and yiras Shomayim of their children. Yiddishe parents, add Tznius to the list.

The Yiddishe woman is the Akeres Habayis, the foundation of the household, and has great influence on how her husband and children serve Hashem. Chazal teach that the hanhagas habayis, the deportment of the household, is in the hands of the Yiddishe women and girls. The Rebbe says that it is important that the husband and father also be a partner, to ensure that the women of the family are knowledgeable in various halachos, such as the laws of Shabbos, so that they will know what exactly is allowed and prohibited. Where halachah is concerned, there is no issue that falls only to one partner, freeing the other of all responsibility. Even if a matter of halachah seems to concern only the wife, the husband must assist her in her avodah by providing information.

The Rebbe emphasizes that this assistance must come in a kind and considerate manner, with a gentle tone of voice, sincerity, tact, love and respect. Issues of this kind, particularly the laws of Tznius, can be sensitive and personal, and must be handled with care. But, the Rebbe continues, the emotional weightiness of the issue should not be a deterrent from the discussion of these halachos, because they affect the individual, the couple and the family as a unit.

When the family practices hilchos Tznius correctly, this has a positive effect on the yiras Shomayim of every family member. The parents must work together to create a home in which all behavior and practice is in accordance with halachah in the finest possible way. The Rebbe explains that if the couple wishes to receive extraordinary brochos, they must serve Hashem above and beyond the letter of the law. This level can only be reached through thorough knowledge of halachos.

THE CHALLENGE: WORKING TOGETHER

A couple faces several challenges when learning the halachos of Tznius. Even a learned man enters marriage with little knowledge of the details of the topic. Yeshivos do not teach students the halachos of Tznius for women because they lack immediate personal relevance. Even during their engagement, men are not taught hilchos Tznius, as the halachos most directly pertinent to marriage are given priority. Consequently, the husband often feels hesitant to discuss these halachos with his wife, because he lacks the knowledge base required and because he would not wish to intrude upon a personal area of her avodoh. The Rebbe identifies the difficulty in independently maintaining excellent standards of halachah and determines that the knowledge and loving support of the husband is beneficial and necessary.

While support and encouragement are helpful in any venture of self-refinement, they are especially important in improving in the practices of Tznius, which can be particularly difficult for one person alone. When Hashem created Chava, the first woman, He said over each limb, "*T'hi Tzanua.*" In every aspect of her creation, Hashem reminded Chava that although He created the woman with a natural affinity for beauty, Tznius must always come first. This proves the existence of a natural conflict between a woman's aesthetic sensibilities and the halachos of Tznius. It makes adherence to these halachos particularly challenging. Therefore, the assistance of her husband is welcome as she works to improve her observance of Tznius.

Despite the known tension between Tznius and natural inclination, the laws of Tznius are often presented in a disordered or vague manner. This results in misconceptions and mistakes that are passed from one generation to the next, from mother to daughter. This cycle is the cause of many contemporary misunderstandings of Tznius, misunderstandings that feel legitimate because these false impressions were learned at a young age from trusted role models. As a result, discussions and suggested improvements on the topic can feel intrusive and presumptuous.

The only solution is that the husband and wife work together to strengthen the standards of Tznius. The husband must understand the wife's natural response and the challenges she faces. He should support his wife in her avodoh, suggesting possible ways to make the fulfillment of

these mitzvos easier. He may suggest that she shop together with a friend so that they can give each other a second opinion on the suitability of a purchase. It is most important that, rather than attempting to enforce the laws of Tznius, the husband should always be ready with words of encouragement and respect. Just as the wife supports the husband as he strives to strengthen certain aspects of his avodoh, he should do the same for her, always speaking, as the Rebbe put it, in “soft language.” At the same time, he can make very clear that he wants, needs and appreciates a wife who keeps hilchos Tznius.

The primary message that the Rebbe communicates here is that Tznius is something that can be learned and discussed together. In this way, any blurred lines in halachah will be clarified and both will know what exactly is permissible and what is not, to the benefit of the couple and their family.

EFFECT OF TZNIUS ON THE CHILDREN

The Rebbe stresses the significant effect of Tznius on children. A principal once wrote a letter to the Rebbe, outlining a meeting he arranged with the teachers of his school before the start of a new school year. The Rebbe reviewed the extensive list of topics to be covered, and responded that he had not seen any mention that a dress code for the teachers would be discussed. The Rebbe added that although the students of this school were very young, the dress of the teacher would surely affect them.

The Rebbe then cited the story of a shochet who lived in the time of the Tzemach Tzedek. This shochet used to wear a pair of galoshes, overshoes, rather than the boots traditionally worn by members of this community. Although there is no halachah condemning galoshes, the people of the town considered this excessively modern accoutrement as an outer sign of what was happening within. A shochet is a symbol of yiras Shomayim in a city, so to have the community shochet so obviously embracing the latest cultural trend was disturbing to the residents who relied upon him. The shochet was removed from his position.

The Rebbe brings this example to illustrate the powerful effect teachers have on their students, like a shochet affects his community. The outer dress is an indication of where the heart resides.

This fastidiousness extends not only to what is technically Tzniusdik and permitted; after all, galoshes are allowed according to halachah.

THE YIDDISHE WAY

At a gathering of N’shei U’bnos Chabad, the Rebbe posed a perplexing question. The Medrash states that Bnei Yisroel

were redeemed from Egypt in part because “They did not change any aspect of their dress.” The Rebbe asks why this statement is declared in the negative form. All other reasons for the redemption of the Yidden are stated in the positive, such as “In the merit of the righteous women were they redeemed.” Why does the posuk not say “In the merit of their Tznius they were redeemed”? The Rebbe explains that the syntax of this verse indicates that Bnei Yisroel were not redeemed because they observed the basic laws of Tznius. Rather, they were redeemed because even when the Egyptian culture that surrounded them wore technically Tznius clothing, the Yiddishe women *did not* assume the Egyptian dress. Even when the modern clothing covered what is required to be covered, the women continued to wear *Yiddishe* clothes.

This clarifies the Rebbe’s directives to the principal of the school and further explains the relevance of the story of the shochet. A person with yiras Shomayim, and particularly someone who has undertaken to educate Yiddishe children, must be careful to dress not only in an officially proper way, but in a specifically Yiddishe way.

Because the outer clothing of a Yid is a sign of where her heart truly lies, she must be sure that her heart is in a place of kedushoh, not chas v’sholom entrenched in the alien culture that surrounds the Yidden today. This additional sensitivity is necessary not only for teachers and leaders of the community, but also for mothers who are the primary role models for the next generation of Klal Yisroel.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU WEAR

It is known that clothing has an intrinsic power. When Yaakov prepared to enter Yitzchak’s room to receive the brochah meant for his brother Aisov, Rivka dressed him in Aisov’s clothes. The Chassam Sofer explains that Rivka knew that Yaakov was an ish tam, a great talmid chochom who spent his time learning Torah and achieving closeness with Hashem. Now he was preparing to deceive his father, his Rebbe and the leader of his generation. Rivka knew that this would be a difficult, even impossible, task for Yaakov. She did not know how he would accomplish it. Therefore she dressed him in Aisov’s clothes. She knew that bigdei Aisov would influence him and he would be able to do what needed to be done, even to act in a deceptive manner that did not reflect his real nature and principles!

From this example it is obvious that clothing has a very real power over a person. When a person puts on a garment, it promotes specific attitudes, feelings, even behaviors. Not only is someone’s clothing an indicator of what is happening inside, it often actually shapes the inner landscape of that

person, as is learned from Yaakov and as is obvious in everyday life. Certain clothes rally specific emotional responses in the wearer, for example. It then follows that a garment can direct a person's actions in a very literal way. Hence the need for acute sensitivity regarding clothing.

A BRIEF REFRESHER

The Shulchan Aruch teaches that a husband has the right to divorce a wife who weaves material in a public place. This is because weaving involves lifting the arms high, which causes the sleeves to fall back, exposing the arms. We learn from this that a woman must be conscious of Tznius regardless of the activity in which she is engaged. This applies not only to covering the arms, but to all halachos of Tznius. In regards to the arm in particular, however, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, one of the leading poskim of the last quarter century, suggests a sleeve length that extends several inches below the elbow to guard against inadvertent exposure. Many poskim also caution against loose sleeves that slip back or fall open while lifting the arms.

A similar challenge is presented by the dinim of covering the legs. According to halachah, the leg, or shok, must be covered. The shok includes the knee, which, like the elbow, must be covered in every circumstance. Similar to suggested sleeve-length, contemporary poskim suggest a skirt-length of four inches below the knee, so that the knee is covered even while the woman is seated. In the year Tof Shin Lamed Beis, when very short skirts were in vogue, the Rebbe reminded a Chossid to be particularly diligent in this halachah. The short-hemline trend has reappeared today, again making the maintenance of appropriate skirt length a challenge. In view of that, it is worthwhile to be especially conscientious in these halachos.

In recent years there has been extensive discussion on the actual meaning of the term shok. Some poskim believe that shok ends at the knee, but others, including the Alter Rebbe, include the lower leg and foot in the definition of this halachic expression. Therefore the standard is set according to the firm opinion of the Alter Rebbe, that the lower leg must also be covered entirely, albeit with tight stockings, not with loose fabric.

This same process is followed when determining how the hair must be covered. The Zohar adamantly states that a married woman must cover all of her hair. Even her husband may not daven in her presence, if any of her hair is visible.

The Tzemach Tzedek also holds that the hair must be fully covered. Although other contemporary poskim rule less rigorously, the Rebbe repeatedly stressed the importance of covering all of the hair. This is best done with a sheitel, because, unlike a hat or scarf, a sheitel leaves no area exposed. The Rebbe emphasized that a sheitel should be worn even for short outings outside the home, so as to constantly observe the highest level of this halachah.

The Zohar teaches that when a mother is meticulous in covering her hair, it affects her children and grandchildren for generations to come. Chazal tell the story of Kimchis, who covered her hair so carefully that the walls of her home never saw it. She merited children who were kohanim gedolim, a legacy that extended to their children and every generation thereafter.

The Rebbe identified the fulfillment of this mitzvah as a source for wondrous blessings in the home and in raising children to be yirei Shomayim, emphasizing that if a couple wishes to see one hundred percent success in their children—

one hundred percent yiras Shomayim, one hundred percent nachas—they must fulfill mitzvos one hundred percent. The brochos of Am Yisroel come through the strict observance of Torah and mitzvos. If a couple follows the ruling of the Tzemach Tzedek and the wife covers the hair completely, they will surely receive one hundred percent in return.

A father once came to the Rebbe with a question regarding his son. He explained that his son was becoming more observant and was allowing his beard to grow. The father did not like the beard and asked the Rebbe whether his son could be frum and be clean-shaven. The Rebbe answered that there are poskim who are more lenient and there are ways to accomplish this. But, the Rebbe said, your son is becoming frum. He is learning and adding mitzvos; that is, he is constructing a building for the rest of his life. He has added a floor to that building, by growing his beard. If you, his father, take away that floor, you may compromise the entire structure and the building may fall. The Rebbe continued: Even if the father feels that his child has a good foundation and the structure is quite solid, it is still a great risk to remove any part of the building.

The Rebbe's message is that even when a practice seems unnecessary, when there are acceptable halachic ways with which to get away with something, it is still extremely risky to do so and endangers the rest of the structure. So when a Yid is faced by the stringent opinion of the Tzemach Tzedek,

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"IF THE DRESS OF THE TEACHERS IN SCHOOL DRAMATICALLY AFFECTS CHILDREN, THE CLOTHING THAT THEIR MOTHERS WEAR IS SURELY EVEN MORE POWERFUL."

where there are more lenient opinions that are commonly followed, it is wise to resist the temptation to rely on the more comfortable ruling. Removing this stringency may possibly upset the structure for the children of the family, jeopardizing their budding yiras Shomayim. This is why the standard of hair covering is to cover all of the hair, to the benefit of the children and future generations of the family.

Like the importance of covering the hair fully, it is essential to be careful about necklines. One is permitted to uncover the neck, but watchfulness is required to make sure that only the neck is uncovered. The place where the neck meets the shoulders should not be seen, and the shirt must cover the collarbone in front. When determining whether the back of the neckline is suitable, put the garment through the “necklace test.” If the collar drops lower in back than where a necklace would naturally sit, it is too low to conform to the halachos of Tznius.

Tznius is comprised of these small details. These details are also what make shopping for clothing difficult or discouraging. Some of this frustration can be avoided, however, by subtly shifting shopping expectations. Just as much of the surrounding culture is not in agreement with halacha, and must be filtered and modified for frum use, one cannot expect that mainstream designers will create clothes that are in full agreement with all of the halachos of Tznius. When shopping, keep in mind that most clothing will require modification and look at Tznius first when approaching an article of clothing.

Another worthwhile detail to check is not only if a garment covers what should be covered, but how it covers. The fit of clothing should be moderate, never too tight. The Shulchan Aruch brings a question of whether a woman is permitted to tie her belt in a bow on Shabbos. In general, tying knots on Shabbos is only allowed if they are guaranteed to be untied before the end of Shabbos. The Shulchan Aruch concludes that a woman may tie her belt in a bow because surely when she takes it off she will untie it. The Shulchan Aruch reasons that if she were to take it off without untying it, it would cause it to be “tight on her body in an immodest way.”

This is an important element in hilchos Tznius and requires thought and attention. Even when originally appropriate, clothing can quickly become too tight, because of weight gain, pregnancy, or misadventures in the dryer. Consistent awareness solves this problem. Keep in mind that halachah concentrates also on the manner of the covering, beyond only what is actually being covered. This also applies to clothing which is transparent, which covers but does not

conceal. Such garments are not in accordance with halacha and must also be avoided.

Today, even clothing that covers the body is designed to showcase what lies beneath, not conceal it. Such clothing is this generation’s galoshes, its Egyptian dress. The Yiddishe women who resided in Egypt knew that even though Egyptian clothing was technically permitted, it was not really in accordance with Tznius. Instead they chose to dress in a Yiddishe way. The same thing must be done now, when selecting clothing requires thought of the spirit and intention of the halachah. This sensitivity must be brought into every Yiddishe home in order to preserve the Yiddishe way in the middle of a powerfully marketed style culture.

TZNIUS IN BEHAVIOR

Tznius must extend to every aspect of Yiddishe lifestyle. Modest behavior and expertise in the laws of yichud are necessary, especially for women and men who work in offices. Chazal teach that Devorah the prophetess held court specifically beneath a palm tree, because the leaves of a palm tree are high and would not create the private atmosphere problematic in the halachos of yichud. This same attention must be given that every encounter in the workplace is in agreement with the halachos of yichud.

Tzniusdik behavior is no longer a challenge only outside the home, but also inside, where technology presents a temptation to every family member. The Internet exposes the family to external culture and extreme care must be taken that standards of modesty and pure behavior are upheld also in this area. The mother and father have a responsibility to create these borders and make certain that the expectations are met by the entire family.

Every Yiddishe parent has a responsibility to be aware and educated about halachah. Parents must teach children from a young age that halachah is paramount. Standards of Tznius must be explained and set in place from the time a little girl is three years old. This is how children will grow up seriously committed to Tznius in particular and to halachah in general.

Children must be taught that Hashem is everywhere, in everything a Yid does and is. A Yid must seek Hashem in every aspect of his life, ensuring that his heart lies in a place of kedushoh equal to the holiness of his neshomoh. This will connect children to the Torah and keep them close to Hashem all of their lives. By identifying Tznius as the first step of the process, parents will ensure that every step their child takes will be towards the light of Toras Hashem.

TZNIUS - OUR WAY OF LIFE

EXCERPTS FROM THE LECTURE ON TZNIUS BY RABBI MM GLUCKOWSKY - ORGANIZED BY YAGDIL TORAH

WE ARE WHAT WE WEAR

The Chasam Sofer explains, the reason Rivkah dressed Yaakov in Esav's garments was to enable him to lie to Yitzchak (to receive the brochos), for clothing influence one's behavior.

In a similar vein, the Amshinover Rebbe explains why Potifar's wife grabbed onto Yosef's clothing. She was trying to catch him thru his weakness – the way he dressed, in the Egyptian dress.

BEAUTY WITH TZNIUS

The Midrash states: When Vashti made a seuda for the women, emphasis was placed on the external décor, for women appreciate external beauty more than food and drink.

For this reason, while creating Chava, Hashem commanded each limb as he formed it, "Be modest. Be modest." Hashem was reminding her that although He created woman with a natural affinity for beauty, Tznius must always come first.

PNIMIYUS, BUT FORGET NOT CHITZONIUS!

One of the Rabbeim once said that although Chabad demands Pnimiyus, we have a lot to learn from the Chitzoniyus of other Chassidic groups.

GOYISHE FASHION

In a Sich'a to Nshei U'bnos Chabad, the Rebbe quoted the words of Chazal that the Yidden merited Geulas Mitzrayim by "not changing their names or their clothing." Chazal do not simply say that the Yidden were redeemed in the merit of tznius. This teaches us that tznius clothing was not the merit, for Egyptian dress was Tzniusdik too. Rather, they were meritorious for they did not even wear the Tznius Egyptian dress; they kept to the traditional

Yiddishe wear!

A shochet who lived in the time of the Tzemach Tzedek used to wear a pair of galoshes, overshoes, rather than the traditionally worn boots. Although no halachah condemns galoshes, they were the goiyishe style of that time; consequently, the shochet was removed from his position.

It is for this reason that the dress code for Beis Rivka in Eretz Yisroel included that skirts must be at least 2-3 inches from the floor. This rule was enforced because "longer" was then the fashion, the "galoshes" and the "Egyptian dress" of that time.

There are Yiddishe clothes and there are Goyishe clothes. This is a message we must make clear to our Children – there is a way Yidden dress.

BE THE LAST IN ON FASHION

The Rebbe said that in matters of Kedusha we should be the first to 'jump in,' like Nachshon Ben Aminadav; however, when it comes to fashion etc. we should be the last ones in (within the realms of Halacha).

NOT LOSING OUR SENSITIVITY

People ask why such a big issue is made out of an inch one way or another. We have become so low that we have lost our sensitivity to the importance of Tznius. We've become so blind that people no longer see the problem.

We need to take a firm stand, without compromise, but in a soft, sensitive and effective manner, not to give up on what we stand for.

TIGHT FITS

Nowadays, clothing is designed to attract, not to cover. One must be careful that their clothing not tightly fitted, revealing their figure. (Size changes due to weight gain or pregnancy can render clothing

too tight and untzniusdik). The gemara clearly indicates that tight clothing is not Tzniusdik.

TZNIUS MENTOR

One should find someone she respects to ask questions that arise concerning Tznius issues.

THE SOURCE OF ALL BLESSINGS

The Zohar states, "Uncovering one's hair causes poverty in the home, brings impure spirits to dwell in the home, prevents one's children from becoming important in their generation and brings a curse upon her husband." The Rebbe usually quoted the positive consequences stated in the Zohar, that covering one's hair brings riches, nachas from children, and health.

The Rebbe quoted the gemarah about Kimchis who merited to have seven sons become Kohanim Gedolim as a result of her meticulousness in covering her hair, even to the extent that 'the walls of her house never saw her hair.' Moreover, her stringency affected many future generations, for the position of Kohen Gadol is hereditary and stays within the family.

The Rebbe emphasized the importance of wearing a sheitel, which unlike a tichel, doesn't leave any hair uncovered, and brings many brochos to those that are scrupulous about this.

The Rebbe wrote in a letter "That which you ask about covering hair, I am shocked by the question! Particularly that which you ask, 'Is it good enough to wear a sheitel that covers everything except for two fingerbreadths?' Who are you trying to fool with this?"

CHILDREN HAVE EYES TOO

According to the Zohar, our actions affect the Yiras Shomaim of our children. What children see in the home has a lasting impression on them.