THE BEAUTY OF MODESTY (I)

HUMILITY AND BASHFULNESS

The Midrash teaches that there is nothing HaShem loves more dearly then modesty.

The Rebbe Rashab explains that pride is referred to as zeh (“This!”), because it is revealed prominently, whereas the way of kedushah teaches the very opposite – “to walk humbly with HaShem.” Modesty requires that a person should not be revealed, but should cover himself, out of his humility of spirit.

In a sicha to women, the Rebbe once explained that the main component of tznius is quiet and modest behavior at home. Appropriate conduct outside the home then flows from this as a matter of course.

UPHOLDING PRIVACY

The Torah praises the trait of modesty in many sources. Chazal command that one should be modest in all his ways and not conduct himself in a shameless manner, not only while he is in company but even when alone. Even when he is alone at night, in his private rooms, he should conduct himself modestly and bashfully in the presence of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, for “the whole world is filled with His glory,” and “in His sight, darkness is as light.”

At one point during his chase to kill Dovid HaMelech, Shaul HaMelech entered a cave to take care of his needs, unaware that this was where Dovid and his men were hiding. To ensure that no one see him, Shaul HaMelech went deep inside the cave, and he concealed himself even more by using his cloak as a covering. Dovid HaMelech, who would have been allowed to kill Shaul to save his own life, was urged by his men to do so, but despite the opportunity, he felt unable to kill him. Instead, he cut off part of Shaul’s cloak. He later told Shaul that his tznius had protected him from being killed.

The Maharal explains that this was his reward for having concealed himself.

The Torah tells us that the true beauty of a Yiddishe woman is not expressed in her external appearance; rather, by virtue of her inner qualities, she is beautiful within.

At a farbrengen on Simchas Torah 569 (1969), the Rebbe said that women should be taught what a lack of modesty implies. When partially uncovering themselves to impress others, it is as if they are carrying a poster announcing that they have nothing else to show for themselves—neither intelligence nor middos, nor even a pleasant face ... Now, why would anyone want to proclaim such a situation publicly?

But in fact that is not the true situation. In fact, every individual girl has her own innate inner qualities, and once she understands this, the test of dressing in a modest manner will become easier.

In Winter 5722, Rabbi Refael Tzvi Hartman, a school principal in Eretz Yisroel presented the Rebbe with a dilemma that he had. Many schools had the practice of appointing older students to serve as cross-guards to make sure that the students only cross at the designated crossing. His school, which included a boys and girls department, also had such a system, and girls were chosen to this position. Rabbi Hartman was uncomfortable with the girls doing this and asked the Rebbe’s advice.

To this the Rebbe replied: “Regarding this that you discontinued the girl cross-guards – it is obvious that this is how you should continue for the future.”

When the book on the Alter Rebbe’s descendants was being compiled, the editor wished to include a picture of the Rebbetzin. He asked the Rebbe for her picture, and the Rebbe replied that she would need to be contacted directly, and her agreement would need to be procured. They contacted her, and she replied that under no circumstance would she agree for any photo of her to be published.

CONSIDER

What is the connection between feeling modest and dressing modestly?

Why can’t a person be public and also beautiful within?

When the malochim asked Avraham, “Where is Sara, your wife?” they were inquiring about what zechus she had, as a barren woman of ninety years, to merit having a child. Avraham replied, “She is in the tent,” implying that in the merit of her modesty, she was worthy of HaShem’s promise that ‘Kings will proceed from you.’

When Bilam wanted to curse the Yidden, he noticed that the entrances of their tents were opposite one another, for reasons of modesty, and therefore benschad them instead. The Rebbe notes that we see from here how one should not focus only on the main requirements of tznius, disregarding the finer points, for even a minute aspect of tznius has the power to transform a curse to a bracha.

THE GLORY WITHIN

The Torah tells us that the true beauty of a Yiddishe woman is not expressed in her external appearance; rather, by virtue of her inner beauty.
MEZUZA FOR STORE OR OFFICE

Do I make a bracha when affixing a mezuza on my office door?

It is a mitzva to place mezuzos on all of one’s doorposts. Some mistakenly think that the primary obligation applies only to the home’s front door, but in truth, every room that fits the criteria has its own mezuza obligation.

A sanctuary in a shul used exclusively for davening is technically exempt from mezuza. Since the room contains sanctity, it is only obligated if used for actual dwelling, e.g., eating or sleeping. If it is used for Torah study as well, it has the status of a beis midrash and Chassidus. R. Mendel became the son-in-law of the famous non-Chassidish Rebbe of Minsk, R. Eliezer Rabinowitz. He served as Rebbe in various towns, including Paritch, before being appointed in 5624 to succeed his father-in-law as Rebbe of Minsk, a large and prestigious community.

During this time the Communist oppression increased, and R. Mendel fought valiantly to preserve Yiddishkeit, despite being arrested and expelled from his home as a result. He was a prominent member of the Frierdiker Rebbe’s underground network in Soviet Russia, nicknamed Seder Hadoros in their secret correspondence, after the author of Seder Hadoros R. Yeichiel Halperin, the Rebbe of Minsk centuries earlier.

In 5695, R. Mendel accepted the position of Rebbe in Leningrad, where he continued his work with mesiras nefesh until his untimely passing two years later.

During the time when R. Gluskin served as rov of Minsk, the world became aware of the persecution of Yiddishkeit in Russia. The NKVD decided to resolve this issue by forcing rabbonim to sign on a letter that all was good and for the Jews in Russia. R. Gluskin fought that rabbonim should not support this lie and he suggested a more honest text instead, which was of course rejected.

Since then, R. Gluskin was blacklisted by the government, and evicted from his home in Leningrad.

A home, he moved into the women’s section of the shul, but was soon arrested. Shortly after his release, he got an offer to serve as rov in Leningrad, which he accepted.

R. Shmerel Sasonkin recalls a private conversation he held with R. Gluskin in Leningrad:

Once, when no one was around, I questioned him about his interrogations with the NKVD. He shared that they asked about his connection to "Rabbi Schneersohn." He told them that he had been in contact, but he discontinued when he was told that it wasn’t to the government’s liking.

He then asked his interrogator why they had such hate for the Frierdiker Rebbe, when there were other rabbonim and tzaddikim. The man replied, "If Rabbi Schneersohn would behave like all rabbonim and just bless his followers, we would remain silent. However, he doesn’t sit still and is unceasingly active in spreading Yiddishkeit!"

R. Gluskin had a charm to him, and no one was felt offended by him even when he put them in their place. Once, his brother-in-law, Professor Shaul Lieberman, repeated a comment insinuating that the chassidische shiblach are unneeded. R. Gluskin replied with a smile, "I still think every town needs a chassidische shteibel. Inevitably one will end up stepping inside, and there will be told who he really is..."

R. Gluskin had a charm to him, and no one was felt offended by him even when he put them in their place. Once, his brother-in-law, Professor Shaul Lieberman, repeated a comment insinuating that the chassidische shiblach are unneeded. R. Gluskin replied with a smile, "I still think every town needs a chassidische shteibel. Inevitably one will end up stepping inside, and there will be told who he really is..."

INFLUENCING A DEFIANT SON

A frustrated mother came to the Rebbe at the Sunday dollars, on 4 Tammuz 5751 (1991), and poured out her heart. Her son has chosen the wrong path, she said, which grieved her to no end, and all her attempts at talking him out of his behavior had been fruitless.

The Rebbe gently suggested a shift in her approach:

"In today’s world it is easier to affect a younger generation through their friends influencing them, than by their parents talking to him."

"Often," the Rebbe softly explained to her, "when youth are spoken to by their parents, they feel that their parents consider them to still be little children."

"Therefore, it is advisable to find someone, other than his parents, to speak to a child.”

(Ashreis shekivach (Yidman) 573)