

“Any man whose wife deviates from the right path.” (5:12)

The *sotah*, wayward wife, has deviated from the prescribed moral path of a Jew by acting inappropriately and cavorting with another man after being admonished by her husband to desist from this relationship. The word *sotah* may also be derived from *shoteh*, which denotes a fool/an individual who has deviated from the normal psychological profile. The *shoteh* has no emotional control. The *sotah* has acted in a manner that bespeaks a breakdown of her mental faculties. Indeed, *Chazal* say that one does not sin unless he has first had a mental lapse.

To deviate morally is not simply a shortcoming in one's moral fiber; it is a sign that one has sustained an emotional breakdown. The woman who acts immorally, who degrades the marriage bond with acts of infidelity, demonstrates a deficiency in her mental state. *V'es tzenuim chochmah*, Shlomo *Ha'melech* says in *Mishlei* 11:2, “Those who are private (in their *Torah* learning) will achieve wisdom.”

Why is a *tzanua*, a chaste, private person, considered wise? He is pious; he is righteous, but how does that trait indicate that he possesses wisdom? We infer from here that *tznius* is based on *chochmah*, wisdom. The individual who is secure, who sincerely believes in the *Torah* way, will not act inappropriately. One who dresses or acts in a manner which demonstrates a lack of *tznius* is acting irrationally. He displays a faulty mechanism in his mental state. When anyone – male or female – serves Hashem, he or she must concentrate on the inner-directed aspect of striving, which is the essence of the Jewish heroic act. While this concept applies equally to men and women, the woman is particularly enjoined to develop this character trait to its highest degree. This is implied by the fact that woman was created from a part of the body that is private in two aspects: first, it is generally clothed; and second, it is located beneath the skin.

Indeed, *tznius* is a woman's ultimate distinction. The *Imahos*, Matriarchs, had many unique qualities. Yet, they were immortalized by a name that denoted their *tznius*. They were given the name of *levonah*, frankincense: “The *Shechinah* visited a hill of frankincense” (*Shir HaShirim* 4:6). This *pasuk* is a reference to the Matriarchs, because – by virtue of their good deeds – they were analogous to this delicate and aromatic spice. Moreover, the literal translation of *levonah* is white, and the lifestyle of the *Imahos* epitomized whiteness and purity. This is why the *sotah*, who is suspected of immorality, does not bring the usual frankincense with her sacrifice. *Levonah* represents whiteness and purity, while her behavior reeks of the antithesis. Last, to paraphrase *Horav Elya Svei, Shlita*, “*Tznius* must be the foundation of the Jewish home. The essence of womanhood is *tznius*, and this trait is the woman's anti-toxin to the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination.”

May we be so bold as to posit that people who are deficient in the area of *tznius* are very insecure. They feel the need to call attention to themselves either by the way they dress, speak or act. They are weak and have no pride. Last, as we see from the *sotah*, one who lacks the trait of *tznius* will resort to stupidity and act in a manner unbecoming a rational person. A Jewish person – male or

female – should reflect refinement, purity, and humility. Whatever happened to the *eidelkeit*, refinement and class, that was the hallmark of the Jewish female – and male? There was a time when we used to have class and pride. Has American society weakened us so, or are we that insecure?

David *Ha'melech* tells us in *Sefer Tehillim* 45:14, *Kol kevodah bas melech penimah*, “The entire glory of the daughter of the king lies within.” This *pasuk* is absolutely non-debasing. The *pasuk* underscores the Torah’s positive attitude towards the female role. It has also been used by *Chazal* to promote the private nature of the religious experience in general. True achievement is always in the private sphere, hidden from the public arena. The Jewish hero is he who reaches his zenith on the inner stage, not in the public forum. We serve Hashem only for the sake of Hashem – neither for the accolades nor for the sake of any other audience. The audience to which one directs his performance defines both the act and the actor.