

## **For Hashem, your G-d, walks in the midst of your camp... so your camp shall be holy, so that He will not see a shameful thing among you and turn away from behind you. (23:15)**

Dressing and acting appropriately are prerequisites for Torah-oriented behavior. “Your camp shall be holy” applies not only to the “camp” in the wilderness; it also applies to our homes, schools, *shuls* – wherever observant Jews congregate. One’s personal camp should not be ignored either. This means that, although one may be respectful of the laws of *tznius*, modesty/chastity, upon entering a holy edifice, he should not forget that he is himself a holy camp. Thus, how one dresses represents his attitude with regard to Hashem. To dress in an immodest manner is to put G-d to shame and cause Him to turn away.

In his *Nitzotzos*, *Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz* relates an inspiring story, which underscores the importance of *tznius* in the life of a Jew. A *kollel* fellow in *Yerushalayim* received a fax from a young woman containing a note of deep gratitude for “what he had done for her.” “In fact,” she wrote, “you saved my life.” Now his curiosity was piqued. He could not remember an incident in which he saved anyone’s life – let alone this woman’s life.

Not allowing this letter of gratitude to go unanswered, he checked the return address, and he was able to locate and contact the sender of the letter. The story he heard was mind-boggling. Apparently, a few weeks earlier, he had gone to the bank where he usually conducts business. Waiting in line, he noticed that the female teller was dressed inappropriately. Under normal circumstances, he would have kept his mouth shut or moved over to a different teller, but this time, for some reason, he was bothered. After all, since it was a public place that catered to many observant Jews, he felt that the young woman should have manifested little more respect. Furthermore, she was herself “somewhat” observant. True, it was a warm summer day, but what is wrong is wrong.

“Excuse me, *giveret*, ma’am,” he said courteously and with complete sincerity. “Do you think it is appropriate for you to serve the customers of this bank wearing the outfit that you have on?”

Before she could reply, he added, “*Tznius* is very important, and it impacts the environment around you; more than that, however, what about yourself? What about your own self-respect? Is this what you think of yourself?”

Powerful words, to which the young lady countered, “Sir, if you have a problem with my outfit, you can always take your business to the next teller.”

End of story? No!

A few weeks later, the young lady was a guest at the wedding of a close friend. It was a warm

evening, and the dancing was quite spirited. She began to perspire profusely. She decided that, if she were to continue dancing, she would remove her new, stylish linen jacket that she was wearing over her dress. Understandably, her jacket served a purpose other than just fashion. As she was about to remove it, she reminded herself of the comment the *kollel* fellow had addressed to her earlier in the bank: "It is not only about others; it is also about you." She then decided that this time she would have a little more self-respect and, rather than remove the jacket, she would go outside and cool off in the evening air.

In her heart, she felt that perhaps the man was right. She had no business lowering her self-esteem by dressing in an immodest fashion. As she stood outside enjoying the cool air and ruminating over her conversation with the man, she suddenly heard the sirens of many ambulances. She turned around and looked at the wedding hall, and she saw that the floor on which she had been dancing was gone! The entire floor had collapsed. Yes, she was attending the ill-fated wedding celebration on May 24, 2001, at the Versailles Hall in Talpiot, Israel, at which the floor collapsed, taking the lives of 24 guests. She could have been one of the casualties, but she had gone outside to cool off – rather than remove her jacket. *Tznius* had saved her life.

*Tznius* is inherent in every Jewish woman. It is innate from Creation, due to the fact that Hashem created Chavah from an internal rib, implying that the public stage is foreign to a woman. She was endowed with an extra dose of modesty. Our Patriarch, Avraham *Avinu*, who was probably the first mass educator, wore a medallion on which was engraved the image of an elderly man and woman on one side and a boy and girl on the other side. **Horav Pesach Eliyahu Falk, Shlita**, gives a meaningful explanation for the contrasting flip-side of the medallion. Avraham taught the world that the qualities found in an elderly man and woman are the direct result of their education in their young and formative years. The future of a woman is greatly dependent on the qualities and values structured for her in her younger, adolescent years. She follows and imitates what she sees.

As we see from the above episode, the rewards of adherence to *tznius* are incalculable. Indeed, the Almighty has a special love for those who practice a refined and modest lifestyle, maintaining strict confidentiality concerning their personal life and affairs. He feels a unique closeness to those who maintain such a lifestyle, because it is pure and genuine, unsullied by the libertine, Madison Avenue society in which we live. What greater stamp of approval does one need than to know that the lifestyle he leads is beloved by Hashem?