

## “Please let me cross and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan.” (3:25)

A fascinating *Midrash* relates part of the dialogue between Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Hashem concerning his plea that he be allowed to enter the Holy Land. Moshe asked, “*Ribono Shel Olam*, the bones of Yosef *HaTzaddik* will enter *Eretz Yisrael*, and I will not enter?” (Why is Yosef different than I?) Hashem replied, “One who conceded, who acknowledged his Land, deserves to be buried there. One who did not acknowledge his Land is not buried there.” *Chazal* note that when Potifar’s wife failed in her attempt to seduce Yosef, she cried out, “Look! He brought us a Hebrew man to sport with us!” (*Bereishis* 39:14). It was clear to everyone that Yosef was a Jew. Yet, when Moshe saved Yisro’s daughters, they described him in the following way: “An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds” (*Shemos* 2:19). Moshe remained silent to the allegation that he was Egyptian, while Yosef affirmed his Jewish roots.

*Chazal* teach us that Yosef merited burial in *Eretz Yisrael*, because he had affirmed his Jewish lineage. He was not ashamed of acknowledging his Jewishness, despite his Egyptian surroundings. In Egypt, they clearly did not think highly of the Jews. Yet, Yosef was not afraid to assert his Jewishness. Moshe, however, did not take this approach. As a result, his request to enter the Holy Land was denied.

While the critique against Moshe was clearly on a microscopic level, in light of the fact that Moshe was the preeminent Jewish leader of *Klal Yisrael*, we still must ask ourselves where are we holding with regard to expressing and manifesting our Jewish image. Do we alter the mode of our public appearance upon finding ourselves in an environment in which our Jewish comfort level is challenged? A Jew must maintain his Jewish countenance, his external sense of pride, regardless of where he finds himself. This is especially true at a time in which so many of our brethren travel throughout the world to areas where a Jewish presence is quite limited, and often even non-existent. We have nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, our mode of dress gives us reason to be proud of our *tznius*, private, modest, manner of not calling attention to ourselves, nor following the *chukas ha’goyim*, the utterly inane style of dress adopted by contemporary society. When a Jew walks down the street, it should be noticeable that he is Jewish – and he should be proud of it. This is demonstrated by the following incident:

*Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, was once walking down the street when he was accosted by an Arab who slapped him across the face, declaring, “That is for you, Jew!” The Jews in the vicinity immediately wanted to pounce upon the Arab and give him what he deserved. *Rav Yisrael* begged them to desist and do nothing. Indeed, the onlookers were slightly shocked by this gesture. Allowing an Arab to take such liberties with the *gadol ha’dor*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, was beyond wrong. It just did not make sense.

*Rav Yisrael* turned to the group that had assembled and said, “I said thank you to the Arab who

slapped me for no other reason than I am a Jew. This indicates that he recognized my religious affiliation from nothing other than my appearance. It makes me feel good and increases my sense of pride in Whom and what I represent. I thanked him for enabling me to enjoy that moment of Jewish pride.”

In his *sefer*, *Ne'os Desheh*, *Horav David Shneur, Shlita*, suggests that with regard to Jewish appearance, contemporary Jewish society falls into three groups. He comments on the *pasuk* detailing Yaakov Avinu's *brachah*, blessing, to Yosef's two sons, Menasheh and Ephraim: *V'yikarei ba'hem sh'mi, v'sheim avosai, Avraham v'Yitzchak*, “And may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak” (*Bereishis* 48:16). What is the meaning of having the names of the Patriarchs being declared upon them? Every Jew has his own name, given to him by his parents. Menasheh and Ephraim were no different.

*Rav Shneur* explains this with the following analogy: A brilliant artist paints a picture of an apple tree on a canvas. The picture is so real that anyone who beholds it is almost prepared to take a bite of one of the apples. Certainly, the artist has no reason to write a caption at the bottom of the graphic, indicating that it is a tree. Anyone with a semblance of vision sees that this is a picture of a tree. Another artist presents his picture of a tree. This artist, however, is not as proficient as the first. In fact, it takes some imagination to see the “tree” in the picture. The artist writes on a card, “a tree,” and places it next to the picture. The card allows one to “envision” a tree out of the conglomerate of colors pieced together on the canvas. It is not as defining as the tree painted by the first artist, but it is a tree nonetheless.

A third artist who is basically a novice presents his painting. To use the word “painting” elevates the description of the “mess” of colors on the canvas to a higher level than it deserves. Only someone with a vivid imagination could ever think that this is a tree. In this case, even the card describing the hodgepodge of color as a “tree” is of little assistance. People have a difficult time believing that this is the picture of a tree.

The *nimshal*, lesson, is quite apparent. Some Jews, by virtue of their countenance/ physical appearance, mode of dress and personal/social demeanor, are clearly Jewish. They act with refinement, dignity, and even royalty. Their choice of clothing parallels their spiritual persona, not seeking to endear themselves to the “hip-hop” culture which pervades society. They have no desire to call attention to themselves. In short, they are secure in their religious belief; proud of their tradition; and confident in their commitment.

The second type of Jew is one who no longer publicly exhibits an affiliation with Judaism. He has long ago exchanged the “black and white” for the “paisley and pink.” *Tzitzis* and other traditional garb are not consistent with his current lifestyle. Yet, he does wear his Star of David or Chai on a chain around his neck. He will don a *kippah* on his head if the need arises. It is not that he is ashamed of his Jewishness. He just does not think much about it, and he publicizes it even less. This individual is much like the ambiguous painting of a tree that is defined once the card bearing

the word “tree” is placed in front of it.

The third type of Jew is all too familiar. His relationship with his heritage had been severed generations earlier. His father was the second type of Jew whose commitment was, at best, lackadaisical. He produced a generation of Jews who neither appears Jewish, nor acts Jewish. The alienation of this Jew has digressed to the point that he feels no emotion towards his religion. He is spiritually numb, or perhaps worse. He is very much like the hodgepodge of color that is a tree – but only in the artist’s imagination. Placing a card in front of the painting and calling it a tree will do very little to define the picture. Yaakov *Avinu* prayed that regardless of what the future would bring, the names/images of the Patriarchs will be proudly manifest in his progeny.