

## How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Yisrael. (24:5)

As we enter the *shul*, our daily encounter with the Almighty begins with the *pasuk* that Bilaam recited. Let us put this into perspective. Bilaam was impressed and inspired by *Klal Yisrael's* modesty and sensitivity to privacy issues, as evidenced by the arrangement of their tents. Bilaam was the paradigm of evil, a man whose sense of morality was so eroded that he sought to destroy *Klal Yisrael* through debauchery. He fully comprehended that Hashem despises licentiousness. He recognized Hashem's reaction to *Klal Yisrael's* promiscuous attraction to the daughters of Moav. Yet, during a brief moment of spiritual ascendancy, granted to him by Hashem, he realized the inherent relationship between *Klal Yisrael* and *tznius*, modesty/ morality. He understood that *tznius* is part of our national psyche, an integral component in our character. He sensed this unique aspect of the Jewish People and expressed it in praise of them. This is how we begin each day. It is remarkable that the first thing that should enter our minds when we enter a *shul* is *tznius*. Obviously, our *shuls* ought to reflect this concept.

**Kol Yehudah** renders a homiletic interpretation of this *pasuk*. *Ohel*, tent, implies impermanence. The *ohel* refers to the layman whose time allotted for *Torah* study is, at best, part-time. Being *kovea ittim la' Torah*, designating certain times during the day for the specific purpose of *Torah* study, is truly a praiseworthy endeavor. The individual may not necessarily become an accomplished *talmid chachom*, *Torah* scholar, but his children will. Children emulate what they observe at home. When they see their parents demonstrate esteem for *Torah*, they will follow suit. When they see that their fathers devote night or early morning to *Torah* study, they will have the proclivity to spend their entire day and night engrossed in *limud ha'Torah*. When a child sees his father dedicating his evening to secular/recreational pursuits, the message he receives concerning the value of *Torah* study is equally clear.

This is the *pasuk's* message, "*How goodly are your tents, o'Yaakov.*" The term *Yaakov* refers to the lay people. These individuals are fortunate when they are able to study *Torah* even temporarily, as implied by the term, "tents." One day they will merit to see their sons in the "*dwelling places*" of *Yisrael*. Both terms, "*Yisrael*" and "*dwelling places*," signify permanence and constancy. If the parents' learning is on the level of "tents," it will achieve a "dwelling place" in the lives of the children.