

How goodly are your tents, Yaakov. (24:5)

What impressed Bilaam about the Jewish tents? Bilaam saw that the entrances to one another precluded intrusions on the privacy of other families. Furthermore, tents refer to the *batei medrash*, study halls. (According to *Rashi*, it refers to the *Mishkan* and *Batei Mikdash* when they were extant). At first glance, *tznius*, privacy and modesty, and study halls do not seem to coincide, unless the Torah is suggesting to us that the study hall – or Torah study of those who occupy the *bais hamedrash*, who devote themselves wholly to studying Hashem's Torah – should reflect *tznius*, privacy and modesty, in their every demeanor. Studying Torah is the loftiest ideal, reserved for the few who are willing to relinquish the material fringe benefits of this world for the eternal spiritual reward associated with Torah learning. It should not become a source for one-upmanship and calling attention to one's own achievements. Everything that we do should be executed with modesty.

It is notable that Bilaam focused on *tznius* more than any of the other wonderful attributes in which *Klal Yisrael* excels. The nation that had reached the apex of spirituality during the Revelation at *Har Sinai* was merciful, meek and kind. Why did Bilaam curtail his curse, blessing them instead, specifically because of their modesty? *Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, cites a life-saving case in which modesty played a leading role. In the struggle between Shaul and David, the king wanted to kill the man who would marry his daughter and ultimately assume the position as king. The story goes that Shaul was pursuing David, so that David and his entourage fled to a cave and made it their hiding place. Shaul was unaware of this. At some point, Shaul required use of the "facilities." Indoor plumbing was not yet available, so he entered the cave which afforded him a degree of privacy. He had no clue that he was entering David's hiding place.

David saw the king entering his place of refuge and resisted killing him. *Halachically*, Shaul was a *rodef*, pursuer; thus, pursuant to the laws of self-defense, David could save himself by taking his pursuer's life. Instead, David cut a corner of Shaul's garment, later sending a message: "It could have been you." What did David observe about Shaul that impelled him to change his mind, to restrain himself from killing Shaul?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that David saw this element of modesty in the way Shaul covered himself, even though he was in an apparently empty cave. No one would see him, so why did he bother? He understood that modesty is not only from others, but for oneself. Hashem is always with us wherever we go. To act immodestly is to imply, "I do not care." Respect for Hashem and respect for oneself should motivate a person's modesty. A person who dresses or acts immodestly indicates that he or she is insecure and requires public recognition, regardless of the consequences.

The *Maharal* suggests that the trait of *tznius* protects one from being subjugated. One who makes himself hidden and covered will not be covered by anyone else. When Bilaam took note of our *tznius*, he realized that Hashem would grant us an extra dose of protection. We have the added

protection that accompanies concealment.

Horav Eliyahu Dushnitzer, zl, was one of the premier *talmidim*, students, of the *Chafetz Chaim*. As *Mashgiach* of the nascent Lomza *Yeshivah* in *Eretz Yisrael*, he was spiritual mentor to many of the future *gedolim*, Torah giants, in the Holy Land. He was extremely careful in areas of *kashrus*; thus, he did not ever eat the food served by the *yeshivah*. He had a woman cook for him in accordance with his exacting standards.

During the British Mandate, the British were paranoid about spies. They would send anyone whom they remotely suspected of sabotage to labor camps in British-controlled Kenya. Understandably, conditions in a labor camp situated in a third world country were deplorable, at best. Sadly, one of those incarcerated by the British and destined to be sent to Kenya was Motke, the only son of the woman who cooked for the *Mashgiach*. Distraught and filled with anguish, the woman ran to *Rav Elya* and pleaded with him to give her a blessing that would spare her son.

Rav Elya was acquiescent, and he said that not only would he give her a *brachah*, he would also give her a *z'chus*, merit, to ensure the blessing's successful outcome. He then went on to suggest that she strengthen herself in her *tznius*. While her dedication to *kashrus* was peerless, she could improve certain aspects of the way she dressed. *Rav Elya* told her that he was certain that her son would be spared if she would initiate certain changes to her dress code. In fact, he said, "If you listen to my directive, Motke will be home on Friday two weeks hence."

The cook listened intently. She loved her son, but the manner of her dress represented who she was. She was prepared to upgrade her performance of any other *mitzvah*, but *tznius* was asking too much. *Rav Elya* was adamant about her son's safety in return for her commitment to *tznius*: Which would it be?

When the woman came home and related her conversation with *Rav Elya* to her husband, he was floored, "You are ready to turn over the world to get our Motke back, but you refuse to augment the way you religiously dress? If the *Mashgiach* made you a promise, why would you refuse to listen to him?" Her husband's words penetrated her mind, and she immediately made the halachic alterations to her clothing. She was now confident that Motke would arrive in two weeks, in time for *Shabbos*.

Two weeks passed, and all Friday she stood waiting by the window. Finally, she could wait no longer, and, with tears streaming down her face, she went to *bentch licht*, light the *Shabbos* candles. Right then, the door flung open, and Motke was home! Tears of joy replaced those of anguish as she lit the candles with her son standing next to her.

"Tell me, Motke," she asked, after the candles were lit, "how were you able to leave jail? How did you get home from there?"

“Today, we were instructed to pack our belongings in preparation for our trip to Kenya,” Motke began. “I stood in line with the other prisoners, knowing that this was it. I would never return to my Land, my house, my family. Suddenly, a British general called and motioned for me to follow him. He led me from one gate through another until I was out of the jail. He said to me, ‘Run home!’ I had no idea where I was. I jumped into the first car that stopped when I waved, and the driver brought me home.”

The mother and father were certain that the British general was none other than Eliyahu *HaNavi*, who was sent to intervene in Motke’s behalf. All this was in the merit of *tznius*.