

## Yaakov said to his sons, “Why would you have everyone gazing at you?” (42:1)

Yaakov had sufficient food for his family. The country, however, was suffering through a hunger which was taking its toll on everyone around them. Thus, Yaakov told his sons to be like everyone else and go down to Egypt to purchase grain to sustain the family. In an address at an *Agudas Yisrael* convention, *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, exhorted the listeners: *Lamah tisrahu*, “Do not be conspicuous with your wealth – even if it was honestly earned (according to Torah standards). Why display before others that you have sufficient food when they are starving?” They had enough, but others did not. Thus, this admonition: “Do not flaunt your wealth...” Yaakov *Avinu* was conveying a message for generations. Such a display of opulence, dress, celebrations send a wrong signal to our neighbors (both Jewish and non-Jewish), which engenders greed, jealousy and (eventually) hatred.

The *Rav* went on to the next level: *chillul Hashem*, profaning Hashem's Name. When those who live lavish lifestyles make a point of garnering attention to themselves, they are almost begging the jealous world to look for (and find) fault in their business dealings. Regardless of one's level of *frumkeit*, observance, *chillul Hashem* has no atonement. If our actions cause our neighbors (Jewish and non-Jewish) to look at us askance, to provoke them to search for our failings, we cause a *chillul Hashem*. Why would anyone want such a sin on his head?

The *Rav* recalled that several years earlier the media had published stories about a great Jewish family renowned for its benevolence and business success. The stories underscored the fact that the family had achieved the public's trust due to their extraordinary integrity. Their word was as good as gold, specifically because they were Orthodox Jews. This is called a *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem's Name.

I will concede that, for business reasons, it is (at times) necessary to put on a display of wealth. Investors, lenders and (even) competitors appreciate one whose financial portfolio is rock solid. Foolishly, they think that a lavish wedding, palatial home, excessive vacations bespeak wealth and success. We must ask ourselves, “Why? For what purpose? What benefit is to be gained from this display of grandiose luxury? Is it really for business purposes, or to satisfy a low self-esteem?” I think this is what our Patriarch intimated to his sons. He did not say *Al tisrahu*; “Do not.” Rather, he said, “Why (are you really) are you showing off? Is there a sensical reason for this ostentatious display?”