

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

TORAH LESSONS for the HOME

{ TZAV 5780 }

DRESS CODE

RESPECTFUL ATTIRE

The Torah says that the Kohen should change out of the clothes he wears while clearing the ash from the *mizbeach* into a clean set of clothes. Rashi explains that this is not a halachic requirement per se, but simply out of “Derech Eretz”, out of respect for those around him.

That is rather odd, because in other places we’re told that stains from a *mitzvah* are an adornment! For example, when a Mohel performs a Bris on Rosh Hashana and he gets dirty, it’s considered a beautiful thing as we say on Pesach; *b’damayich chayi*. So why is the change of clothing necessary here?

The Torah is teaching us that one should make certain to look tidy and neat at all times. The Gemara in Yuma elaborates, bringing an example of a butler who changes out of his apron before serving his master. One might question why that would be necessary. He’s not smelly and dirty from rolling in the mud, or playing a strenuous sport. The stains on his apron are indicative

of his loyalty to his master; it portrays the efforts he expended to prepare food for him! Still, it would not be considered respectful to show up wearing dirty clothing, much like we wouldn’t want to see the cook at a wedding milling about in the crowd in his stained apron, even though we know exactly where those stains originated from.

APPEARANCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

The Torah seems to give a lot of attention to people’s externals. We know that the Kohen Gadol had to cut his hair every day. Why was that? Rashi (Sanhedrin 22b) explains that it’s so that the new Kohanim who came to watch him, will see him looking clean and put-together, and so they will respect him. But he was the Kohen Gadol! Won’t they respect him just because of that? Apparently not. The same is taught about a *Navi*, a *Talmid Chacham* and anyone who needs to have an influence on others, they need to be extra careful to look respectable, so that people will listen to them and respect

them. (See *Drashos HaRan Drush 5 based on the Gemara Sanhedrin*).

Of course, we shouldn’t pass judgment based on anyone’s appearance, and indeed we should refrain from that. But we need to make sure that we, ourselves, look presentable if we want others to regard us with respect. Actually, the seforim teach us that *hachitzonius me’oreres hapnimityus*; looking respectable will affect actual change inside of us and we will actually deserve that respect.

MARRIAGE AND LOOKS

Before we discuss what one should look like in a marriage, I find it important to preface this with several simple but necessary disclaimers:

First of all, it is never okay to dress in a way that violates *Halacha* or *Minhag*. If this ever comes up, make sure to discuss it with a Rav. Some women might feel obligated to dress in a certain way or do certain things because they were taught that “*Isha kesheira osah retzon baalah - Who is a good wife? The one who heeds*

her husband's will." Women need to know that if doing what their husband asks of them is incorrect or inappropriate by *Halachic* or *Yiddishkeit* standards, then that is not "*kesheira*", and no good has ever come of that.

Additionally, we are not talking about problematic relationships where there are issues of control, or *cha"v* abuse. What we are discussing is dressing properly in the framework of a normal, functional environment.

A woman was created with an innate desire to be beautiful, and that is how it should be. In fact, the Midrash tells us that a man is obligated to give his wife clothing and jewelry so she can adorn herself. But we also see that if her husband is out of town, she does not have to receive those gifts. Why? Because clearly, her beauty is meant for her husband, and her husband alone. The same thing can be beautiful or ugly – depending on where and for what reason it is used.

It is certainly true that marriage isn't all about looks and it should be about connection and looking past external differences. But proper appearance is an undeniable component to the attraction and desire that is necessary for a healthy marriage. When your spouse cares about your appearance, it doesn't make him or her vain or shallow. This is what the Torah instructs us to do! Beauty, pretty clothes, and other adornments were actually created for the purpose of beautifying yourself for your spouse.

NOT A CONTRADICTION

When a woman dresses nicely for her husband, it is the

most beloved thing to Hashem as we're taught that Hashem wanted the women's mirrors in the Mishkan. Hashem said about those mirrors "*They are dearer to me than all the other contributions*". And yet we also know that "*Nothing is as beloved to Hashem as Tznius*." This is not a contradiction at all. Both are extremely beloved to Hashem. When a woman uses her beauty to satisfy her husband, there is no greater form of *Tznius*!

Aishes Chayil, the song we sing on Shabbos, claims that "*Sheker HaChein V'Hevel Hayofi* (Grace is deceptive and beauty is illusory)". It can be confusing. Is beauty important or is it superfluous? If it is used appropriately, then there is nothing more beautiful. But if it is used otherwise, then it is indeed defeating its purpose.

Dressing in a becoming fashion is not just an added bonus; there is actually a real concern that not doing so will cause a wife to distance her husband and destroy her marriage. Chazal were so concerned with this, that they permitted women to dress nicely at all times so as not to turn their husbands off.

This is the reason for the halacha that a man is not allowed to marry a woman until he sees her. One might argue that if the groom is a righteous and pious man such frivolities would not concern him. But no, Chazal thought otherwise. They realized that lack of attraction is a real and valid concern, and so they instituted this practice.

PROTECTIVE GEAR

Paying attention to your appearance is also a very

effective way to prevent your husband from sinning. The Gemara tells the story of Aba Chelkiah, a famous Amora, who returned home and was greeted by his wife – decked out in her elegant finery. She said it was so that he would be attracted to her, and not to anybody else. There was also a similar story of one of the Chazal, who prayed to Hashem to rescue him from his Yetzer Hara, because his wife was not attractive and he felt like every day was a struggle.

These were holy, pious men! And yet, they needed a pleasant looking wife to be able to serve Hashem properly. A man who is concerned with his wife's looks should not be looked down upon. Don't think that if he would have really loved her and appreciated her, he would've seen past any externalities. Not so! Looking clean and becoming is what helps him have the peace of mind and serenity he needs to serve Hashem. The Gemara teaches that "a beautiful abode, a beautiful wife and beautiful vessels give a person comfort".

The Gemara goes so far as to tell us that if a woman takes upon herself a certain stringency in dress that her husband is not agreeable to, they cannot live together and she has to leave. That is how serious this matter was to our sages.

Very often, it's not even about a person's looks per se. It's more about the general appearance. One should always strive to look neat, put-together and happy, with a pleasant expression.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR

As an important addendum, respectable appearance goes both ways. It is true that the Gemara and *Halacha* mostly discusses the woman's appearance, but it is no less of a requirement for the husband to be respectful by ensuring that he is dressed properly and looks put together.

If the Navi, the king, and the Kohen were required to be mindful of their appearance, then how much more so should you make sure you look presentable. One of the things you promised your wife was food and clothing. Well, sometimes that means that *your* clothing should be nice. It might be almost as important as food.

There was a Chashuve Rebbe who used to ask his wife before leaving his house if he looked okay. As mentioned several weeks ago, Rav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach ZT"l straightened his attire before entering his home. Whether it is out of respect for your wife, or out of respect for the Shechina residing in your home, the bottom line is that it is basic decency to be mindful of how you look.

It goes without mention, that if your wife expresses displeasure with an aspect of your appearance then you should make an effort to please her. If your work clothes bother her, you don't have to make a beeline to change them the second you walk into the house, but do make a reasonable effort to change as soon as possible.

A relationship should never be dependent on each other's

appearance, but it must not be turned off by it either. Especially if it means a lot to your spouse, making this effort might be what will deepen their respect for you and make them appreciate you that much more. You will both be the winner.

CHINUCH: WHEN CHILDREN CARE

If your child is particular about his appearance, there's no need to shame him for it. There are some children to whom looking decent is very important, and even if you don't understand it yourself, realize that this is a very real need to him. Of course, there is no reason to go overboard or break school code, but if your son refuses to wear his second cousin's hand-me-down, don't force the issue.

There's also another factor that might come into play when dealing with children who are particular in this sense, and that is when they are embarrassed with the way you – their parent – look. Perhaps they are ashamed that your work clothes do not conform to the typical way other fathers in your circle dress. Don't take it personally and don't become offended. It is okay if you just validate his feelings and explain to him gently that you need to wear these clothes so that you can earn an honest living. But, as a gesture of respect, do try to change into normal clothes before you come to pick him up from school or otherwise enter his territory. There is no need to embarrass him needlessly – as foolish as his embarrassment might be.



QUESTION:

My wife never displays any vulnerability. It's almost as if she doesn't need me. Could it be?

ANSWER:

When a person – adult or child – doesn't ask for anything, it doesn't mean that they don't need it. In fact, they might need it more than anyone else. They might need it so badly, that it's impossible for them to verbalize it. It might also be that asking for things is a personal weakness of theirs, and it's hard for them to do so.

Whatever the case may be, you need to find ways to give to her even before she asks. Figure out what she likes, pay attention to the things she tells you, and don't wait for her to come and beg for it. For example, give unsolicited compliments or surprise her with a little gift from time to time. These are worth so much more than something that is asked for outright. Sometimes when your spouse sees how well you know them and their preferences, it makes them comfortable enough with you to actually go ahead and tell you what they want.