

THE KTM DAF PARASHA

BRINGING A TASTE OF ISRAEL TO MONTREAL



SOTAH: THE COLLAPSE OF TZNIUT AND THE SEARCH FOR THE INTEGRATED SELF

BY RAV ARI FAUST (ROSH KOLLEL)

Among the most controversial mitzvot in the Torah, and certainly the most shocking one, is the Sotah - a woman who, due to promiscuous behaviour, is suspected of being unfaithful to her husband (Bamidbar 5). The woman is brought to the Beit Hamikdash for public humiliation by revealing her hair and uncovering some of her clothing.

The Sotah presents us with an opportunity to think – or more accurately to “re-think” – about *tzniut*: Translated as “modesty” or “discretion”, this term is commonly understood as the mitzvah that restricts Jewish women’s dress-code - obligating them to wear clothing that adequately covers their body. Conversations about *tzniut* would often follow this theme, and present a correlation between a woman’s commitment to Jewish life and the length of their clothing. Understood as such, being *tzniut* means that the more covered you are, the better.

It is not the goal of this article to address the specific guidelines of *tzniut* dress-code (for women or for men). Suffice to say that there is a range of legitimate halachic opinions and that sensitivity and nuance are crucial when discussing this topic.

More broadly and conceptually, *tzniut* as a value is much more far-reaching than generally implied by the aforementioned approach. In truth, this approach to *tzniut* has no shortage of flaws. For starters, to equate Jewish commitment with dress code is reductionist and superficial: It implicitly suggests that the role of Jewish women is restricted to the realm of covering-up and lighting Shabbat candles, instead of encouraging engagement and contribution to Jewish life holistically – not only on the private and domestic level, but also on the public and communal level as well.

This also reduces the discussion about *tzniut* to one of measurements and suggests that just like a Sukkah has minimum and maximum dimensions, the appropriateness of our clothing is measured by a ruler. The Gemara (Yoma 35b) relates that Elazar ben Charsom’s mother had sewn his priestly garment from an expensive linen. However the garment was deemed inappropriate and he was never allowed to wear it, since the fine fabric emphasized the contours of his body. Clearly, there is more to *tzniut* than the length of the garment. Notice also that Elazar ben Charsom was a man!

Moreover, this correlation, which emphasizes the externality of Jewish living, overshadows the more important focus on our internality. Instead

of encouraging the refinement of character or deepening of ideas, this approach teaches how to “look Jewish” instead of what it really means to “be Jewish”. In terms of *tzniut*, it is much simpler to dress tzanua than to behave tzanua.

Which brings us to the crux of the discussion. What is *tzniut*, anyway?

An answer to this can be derived from the process the Sotah undergoes. Our sages (see Talmud Sotah 8a, Rashi to Ketubot 72a) derive from the fact that the way we relate to the Sotah is a deviance, the normative practice must have been for women to dress in a modest manner. This is known as דת יהודית - customary Jewish religious practice specifically in the realm of *tzniut* (Rambam, Hilchot Ishut 24:12).

It is noteworthy that, with the exception of Rabbi Yitzchak of Corbeil (Sefer Mitzvot Katan, 57), to my knowledge there are no commentaries who list *tzniut* as a mitzvah de’orayta. Granted, there are halachot that guide dress and modest behavior, but there is no codification of *tzniut* as an independent mitzvah framed the way contemporary discourse sometimes assumes. Sefer Mitzvot Katan himself derives this mitzvah from the standards of self-dignity we are meant to uphold in army encampments (Devarim 23:15). This does not relate specifically to dress-code and it certainly doesn’t immediately relate to women since in the Torah it was the men who went to battle!

The prophet Micha says (6:8):

הַגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מִה־שׁוֹב וּמִה־יָהּ דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִם־עֲשׂוֹת
מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהַגָּנוּעַ לִפְנֵי עַם־אֱלֹקִים

You have been told what is good, and what Hashem requires of you: To do justice and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God

“To walk modestly with your God”, just like “your encampment shall be holy” implies that the concept of *tzniut* is as broad as it is deep. The Jewish community has always organically and intuitively maintained certain standards of modesty and humility - not only in terms of dress or interactions of sexual nature, rather *tzniut* is a holistic Jewish approach to life.

Rabbanit Shayna Goldberg offers the following explanation (adapted from “The Orthodox



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Connundrum” podcast):

What does it mean when we use the word “modest”? *Tzniut* expresses an attempt to allow deeper, internal things to become part of the focus, instead of allowing the external to draw all the attention. This is not to say that the external does not matter – it matters deeply. But *tzniut* seeks to integrate the internal and the external; *tzniut* is about having some kind of integrated experience and not just the external...

As a community, can we find standards of dress that help people feel that they’re not being covered up or that their physical body doesn’t matter, but at the same time, that their body isn’t going to be where the story ends. It’s going to be where the story begins.

We need to begin having more substantial discussions about *tzniut*, and to think seriously about how this quality is to be instructive in a materialistic society - for men and women alike. What is the Jewish view to luxury or status culture, or the obsession with aesthetics & branding? *Tzniut* is not only about dress-code or sexuality, it guides us to live an integrated life where our material belongings are not where our story ends - but where it begins.



ENCOUNTERING THE GIANTS: RABBI YISRAEL SALANTER

BY CHAGAI SHREM

Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin Salanter (1810-1883), the father of the "Mussar Movement," was one of the greatest

Jewish thinkers of the modern era. He emerged from the classic yeshiva world of Lithuania, but recognized that while the analytical intellect of yeshiva students was well-developed, their inner world – their character traits (middot) and emotions – required deep treatment. He was not satisfied with theoretical study alone; instead, he established "Mussar houses," published periodicals, and acted throughout Europe to make fear of Heaven and Mussar an inseparable part of Jewish life.

Question: Why is it so important to study Mussar?

Answer: Our intellect knows the truth (for example: that one must not be angry), but our habits and impulses in the subconscious manage us at the moments of truth. Intellectual knowledge alone is helpless; a person can know that a sin is evil, yet continue to sin. A person knows in his mind with certainty that there is judgment and a Judge, and that he will be punished for his sins. Nevertheless, he continues to sin. As our Sages said, "The wicked know that their path leads to death" (Shabbat, 31a). The mere knowledge that something is bad will not cause a person to change his ways. It is a person's duty to diagnose his character traits – where does he get angry? Where is he arrogant? Where does he act out of impulse?

Mussar is like a science: a precise technology for self-knowledge and character refinement. It is the bridge that connects the intellect to action: it is the tool that embeds the knowledge of the intellect into the person's personality. Mussar is the effort to bring yourself to a place where, when you stand before a test, your natural inclination will be to respond correctly

and not impulsively. For example, if a person tends toward anger, it is not enough to decide, "From now on, I will be calm." Rather, one must perform small, daily exercises designed to train this "muscle", until the calm response becomes his nature.

Question: Why was there a need to establish a special movement for the study of Mussar?

Answer: There are Jews who live in a state of dissonance; on one hand, they are meticulous about the minutiae of forbidden foods and the Sabbath, yet they are dismissive of honesty in business, lashon hara (evil speech), and respect for others. The movement's goal is to restore the Halachic weight to the relationships between man and his fellow, so that a Jew will fear social injustice with the same intensity that he fears eating non-kosher food.

Even Torah scholars who study in-depth find that the Torah remains only in the head and does not touch the heart, impacting their lives and behavior. The Mussar movement arrived to establish a fact: it is impossible to defeat the evil inclination through intellectual hair-splitting. A person must stop the dry study and engage with Mussar through crying, emotion, and stirring of the soul, in order to melt the "hardening of the heart" created by routine.

Question: If so, what is the correct way to deal with the evil inclination (Yetzer Hara)?

Answer: The intellect needs the help of the emotions. To make a sin loathsome to our nature, one must study in deep detail the practical Halachot of that specific sin. For example: the laws of Choshen Mishpat (civil law) for one who struggles with monetary honesty. This meticulous study creates a "possession of the heart" that changes one's physical nature, until the sin becomes physically repulsive to him. Also, spiritually, the very act of studying Torah protects a person

and weakens the power of impurity, even if the subject being studied is not directly related to the specific sin.

Question: Is it possible to settle for only one of these solutions, for example by simply studying Torah with the aim that its spiritual benefit would remedy the Yetzer Hara?

Answer: No. The spiritual remedy is a byproduct of the commandment of Torah study, but it will not work if a person neglects



the specific and deliberate work. Just as the soul cannot exist in a body that is not nourished, so too the Torah will not help the "sick soul" without passionate Mussar study and focused deepening of the Halachot of the sin. "According to the measure of the illness, so is the measure of the remedy."

Question: Is a great Torah scholar more immune to falling?

Answer: On the contrary! "The greater a person is than his fellow, the greater his inclination." The sins of great people may appear small to those looking from the outside, but through the "telescope" (the intellect and the Torah), one sees that they are grave and immense. The destruction of the Second Temple due to "baseless hatred" is proof that hidden, internal sins can be more destructive than overt transgressions.



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HALACHIC Q&A

BY RABBI YOSEF ZVI RIMON - NASI, WORLD MIZRACHI

Question: A couple that has a baby boy feels that having a shalom zachor the Friday night before the brit milah will cause stress in the family and be too much for them. Can they decide not to have one?

Answer: A shalom zachor is a minhag, and therefore, if having one may cause some family stress, it should be fine not to have one. However, you may be able to do something small. The sefer Otzer HaBrit writes that there were places in the Galil that would go right after tefillah to the house of the newborn to say Mazal Tov, bringing some sweets but not sitting down. This may be a good option in this scenario: have ten people stop by after tefillah and give out some cake or sweets. But even this is not necessary.

Question: If we are making Shabbat early, can we also start our meal early?

Answer: The Or Zarua writes that because kiddush is supposed to be said at the place of the meal, once we know that kiddush is allowed to be said early, it must be that the meal can be eaten early as well (see Tosfot and Rosh on Pesachim 99b).

The Sefer Chasidim says that if one does start their meal early, they should make sure to eat a kezayit of bread after nightfall to be yotzei the mitzvah of seudah.

The Mishneh Berurah (267:5) paskens that one can finish their meal even before nightfall, but l'chatchilah they should eat a kezayit after nightfall. This is the accepted psak.

Question: Can one use a monitor for a child on Shabbat? Is there a difference if it is a video or sound monitor?

Answer: If the monitor is turned on before Shabbat, it can be used on Shabbat whether it is video or sound. Adults near the monitor can speak normally; however, they should make sure not to speak with the intention of being heard through the system.

If the monitor was not turned on before Shabbat and there is a medical need (or even a safek of medical need), it can be turned on with a shinui (such as using the back of your finger).

Question: What bracha is made on vegetables grown disconnected from the ground through hydroponics?

Answer: At first glance, it seems that shehakol should be made because they are not growing from the ground, just like mushrooms (Nedarim 55b).

The Chayei Adam understood this way and rules that a shehakol is made on all vegetables grown in a non-perforated pot (atzitz she'eino nakuv).

Rav Ovadya Yosef writes to make ha'adama if something was grown in a non-perforated pot, but shehakol if it was grown in water (Shu"t Yechave Da'at).

Many poskim, however, understand that a mushroom is shehakol because it grows in the air. Anything which normally grows from the ground should therefore be ha'adama. Accordingly, ha'adama would be said on hydroponic vegetables if that vegetable generally grows from the ground (Shevet HaLevi; also quoted as the opinion of the Chazon Ish).

Sprouts grown through hydroponics should be shehakol because they generally grow in water (Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach,

quoted in Vezot HaBerachah).

Question: Can I use a salt shaker which has rice in it on Shabbat?

Answer: Some poskim are machmir not to use these because the shaker separates the salt from the rice (quoted in the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein).

Nevertheless, in practice this is permissible. This is because the function of the holes is primarily to spread the salt, and the separation only happens as a result (Az Nedabru).

Additionally, Rav Shlomo Zalman (quoted in the footnotes of Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah) reasoned that because the separation happens immediately, this is not considered a kli with regard to the laws of borer.

Question: Is there a basis for men wearing two head coverings?

Answer: In the Gemara, Rishonim, Shulchan Aruch, and poskim, two coverings are not mentioned. However, there are Hasidic figures who saw value in it — two "encirclings" (mekifin).

For example, in the Imrei Emes on Parashat Beshalach:

"It says: 'Cover your head so that the fear of Heaven will be upon you.' Therefore, Hasidim cover their heads with two coverings, because there are two kinds of awe: higher awe (yirah ila'ah) and lower awe (yirah tata'ah)."

Also, see in the book Minhag Yisrael Torah, Siman 2, section 6.

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- 1 Sivan | Manny Dalfen, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his father, Morris Dalfen z"l
- 2 Sivan | Gerald Bernstein, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his mother, Phylis Bernstein z"l (Chaya Faiyge bas Yosef Halevi)
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- 23 Sivan | Kamal Gabbay, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his mother, Muzli Gabbay z"l



Healthy Boundaries



Eitan is exhausted in class – again! “That’s enough,” he decides, “no more late nights.”



But he gets too carried away playing – again!



While everyone else is really productive during the day, Eitan is struggling...



Eitan’s friend offers to help. They make a schedule together.



This time, Eitan keeps to the plan. He’s focuses on balancing his work and some fun, and goes to sleep on time.



The boundaries Eitan kept to really paid off!!!

In our parasha, we learn about the Nazir – who takes an oath to refrain from certain things like wine or becoming *tameh* for a certain period of time. The Nazir teaches that sometimes, choosing a healthy limit can help us grow stronger and become our best selves. Judaism does not teach that holiness means “the stricter, the better.” Rather, it values self-control, self-awareness, and thoughtful choices - knowing what boundaries help us use our talents, choices, and freedom in the best possible way.