



OUR VOGUE

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אונזער זעץ

There was a chassid who, whenever he was approached with the request for a donation for charity, would stick his hand into his pocket and take out a few coins. Then, muttering “just a minute . . .,” he would again dig into his pocket and come up with another few coins.

Someone asked him why he has this unusual habit of giving in two installments: “Why can’t you take out the full sum you want to give at once?”

“Every act of charity is a victory over our selfish nature,” replied the chassid. “I just can’t resist the opportunity to score two victories for the price of one.”

They say we should enjoy the process of doing a mitzvah and we should perform the mitzvos with generosity and an open heart.

I confess I sometimes find the mitzvah of tzedaka hard to enjoy: When someone rings my bell, I give him some bills, sometimes less, sometimes more. Invariably though, I close the door and begin to fret – did I give him too little? Did I give him too much? That fellow was “interesting-looking,” how do I know he’s not going to spend it on drugs? And how do I know any of these people with their hands stretched out are not swindlers who have stashed thousands of people’s charity dollars in a bank account or under a mattress. Then again -- maybe I didn’t give enough? People who knock on the door and ask for help for a sick relative, for

rent, for a wedding -- how many doorbells are they going to have to ring to collect that massive amount? Occasionally I’m overcome with pangs of compassion and I run after them to stuff a few more bills into their outstretched hands.

“This is ridiculous,” I decided one day. “Mitzvos are meant to be done joyfully.” I had a little talk with myself and decided that it’s better to be judged above for being too generous than for grudging giving. Let G-d take care of justice in His world – I’ll take care of my charity responsibilities. “Just be generous,” I concluded my self-talk – “give an extra dollar or five – you won’t regret it.”

Often it doesn’t cost a penny to be generous. I passed an elderly woman the other day. She was leaning on a walker as an aide walked beside her. Every step she took required focus and effort, yet she sported a bright, cheerful demeanor. I couldn’t help but smile at her, and compliment her, “Your cheerfulness is brightening up the street!” She stopped and told me, in a shaky yet clear voice, “My mother-in-law would say, ‘What does it cost you to smile? Es kust nisht kein gelt (it cost nothing) and it makes people happy.’ A good word and a smile changes a person’s day. It’s so easy to be generous.” So yes, be generous with your smile – you won’t regret it.

Have you ever practiced generosity with clothing? We’re always looking for people who could use the clothing we no longer need. Why should good clothing go to waste when someone might benefit from them? After all, clothing is an expensive commodity. I remember checking into

a young lady who was suggested for an eligible young man. I was told the young lady buys a new wardrobe every year. Now that sounded disconcerting. Was she going to be a high maintenance wife? Then I heard the full story. While she was in seminary in Israel a local classmate was getting married, and our compassionate young lady, realizing the kallah had no money to buy the things she needed, gave her practically all her good clothes – including her favorite Shabbos outfits. Naturally, when she returned to the States for Pesach she had to replace her depleted wardrobe. Luckily for her mother she lived near some great malls. The same scenario repeated itself her second year abroad. Was this high maintenance behavior or noble generosity?

Could I do that? It’s admittedly a hard act to follow. But I thought of another way to be generous with my clothing. Not with the clothing I’m giving away, but with the clothing I keep. I’ve been struggling with my skirt lengths these days; some of them hover on the borderline. Generosity can take many different forms.

It’s nice to know that our generosity doesn’t end with that one specific act. We give a little and Hashem gives a lot. Our few inches go a long, long way.

Give an extra dollar – with a smile.

Give a smile – it’s priceless yet doesn’t cost a cent.

Give another inch. Be generous.

EDITORIAL BY GITTY STOLIK
Author of *It’s Okay to Laugh, Seriously*
Best selling book by Mosaica/Feldheim



FACING FORWARD

What could be more dissimilar than coals and pearls? And yet, the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson used these two as metaphors for learning Chassidus. The first one is black and sooty, the other light and lustrous. Coals are mined from the underground, natural pearls are extracted from the oceans and seas. Coals provide light and warmth which are necessities. Pearls and jewelry, on the other hand are non-essential, luxury items; we can survive without them. (I'm not sure how well marriages could survive without jewelry!)

Why does the Rebbe offer two metaphors? Would one of these not suffice? The two metaphors address two historic periods:

When Chassidus was introduced by the Baal Shem Tov, people were suspicious. If we managed without Chassidus since Matan Torah, why introduce something new at this point in history? The metaphor of coals is a response to these skeptics. The tempest-tossed Jewish people, having endured tragic upheavals, were broken, barely surviving. They needed something to revive them and restore their vitality. Coals provide light and warmth. That was what the yidden sorely needed – light, warmth and vitality. And that's what Chassidus offers. It was a metaphor appropriate to that time.

Today we are ready to tap into the second metaphor. We are like a kallah about to meet her choson under the chupah. We are on the threshold of Geulah. It's time to get our jewelry out of the safe. Now is the time to be adorned with our finest pearls and jewelry. As the Rebbe points out, when we're at home by ourselves we don't need jewelry, "b'shaas aber mehn darf zich shtelen lifnei hamelech..." we are preparing to present ourselves to the King. Standing before a choson and a king I could use a nice new piece of jewelry, don't you think?

When I was a school-age youngster, mini-skirts were quite the rage. My contemporaries and I tried to find longer skirts, but our standards had definitely eroded – we were quite satisfied if our skirts barely reached the knee. I was seated in the front row in my eighth-grade graduation picture, oblivious to the

fact that my knees were exposed. Thankfully, our yearbook "censors" filled in the gap with black marker.

I remember that we debated the halacha with our teachers. What exactly is considered "till the knee," as the halacha expresses it? The lengths appeared outlandishly long to us, but that did not make them kosher. We were like the chassid who came to the Rebbe Rashab and asked, "What's the big deal if one walks four amos (cubits) without washing negel vasser?" The Rebbe answered, "Because you did so, that is why you are asking such a question."

Years later, from the safe vantage point of the mid-calf-length era, my children looked back at my school pictures with pointed wonder. "How is it possible that you wore skirts like those?" In retrospect I wondered -- why didn't

we have our clothing sewn, or at least altered -- seamstresses weren't that expensive back then. If there was anything my contemporaries and I would do differently given a second chance, it would be that; or so I thought... Until shorter skirts crept back into fashion...

In all fairness, considering the circumstances of that mini-skirt era, we were doing our best. Most were survivors, people rising from the ashes of mass destruction. Russian-Jewish immigrants had the additional burden of having had scant, if any yeshiva education through decades of persecution. Yiddishkeit, for many, was being practically re-invented. It is my belief that the One Above considered every mitzvah in those times a precious offering.

Decades later, Yiddishkeit has blossomed. We have yeshivos of every stripe, kosher food galore, an explosion of Torah knowledge. But the best part of the time we live in, is that we no longer live facing backward, in the shadows of the past. Now we are facing forward, with joy, preparing to meet the choson, the King. Now is the time to be putting on our pearls, to be looking our very best.

We have made gratifying progress since then. We're better off than we ever were. And thank G-d we're getting a second chance at those skirts.

We are like a kallah about to meet her choson under the chupah. We are on the threshold of Geulah. It's time to get our jewelry out of the safe. Now is the time to be adorned with our finest pearls and jewelry.

BECAUSE THEY CHEERED ME ON

Endorsement and enthusiasm are the most meaningful and effective gifts any parent and educator can give to a child.

“I had surely picked the worst Shabbos to begin,” Jennifer tells of her first Shabbos-keeping attempt. She was young, barely-teen, and peer pressure from her Hebrew day school friends prompted her to announce, one Friday afternoon, “Daddy, I think I’m going to keep Shabbos this week!” To her chagrin, her family had picked just that Friday night to go to a restaurant she loved and meet up with family friends, her favorites. But they didn’t hassle her. “Sure, go ahead. Make yourself a sandwich. We’ll be back later.”

So Jennifer stayed home, alone. She foraged the pantry, found some chips and 7-Up and considered her options. Maybe she’d watch TV. No, TV is not allowed on Shabbos. Practice piano? No again. So she flipped through some magazines lying around the house and imagined her family having the best time at the restaurant, without her. And so passed what were easily the two most boring and lonely hours of her life. She decided she had been a bit rash in her commitment, and hopefully next week she could join her family in a Friday night outing to make up for the one she’d missed.

Later that evening she told her parents she was backing out of Shabbos observance. “In two hours? Had you told me after you tried out this Shabbos idea for a month that you gave up, I would have respected your decision, but two hours, Jennifer? Come on.”

Shabbos morning, she stayed in bed. She heard the blare of the playoffs on TV, the nonstop ringing of the phone (and her mother’s apology to many callers that Jennifer was not going to be available all day), and the comings and goings of her parents as they ran errands. “If I went downstairs, I’d do more of...nothing. So why bother?” But hunger finally propelled her from her room. Coming down, she found two bags on the dining room table. One bag held a bottle of grape juice and a package of six rolls. The other held a white gift box. She lifted the cover and parted the tissue paper to reveal a pink and tan argyle sweater outfit. It was modest from collar to knee. “Paris couture it was not. I can’t even say it was my style, yet it was the most beautiful gift I ever received.”

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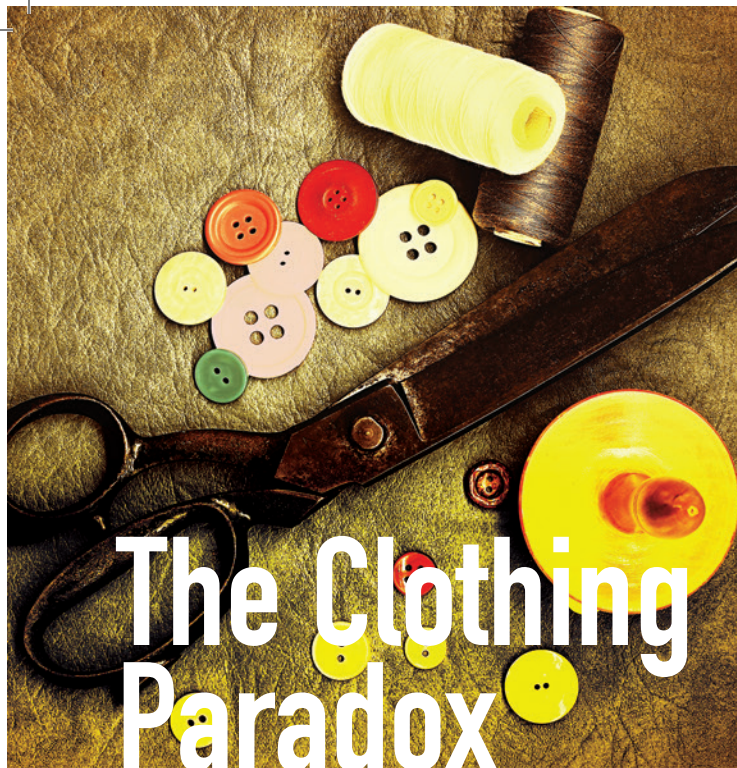
To her parents’ credit, they understood that someone living this life would need to look the part. Their gift cheered her on. Generosity takes different forms. It can be a readiness to notice, delight in, and give importance to the smallest of changes. Jennifer’s commitment to Shabbos would still have its ups and downs, but eventually she became completely observant.

Be generous in your endorsements, mother. Zhaliveh’t night (don’t scrimp)! Your enthusiasm can take your child’s tznius perception from failure to success— without a word ever being said.

(Adapted from an article in Family First by Jennifer Goren, 22 Cheshvan 5776)

One of the best ways to protect our children’s observance is to gird them with love and joy and remember that while “actions speak louder than words,” how we feel about Yiddishkeit is paramount. Feelings are contagious and their unspoken words will make the loudest noise.

Somehow the heart moves us more easily than the mind. And for better or worse, most people seek happiness before they seek truth.



The Clothing Paradox

It seems the key words involved in Tznius are contradictions in terms, garbed in layers of meaning. No wonder that the ideals of tznius are so elusive; it is a topic shrouded in mystery.

The Hebrew word for clothing is *begeid*. The word *begeid* shares a relationship with *boged*, a traitor. Getting dressed seems a respectable enough endeavor, but it may just be a betrayal of the truth about ourselves. Some people try to remake themselves or cover up their insecurities by their external presentation. A girl dresses up carefully for the date, leading the boy on to believe she's always going to look like that. Who would have thought to ask the ragged-looking fellow for a donation? And yet, I've heard it told that a seeming down-and-out'er has been discovered to be wealthy enough to sponsor half the building campaign! Clearly, clothing can be a tricky business. **Is clothing an authentic expression of who we truly are or a deceptive veneer?**

The Hebrew word for coat is *me'il*. The word *me'il* also derives from the word *mo'al*, to violate. But paradoxically, a coat seems to have the very opposite purpose; it serves as cover and protection from [personal] exposure.

The only word that does hold out some logic is the word *lvosh* which enclothes two words: *lo vosh*, without shame or embarrassment. That is correct. Our clothing saves us from the shame of exposure. And yet, *lo vosh*, there was no shame for Adam and Chava before they tasted of the fruit of *eitz hadaas*, when they wore no clothing at all. After the event, *lo vosh* — we avoid shame only with suitable attire.

Let There Be Light!

Adam and Chava's bodies before the sin of *eitz hadaas* were like the glass casing of a light bulb. A bulb is composed of two parts, a glass exterior and an inner filament. When the light is on, they appear as one entity. Before *eitz hadaas*, the body allowed the soul light to shine through in its full glory, and every part of the body expressed a different aspect of the soul. There was no dichotomy between body and soul, no hazardous negative energies interfering. But those days are long gone.

How do we access light post-*eitz hadaas*? Hashem showed the way when He clothed Adam and Chava in *ketonot* of *or* (leather, hide). The word for leather is the same as the word for light: *or*, except that the first is spelled with an *ayin* and the second with an *aleph*. When the *or*, (the leather, or garment) covers a body properly, it allows the other *or* (the light within) to shine through.

The Jewish way is not about covering; it is about expressing. Tznius in dress is a vehicle of truth, a pure form of self-expression. Any deviation is a betrayal of our true essence, and an act of self-deceit. This is not who we truly are. An identity crisis! Take a stand: Who is the real me?

The laws of tznius make it simple and possible to be balanced, authentic and well-adjusted. When we wear *Ketonot-Or* Couture we're wearing a *begeid*, but we're not a *boged*. We wear a *me'il* but we're not *mo'al*. We put on our *lvosh*, and we have nothing to be ashamed about.

You want to express yourself? Cover up!

To wrap up the clothing paradox: When we expose the body we repress the soul. When we cover the body we expose who we truly are. The light of the body must not eclipse the light of the neshama — the real me.
The combination must be just right.

(Points were extracted from a shiur by Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson, Parshas Vayeishev)

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לעיני האשה החשובה הצנועה
מנוחה בת רי יצחק עייה כייג אדר תשע"ג

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