

Welcome! We will be learning from the English edition of the sefer *Modesty: An Adornment for Life*, by Rabbi Pesach Eliyahu Falk.

This learning series is sponsored by Amy and Dani Gross and family in memory of Gimpel Mordechai Daniel ben Sara Eta, Rabbi Motty Katz. May his neshama have an Aliyah in merit of the learning that the Gross family has made possible!

1.

In Torah law, the need for women to dress pleasantly and tastefully is fully recognized and even greatly encouraged. Concerning the duties of a husband to his wife, Chazal say, “He loves her as much as he loves himself and honors her even more than himself” (Sanhedrin 76b and Yevamos 62b). The Rishonim explained that “honoring her” refers to buying her fine clothes and jewelry. As far as clothing is concerned, her needs take precedence over his, since her need for pleasant and tasteful clothes considerably exceeds his.

A husband buys his wife a new garment or ornament before Yom Tov to enable her to fulfill the mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov – rejoicing on Yom Tov. He cannot, however, fulfill his personal mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov by purchasing new clothes for himself (Orach Chayim 529:2). This is once again because the need for fine clothes and jewelry and the great pleasure derived from them are intrinsically feminine. The Torah is only too happy to permit a woman to do that which is essential to her fulfillment as it knows that no harm will come to kedushas Yisroel as a result of her dressing in such a manner.

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2.

Thus, tznius does not deny the woman her natural requirements and far be it from Yiddishkeit to prevent a woman having one of her innate and instinctive needs fulfilled. However, whilst she has a legitimate need to have a pleasant and regal appearance, there is no necessity for her to dress in a way that attracts the attention of passers-by. While she has a need to appear pretty and graceful to her husband, family, and friends, she should have no urge to exhibit herself for all to admire her.

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3.

When a Bas Yisroel dresses in a manner that is modest and graceful, the purity of her refined being, her good *middos* and her *Yiras Shomayim* shine through. They give her a very special *chein* with which *Bnos Yisroel* are blessed, as Chazal say, “Rabbi Yishmael said, ‘Jewish girls are particularly good looking.’” (Nedarim 66a)

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4.

A Bas Yisroel has deep inner qualities (i.e. the way she thinks and feels about things) and also possesses considerable outer chein. Her deep inner qualities originate from the pure neshama that is within her. With these qualities she will nurture a family that will be worthy of being considered a further link in the golden chain of Klal Yisroel. Her considerable outer chein is typical for Bnos Yisroel, and is once again closely related to her pure and beautiful neshama, as the exterior reflects the interior.

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5.

The attention the Eishes Chayil pays to her clothes and general appearance reveals the inner satisfaction she derives from her great mission in life: to enable herself, her husband and her children to realize their full potential – to the honor of Hashem and His holy Torah.

(P.S.I can't tell if these are pants or a skirt. Let's say skirt.)

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6.

...There are three basic modes of non-tznius'dik dress – inadequate dress, ostentatious dress and casual, improper dress.

- Inadequate dress is ossur because it can cause men to see parts of the female body that must be covered.
- Ostentatious dress attracts undue attention to the woman or girl.
- Casual improper dress exhibits a lack of self-esteem and self-respect, whilst tznius entails being aware of the importance of the Bas Yisroel and ensuring that she is properly protected.

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7.

...It should be noted that in the times of Chazal, when the world was far less corrupt than it is today and Klal Yisroel was on a much higher standard than nowadays, women had the opposite attitude to nowadays. They considered flared garments, with plenty of spare cloth, to be far more elegant and graceful than tight-fitting, slim-line clothes. This is mentioned in the Gemara (Kesubos 48a) where Chazal say that a husband is obliged to buy his wife the types of clothes she needs. On this Rashi, s.v. Lfum she'eiroh, writes "Elderly women find the weight of extra cloth a problem and therefore cannot wear very flared clothes. On the other hand young women are not disturbed by the weight of the cloth and the husband must therefore supply them with wide, flared clothes which enhance their beauty."

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8.

In Jewish law the dress or skirt must cover and also screen-off completely the upper sections of the legs. ...When describing the tznius of the Bas Yisroel the verse writes "Your thigh is obscured and disguised" (Shir HaShirim 7:2) which means much more than just "covered." Hence the complete thigh bone, which ends at the lower end of the knee... must be hidden behind a loose skirt so that it is obscured.

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9.

Due to her difficult circumstances, Ruth was forced to gather fallen stalks from a field in which male workers were harvesting. Ruth dressed and conducted herself with perfect tznius at all times. However, now that she was in a situation where she might be observed (especially as she was exceptionally good-looking, as stated in the Midrash on the verse Ruth 2:3), she went far beyond the normal halachos of tznius and even covered her hands. The Midrash (Ruth Zutah 2:6) records what the lad said to Boaz in response to his query about who Ruth was: "She has been with us for quite a few days but we have neither seen any of her fingers or toes nor have we heard her speak, and we do not know whether she is dumb or capable of speech." Ruth, in her great piety, practiced a level of tznius that was well beyond the letter of the law, so as to maintain her purity in this unhealthy situation.

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10.

The Eishes Chayil does not seek excuses to free herself from what she is capable of doing. Realizing the merit of doing mitzvot and the will of Hashem in general, she tries to achieve as much as possible. The verse says in Eishes Chayil, "She girds her loins with strength and she invigorates her arms" (Mishlei 31:17). A person "girds his loins" so he can walk swiftly without hindrance from the clothes he is wearing (see Rashi, Shemos 12:13) and invigorates his arms before undertaking a physical job that is somewhat taxing. The Eishes Chayil seeks no excuses. She therefore dresses in a way that her clothes will allow her to undertake the venture efficiently and she flexes her arms so that she can accomplish whatever is in her reach and needs seeing to.

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11.

New fashions that are technically kosher, but very different to what was worn until now, are eye-catching and hence unrefined. Such clothes attract considerable attention and wearing them is accordingly an infringement on modesty – the insignia of the Bas Yisroel. These garments might, however, eventually become suitable. This is once the fashion has become widespread and the garment is no longer unusual and eye-catching. Once this has happened a Jewish woman may wear it, provided the garment is tnius'dik – see Mekoros 58:1-3.

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12.

A woman who is a tznuva is a strong person. She has the strength of character not to be caught in the shackles of worldly pleasures which deter a person from doing right. Her inner being is attached to all that Yiddishkeit stands for and she therefore does not succumb to the hollow and vain enticements of the world at large. She is not blinded into wearing unsuitable garments by the urge to project an elegant image. Instead, she proudly appears in full Jewish dress, thinking to herself that for nothing in the world would she forsake even an iota of that which is her most cherished asset – her tznius.

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Exploring Emes: In what areas of life do you feel strength of conviction? In what areas may you be following others without as much inner drive?

13.

When a woman or girl is determined and persists in living and conducting herself totally according to the guidelines of Torah she is a deserving recipient for the contented and rich life promised to those who steadfastly cling to the Torah – “Torah is a tree of life to those who cleave to it in spite of difficulties; those to who ensure its fulfillment shall be happy and fortunate” (Mishlei 3:18). This woman will eventually realize that the choice of friends and society that she made twenty-five years ago and the special women she has chosen to admire and emulate, ultimately gave her the husband she has and the home she runs. She would not exchange them for anything in the world. The art is to foresee this happy and intensely satisfying result while still far back at the cross-roads!

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Exploring Emes: Whom do you emulate, and why?

14.

A woman or girl must make every effort to avoid befriending those who are out of touch with tznius. She must ensure that she remains far from their society to avoid being influenced... by them. Instead, she should strive and make every endeavor to belong to the finest and noblest group of women possible. If she successfully strikes up one or two close friendships with such women, this could prove to be a life-long anchorage for her and her family in the realm of kedushas Yisroel.

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Exploring Emes: Which of your friendships are the most influential in your life?

15.

Even when a person of the highest morality sees misconduct – and is sincerely disgusted by what meets his eyes – he is nevertheless detrimentally affected. The “power of sight” is so great that an impression is made even though the person knows it is evil and he utterly despises it. In Devarim (29:16) Hashem warns the Jewish people not to be influenced by the avoda zarah they will encounter in Eretz Yisroel. In this context Hashem says: “You shall see their repulsive and revolting idols etc. Beware not to be drawn to serve them etc.” It seems strange that people who view avoda zarah as repulsive and revolting should be drawn to it and be in danger of serving it. The Brisker Rav, Maran HaGaon Ha Rav Yitzchak Zev Soleveitchik zt'l, explains that this is quite understandable when knowing the intense power of sight. A person can see something that truly disgusts him and nevertheless be so deeply affected by it that he is eventually drawn to it.

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Exploring Emes: Was there ever a fashion that you disliked at first, and then came to like? Why did you change your mind?

16.

Tznius is a very exacting art. In public, tznius calls for apparel that projects refinement and pleasantness, whilst at home, tznius calls for a special chein and when necessary even beautification. This is in fact typical of every midah (trait). Different circumstances call for different reactions. To be harsh when one should be kind and forgiving, or to be soft and accepting when one should be strict and unyielding, are both wrong. The same Avraham Avinu who in his great kindness always brought the poor into his house, understood that for the sake of one of his sons (Yitzchak) he must take his other son (Yishmael) and send him out of the house! So too, tznius will sometimes call for dressing in a way that is not eye-catching whilst at other times calls for a woman to dress in a way that is very appealing.

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Exploring Emes: How do you decide when and how to dress up? Do you dress up to meet expectations? When do your values suggest that you should dress up?

17.

Many skirts are made of non-absorbent man-made fabrics that become charged with static electricity. While walking, the material rubs against a nylon slip or the body, and this generates electricity, which in turn causes them to cling. Due to this, as the wearer walks, the skirt will sometimes cling to the body in a way that the shape of the upper leg is evident... Accordingly, all such items should be rinsed in fabric conditioner. Many women, sensibly, rinse every family wash in fabric conditioner to ensure that this problem does not arise.

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Exploring Emes: To what truths do you “cling?” What, aside from your clothing, do you hope does not cling to you?

18.

When the Rambam describes the conduct of a Talmid Chacham he first writes, “Talmidei chachamim conduct themselves with very considerable tznius.” He then goes on to say, “He should not wear clothes worn by royalty such as clothes made of gold or purple as they would cause people to look at him. He should also not wear the undignified clothes of the poor as they shame the wearer project him in a bad image. Rather he should wear standard clothes that are pleasant-looking.” (Rambam Hilchos Deios 5:9) Accordingly, if a woman or girl dresses in an undignified manner she does an injustice to the status of a Jewish daughter.

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Exploring Emes: What do you consider “too casual?”

Casual Friday: Casual and comfy can look “put together.” Graceful clothing made of jersey material in refined colors allows plenty of room for movement and ease.

19.

Just as tefillin is identified by Torah as a “sign of allegiance” to Hashem (Devarim 6:8), so too, covering the arm in the correct manner is a “sign of allegiance” on the part of the girl and woman to the will of Hashem that kedusha should prevail amongst the Jewish people. Although other parts of the body are also covered, they are obvious necessities, called for by basic modesty and expected even from non-Jewish women. However, covering hair and the upper arm are acts of tznius done only by Jewish women, and are therefore “signs of allegiance” to Hashem.

These two forms of tznius are therefore very special – and fittingly correspond to the great mitzvah of tefillin of men. Both symbolize the fact that our intellect (the head) and physique (muscular part of the arm) are fully submitted to the will of Hashem.

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Exploring Emes: What are your feelings about covering your hair or your upper arms? Are your feelings affected by knowing that these mitzvos are analogous to tefillin?

19.

Concerning a King, the Torah writes that he must possess two Sifrei Torah, one for home use and one to accompany him when he goes out. So too, the Jewish woman or girl who is a Bas Melachim must possess two codes of law – a refined and cheerful dress for inside the home, with a refined and more regal manner of dress for when she goes out.

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Exploring Emes: In what ways does bright cheerful clothing reflect who you are? How is your identity evident in more formal, regal clothing?

20.

The neshama of the Bas Yisroel yearns for tznius and feels an inadequacy when it is absent. A visitor from the United States related the following wonderful way of strengthening our perception:

When she was a teenager her mother would tell her that when she was fully dressed and ready to go out, she should stop for a moment and think to herself how she would feel if when out on the street she would meet Rebbetzin Kaplan (the founder of the Beis Yaacov movement in America). If she knew she would feel fine and even be delighted at the chance encounter with such a choshuve person, she could rest assured she was dressed as a Bas Yisroel should be dressed.

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Exploring Emes: How do you judge when your appearance is just right?

21.

When a Talmid Chacham asked the Chazon Ish what he could do to ascend to a meaningful level of yiras shemayim, he gave him the following advice: “Fulfil mitzvos in their fullest detail. This is the one and only assured way of reaching the heights to which you aspire. Do not accept from anyone that there is another easier and quicker way to reach such perfection, since there is simply no other way” (see P’aer Hador, 3, page 11).

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Exploring Emes: What is particularly meaningful to you in Yiddishkeit? Have you set goals in this area?

22.

A person is aware at all times of the clothes he wears and is reminded by them of the allegiance that is implied by the clothes he wears. Consequently, when a woman or girl wears refined clothes they continuously remind her that she has undertaken to conduct herself in a way that fully preserves tznius. In contrast, when a woman or girl wears pritzus’dik clothes she is constantly reminded that self-beautification is of such paramount importance to her that she is willing to wear anything, even unrefined and pritzus’dik clothing, in order to look glamorous and gain admiration for her appearance.

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Exploring Emes: What glamorous or popular styles appeal to you? How do you feel when wearing them?

23.

...Tznius is a countermeasure to the attempts of the yetzer hara. This explains why, subsequent to the sin of Adam and Chava, mankind suddenly felt a need to be clothed (Breishis 3:7). Similarly, it is stated in the Gemara (Eruvin 100b) that the mitzvah of kisui sheirus, the obligation for married women to cover their hair – and the obligations of tznius in general – were given in direct response to the sin of Adam and Chava. The deeper meaning of this is that, as a consequence of the first sin committed by mankind, the yetzer hora, which had previously been man’s external enemy, now became an internal foe, interwoven with his emotions and feelings. With this, the passion for sin became far more formidable than it had previously been. To help withstand and overcome this greatly strengthened yetzer hora, Hashem Yisborach gave mankind an urge to be clothed and practice tznius in both dress and conduct...

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Exploring Emes: When have you felt the urge to keep something private? Did you feel that keeping matters private came from strength or, G-d forbid, from shame?

24.

The learning of Torah and the adherence to tznius have much in common. They are both constant, ongoing mitzvos which are observed in accordance with the person's appreciation of them. Just as there should be no boundary to a man's devotion to Torah, likewise there should be no end to striving towards more eidelkeit and tznius, at both an external and an internal level. The more these two great pillars of Yiddishkeit are cherished, the better they are kept. These efforts are well rewarded; they imbue the person with kedusha to enjoy Torah, tefilla, mitzvos, and good middos, and serve as a most effective antidote to the inroads the yetzer hora is constantly trying to make.

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Exploring Emes: Of what values are you aware at all times?

Casual Friday: Longer denim skirts can be styled attractively while remaining casual and comfortable. (Hint on comfort: choose the sneakers!)

25.

...Women have their own form of "inoculation" against nisyonos which is the equivalent of Torah learning. This is the wonderful trait of tznius, which when kept properly is all encompassing. It gives so much kedusha and strength to the woman that she is capable of outwitting the yetzer hora and withstanding its relentless pressure.

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Exploring Emes: Recall a time when you outwitted the yetzer hora. Where did you find such strength?

26.

Just as the yetzer hora does everything within its power to interrupt a person learning, or make him abandon learning altogether, so, too, the yetzer hora tries its best to deter a woman from tznius. His greatest accomplishment would be to make her abandon tznius in dress altogether. The yetzer hora knows that Torah learning is the fuel which ignites and drives the man's neshama. He therefore tries desperately to disrupt it and

thereby prevent the person absorbing this life-giving substance into his being. Similarly, he is aware that tznius infuses tahara deeply into the woman's being. He therefore does everything in his power to hinder the woman from true adherence to its halachos.

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Exploring Emes: When can you sense purity (tahara) in your life?

27.

When buying a dress or skirt for a girl who has not yet grown to her full height, one should try if possible to ensure that the garment has a deep hem. This will allow the garment to be lengthened as she grows taller and the need to lengthen the garment will arise. When such a hem is not available, there is a danger that the girl will continue wearing the garment even once she has grown taller and it no longer fits her.

The expense and bother involved in obtaining a replacement item, plus the attachment the girl might have to this particular dress or skirt may well blind her, and even her parents, as to the inadequacy of the garment, which is a fault that will gradually become worse and worse. Since the extra hem could make all the difference, it is of considerable advantage to procure it. When having a dress or outfit made for such a girl, one should ensure that a substantial hem is left to be let out in the future.

Apart from the advantage from the point of view of tznius, it is also far better for the education of the girl that she wears her clothes for quite some time, rather than be regularly buying new clothes. See 3:F about the role histapkus (being contented with little) has on the overall chinuch of a child.

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Exploring Emes: What is your ideal amount of clothing? What makes it ideal for you?

27.

Man has a spiritual inner core surrounded by a physical outer shell. The spiritual inner core is the holy neshama which is within each and every one of us. We refer to it each morning in the brachs of Elokai neshama, when we say, "the neshama that you have put within me is pure." The physical outer shell is the body which is a sanctuary for the neshama as long as it is to be in this world. It is the duty of a person to ensure that his body serves the neshama and enriches it with Torah and good deeds, rather than causing it distress at being kept in this world for no valid purpose.

True beauty exists when the purity of the inner neshama shines through the outer shell – the body. The serene facial expression of the person bears witness to the quality of the neshama and the purity of the body, since for the light of the neshama to penetrate the body, the neshama must be radiant and the body unsoiled and translucent, allowing the rays of the neshama to shine through. Hence when the Torah tells us about the outstanding beauty of our Imahos, the true meaning of this praise is that both the inner and the outer being of these great women were of the most exceptional standard.

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Exploring Emes: What does your appearance show about who you are?