

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

If someone is wearing knee-length pants, may he serve as *shliach tzibur*? Does this depend on whether he is also wearing socks or stockings? Does it depend on the quality of the pants, the clientèle of the congregation, or the accepted norms for dressing locally?

The issues:

- A) *Tznius*, modesty in dress
- B) *Velo yir'eh becha ervas davar*, dressing for reciting holy things
- C) *Hikon likras elokecha*, dressing for *davening* and for *shul*
- D) *Kevod hatzibur*, additional requirements for a *shliach tzibur*

A) *Tznius*

Tznius comes under several different categories. It involves *busha*, shame or self-respect. A person must not feel immune to shame, especially when such feelings will permit him to act accordingly. One who feels no shame might feel comfortable acting somewhat like an animal, or in ways that others might view as animal-like. People who have no self respect are suspect when it comes to violating *mitzvos* that others refrain from due to their shame. One should need no outside motivation to follow the commandments. However, some of us need motivation, and a common motivation is the shame of getting caught having violated something. Those who dress immodestly in public may not be accepted as witnesses. It is assumed that if they were offered money to testify falsely, they would not be so concerned that they might get caught. In reality, the concept exists for a Jew even in the innermost private chambers, where no-one would be able to see him. Hashem is always present! The dignified human also feels self-respect in private.

The source for the shame concept is the story of Adam and Chava. When they sinned, and came to the realization that they were naked, they girded themselves with fig-leaves. This was considered the bare(!) minimum, covering no more than the most embarrassing parts. They hid, shameful of themselves and each other, in private, and even of Hashem. Hashem then made them cloaks to clothe them. This is considered the paradigm example of Hashem's kindness, as the *malbish arumim*. Evidently, the shame of even partial nakedness is considered extremely important. [An additional factor included in that kindness, according to some, is that clothing protect from the elements.]

Tznius is also a function of modesty in general. One should not want to show off and attract attention. This is often a sign of arrogance and haughtiness. Rather one should want to remain inconspicuous. By dressing modestly, one can retain a low profile.

Tznius is also a function of one's self-protection against improper behavior with regard to other temptations. By dressing certain ways, one invites certain laxities and attracts others to interact improperly or indecently. Even if the dresser is himself uninterested in this, his presence can be a catalyst for it. Sometimes this is openly provocative,

and at others it is passively dropping one's guard. The Torah always refers to immoral relationships as exposure, because this is the first part of the act. Thus, though one is not liable until completing it, the exposure alone symbolizes the entire disgusting behavior pattern. The main Scriptural sources for this are three *mitzvos*: (i) The Torah commands us not to stray after the sights of our eyes. This refers to sights that can lead to indecent thoughts and acts. This *mitzvah* is left very much to the person to implement according to his own individual sensitivities. (ii) The Torah forbids cross-dressing between men and women. According to many, this is based on the potential pitfalls that can result from intermingling of sexes that would be the automatic result of cross-dressing. This is also seen as an example of how one should implement his own safeguards in this area, according to his own set of temptations. (iii) The Torah forbids coming close to the people with whom relationships are forbidden. "Coming close" is a term that leaves room for interpretation. While there are specific acts that are listed by the Rabbis that are included in this, such as touching, gazing at certain exposed areas, or even a woman's attractive clothes, and listening to a female singing voice, the Rabbis add that the Torah intentionally left the term vague. One may not pretend that the Rabbinical specific pre-temptations do not apply to him, but must also know which additional safeguards he needs to implement himself. Included in these is the self-control engendered by dressing modestly, as opposed to the 'free and easy' feelings brought on by not dressing this way.

Acceptable dress often depends on the culture. Some cultures may not be used as guides, due to their decadent nature. Following the fashions of these is forbidden under the prohibition, *lo saasu mikol hatoaivos ha'aile*, an appendix to the list of forbidden relationship behaviors. This includes such behaviors and manners of dress that might not be expressly forbidden, but can readily be understood to be provocative.

Most cultures have their own minimum standards of decency. In general, there are levels of acceptable norms of dress. Dressy clothing is worn for ceremonial or party type events and occasions. Often these do not automatically meet the standards mentioned, and caution must be taken not to drop one's guard. Formal or dignified wear is worn in unfamiliar company, especially in the presence of dignitaries or in important work situations. Casual or informal wear is worn in the company of friends. When no-one else is around, such as in the privacy of one's home when company is not expected, and certainly in the bedroom, little attention is given to the presentability of one's attire. To wear such 'bed' clothing in public, even if no skin is exposed, is inappropriate. It will inevitably lead others to think of its usual use and setting. Likewise, one should not wear undergarments or swim-wear in company, no matter how fully they cover the body. It can create an atmosphere of intimacy. However, some of these norms are also dependent on the culture. For example, both the *Tanach* and the Talmud consider barefoot to be the most humiliating type of exposure. [Some stores post a rule that they will not serve someone barefoot!] Yet, the poskim maintain that in places where this is normal, one may walk around barefoot. Nowadays, a similar rule might be applied to walking around without socks. In some places it is considered rude and unclad, whilst others consider it normal in warm weather, even in decent company.

In addition, the nature of one's work often requires a certain mode of dress. This might be to protect from workplace dirt or dangers, or to maintain a uniform. In terms of

respectability, such clothing is usually acceptable outside the work-place as well. There might be some situations when it is inappropriate outside its normal setting. There might also be cases where the attire is considered decent only in its intended environment. If it is soiled or otherwise messy, it also raises the respectability issue. [See Beraishis 2:25 3:7 10 21 Noach 9:21 Acharai Mos 18:6 26 30 Kedoshim 20:17-18 15:39 Ki Saitzai 22:5 10, commentaries. Chinuch 188 387 542 543. Brochos esp. 20a 57b-58a 62a-b Shabbos 77b 113a-114a 118b 129a Taanis 14b Yevamos 63b Sotah 14a-b Kidushin 40b Baba Kama 86b 90b Baba Basra 57b Sanhedrin 26b, Poskim. Rambam Dayos 5:6 10 Aidus 11:5. Tur Sh Ar OC 1:1 2:1 6 CM 34:18, commentaries.]

B) Dressing for holy utterances

One must often recite *shema*, *brochos* and the like in the intimate privacy of the bedroom, or when one is not dressed for company of any kind. In one extreme case, one recites a *brocha* when immersing in a *mikveh*. At these times, there are minimum requirements for covering sensitive areas. This is based on a number of additional *mitzvos*. Specifically, there is a positive *mitzvah*, *vehaya machanecha kadosh*. Scripturally, this refers to a Jewish army. It actually has additional *mitzvos* known as *yad* and *yased*, designating a space to be used as a privy, outside the camp, and carrying a shovel to bury waste. It is extended to require that one does not relieve himself just anywhere, and specifically, that one keep certain disgusting things out of sight, especially when reciting holy utterances. One must be clean of all unclean issue adhering to his person or clothing. Linked to this is a negative *mitzvah*, *velo yir'eh becha ervas davar*, [Hashem] shall not see in you a bareness. This includes covering ones most private areas. The minimum requirement is to cover the private areas and to make a separation between the heart and the private areas. This applies even if one is covered by a sheet or a loose garment, but has nothing separating his heart from his privates. In less extreme cases, one should maintain a level of respect for the holy utterances that he will make. However, if one recited a *brocha* with minimal coverage, the poskim debate whether he should repeat the *brocha*. [See Yisro 20:23, Tetzaveh 28:42, Ki Saitzai 23:10-15. Brochos 22b-25a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 73-74, YD 200:1, commentaries.]

C) Hikon likras elokecha

For *tefilah* (*shemone esrai*) one must cover the entire length of the body as well, even in a pressing situation. Prayer directed to Hashem Himself is like addressing a king. The special awe requires extra respectful dress. This special attention on dress for *tefilah* is based on the verse, '*Hikon likras Elokecha Yisroel*, prepare [beautify yourself - *Rashi*] to meet your G-d, Yisroel.' (Amos 4:12) The Talmud describes conflicting practices. One should remove his cloak and wring his hands in supplication, and one should don his fanciest clothing. Some say that in times of crisis one should not wear his finest clothing. In times of calm one should dress his best.

Some manners of dress are acceptable in certain localities, even in the presence of a king or high dignitary, but are totally unacceptable in other locations. For example, the poskim say that where it is not the custom to appear before important people without socks, one must wear socks for *tefilah*. Some say this means wearing good quality socks and heeled shoes or sandals, unless one's clothing covers his feet. By implication, in hot regions where people do not wear socks, one may wear clothing that exposes his feet.

In modern society, an all powerful king is hard to imagine. It is possible to imagine a situation where one dresses to impress, such as for an important interview or meeting one's most important client. Appearing in a courtroom or before a great Torah sage are also cited as ways to measure acceptable norms for dress to satisfy *hikon*. In addition, one must dress the way he dresses outside the home, rather than in the casual manner he does at home. Thus, if one wears a hat or tie outside, he should wear them for *tefilah*. In addition, dressing formally inspires *tefilah*-appropriate feelings. [See Brochos 26a Shabbos 9b-10a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 91 183, commentaries. Chorev (Hirsch).]

D) Kevod hatzibur

In addition to the basic requirements of *tznius* and *hikon*, a *shliach tzibur* must follow the requirements of *kevod hatzibur*, respect for the congregation. This applies to any *shliach tzibur*, as he is seen as representing the larger *tzibur* of Israel. It is also viewed as *kevod shamayim*, respect for Hashem. The poskim debate whether the appointers, the local congregation, might be *mochel*, waive certain preferences. We follow the view that the *tzibur* has no right to forgo their honor and respect.

A *pochaiach* may not act as *shliach tzibur*. The poskim debate the meaning of *pochaiach*. It is either one whose sleeves are torn and whose arms are exposed, or whose legs are exposed. This means that assuming one may recite *tefilah* personally clothed this way, he may not act as *shatz*. He may also not be called to the Torah or recite *kadish*. However, if he needs to say *borchu* because he missed it, he may do so. Ideally, a *shatz* should have full length clothing. The Talmud gives the reason for disqualifying a *pochaiach* as *kevod tzibur*. Some, however, connect it to *ervah*. As *ervah*, it might be acceptable to follow local norms. As *kevod tzibur*, it is unacceptable.

Our question is whether knee-length pants, that are presentable and might be worn to impress, are acceptable or a *shatz*, at least occasionally. The question is whether locally acceptable norms also apply to *kevod hatzibur*, or whether they are only a function of *mechilah*. The poskim seem to have dealt with exactly such a case. They discuss one whose pants do not reach to the ground. The presumption is that in this culture people present themselves to dignitaries without socks. Furthermore, such short pants seem to be acceptable in the presence of dignitaries. Nonetheless, for a *shatz* socks are required that cover the entire exposed shins. [See Megillah 23a 24a-b Yuma 70a Sotah 39b Gitin 60a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar OC 53:6 13, commentaries, PMG/MZ8.]

In conclusion, the poskim require full length pants for a *shliach tzibur*. If one wears shorter pants, he must wear socks covering all exposed skin.

On the Parsha ... He does not look at iniquity in Yaakov, and He does not see trouble in Israel, for Hashem his G-d is with him and the endearing friendship of the King is within him. [23:21] This verse is one of the ten proclamations of Hashem's Kingship in the *Musaf* service of *Rosh Hashanah*. Why use a verse uttered by *Bilam*? Why use this verse at all? *Bilam* tried to look inside the Jewish way of life, to find trouble. He could not find it. The Jew feels Hashem's presence in his most private places. It is as though he feels like he is in the king's palace, when he is in his own bedchamber. The King is his close friend, and he behaves accordingly!

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