



גדר עולם  
WORLD'S fence

by  
The Chofetz Chayim זצ"ל

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## CONTENTS

Foreword .....	4
I. How Serious Is the Trespass .....	7
II. The Ban on Sacred Words .....	7
III. Serious Punishment Self-Imposed .....	8
IV. Seduction by the Evil Impulse .....	10
V. Further Seductions of the Evil Impulse .....	11
VI. The Husband's Duty of Admonition .....	13
VII. The Virtue of Modesty .....	20
VIII. The Father's Duty Towards His Child ..	22
Close of The Volume .....	25

## FOREWORD

As we contemplate the words of our Sages (of blessed memory), we discover that modesty in a woman is an outstanding trait, and that by virtue of this trait she is rewarded with children who shall become *talmidei chachamim*. Thus we find in the Gemara (*Yuma 47*):

The rabbis cited: Seven sons did Kamchis have, and all served in the high priesthood. The sages said to her: "What have you done to deserve this?" She said -to them: "Never in all my days did the rafters of my house see the plaits of my hair."

On the other hand, the trait of immodesty causes the birth of brazen children, heaven forbid.

In our sinfulness, the trait of modesty in our own day has been greatly breached. Especially with regard to exposing the hair of a married yeoman, we find that this matter is treated with abandon by women who go openly in the public eye with their hair uncovered. Nor do these women show any concern over exposing their arms. Moreover, our Sages have stated (*Brachos 24*) that if a handbreadth of a woman's body is exposed where it ought to be concealed, it is considered an indecency. Likewise the hair of a woman is also considered an indecency, and it is forbidden to say any sacred words in its presence.

Consequently, from this immodest practice, many harmful results ensue. In Jewish homes, many thousands of blessings and other holy words are uttered daily, and it is impossible to avoid saying these passages while the woman is present. Now we know that all blessings or other words of Torah, when properly said, bring a blessing and holiness upon Israel, as it is written: "In every place that I cause my name to be mentioned, I shall come to you and bless you." [According to the plain meaning of the passage, it applies to all words of Torah and to all places, and not necessarily to the time of the Sanctuary, as evident in *Brachos 6*

in the Gemara.] Also, they are a protection for Israel against all distress and affliction, as it is written: "For G-d your L-rd goes about in the midst of your camp to save you...and your camp shall be holy." At a time, however, when these words are said in the presence of an indecency -- heaven forbid -- it has already been written: "Nor shall any indecent thing be seen in your midst that He should turn away from you." Consequently, all such matters cause G-d to conceal his face from Israel-- heaven forbid.

We find furthermore, in the *Holy Zohar Parshas Naso* that the neglect of this matter causes the element of evil to reside in one's home and brings poverty into the house. Therefore my heart was moved -- with the help of G-d -- to gather all the sayings of our Sages that relate to this matter in order to reveal to all the seriousness of this transgression and its punishment, and the great virtue of the woman modest in her ways who is thereby rewarded with children that are G-d-fearing and esteemed by their generation. Perhaps in this way they will understand and take heed so that this breach may be somewhat repaired, and through this merit we may deserve to see the building of Jerusalem, its enclosure and passages, speedily and in our days, Amen.

*As explained in the words of our Sages (of blessed memory), a very serious transgression is committed by the woman who goes into the street with her hair exposed and wears neither a kerchief nor any other covering. Regarding this matter, our rabbis have declared that such an act is a violation of our sacred Torah. Furthermore, if a woman's hair is covered only partly but not as the law prescribes, it is still considered a transgression and her husband may divorce her without payment of her k'subah.*

*In our sinfulness, this matter has been treated with abandon by many men and women, nor are women concerned about exposing their arms. Consequently, I have thought to transcribe the words of the Talmud and the Torah authorities to describe to all the seriousness of this transgression and the harmful results that emerge from it. Perhaps those who read will take heed.*

## I. How serious is the trespass?

First of all, the *Mishnah* (*K'subos* 72) states that among the women who may be divorced without a *k'subah* are those who violate the holy Torah. An example of such a woman is one who feeds her husband forbidden foods, or cohabits with him during her forbidden period, or walks in public with her hair exposed, even though it may be partly covered but not adequately as the law requires. The great authorities, such as *ALFAS*, *RAMBAM*, *TUR*, and the *Shulchan Aruch* all write that this offense is very grave, and one must, therefore be extremely careful.

## II. The ban on sacred words

Aside from the offense described above, there is another reason that a woman needs to cover her hair even while she is in her home. Unless a woman's head is covered by a hairpiece or a kerchief, her husband is not permitted to utter any holy words in her presence since a woman's hair is considered by our Sages as an indecency. On this matter, all great authorities are in agreement. The *Shulchan Aruch*, in particular, writes that no sacred word may be spoken while that part of a woman's hair which is ordinarily covered is exposed, even if the woman is one's own wife. Although only a small portion of the hair is exposed and even if it is customary for women in the city to go about in public with uncovered heads, nevertheless it is still prohibited.

The same rule applies in a city where it is customary for women to go about in public with bare arms, and one may not pronounce sacred words in such presence. The reason for these laws is that no habit of bad conduct can ever cause our holy Torah to be changed. It must be realized, furthermore, that in the presence of the exposed arms or heart or breast of even one's own daughter it is neither permitted to say grace, nor to pray, nor to study Torah, nor to pronounce any blessing.

### III. Serious punishment self-imposed

It is well known that in the writings of our Sages a great distinction is made between the person who commits a transgression once because his impulse overpowered him and the one who repeats a sin with utter abandon. Rabbeinu Yonah, in the *Sha'arei T'shuvah*, discusses this matter at length and writes that the person who is completely indifferent to a particular trespass is considered an insurgent, which is the worst sort of a sinful person. Such a transgression is forgiven only with very great difficulty since this person has thrown off from himself one of the commandments which G-d has issued to us. In this connection, the Torah writes: "Accursed is the man who shall not uphold the words of this Torah to do them," meaning the person who does not keep any part of the Torah from beginning to end. This person may be compared to a servant who tells the king that he will do whatever he is ordered with the exception of one command, in which event he has thrown off the rule of the king and is capable of doing as he pleases.

In the light of this discussion, it becomes apparent how serious is the trespass of the woman who accustoms herself to go about in the public eye with her hair exposed, for in so doing she has become resolved to this sin. The Midrash *Shochar Tov* states further that one who becomes resolved to a particular sin can never be forgiven for this trespass. Thus we find the prophet Isaiah proclaiming: "Ho! ye who draw the sin with vain cords; and like the ropes of the wagon is the trespass." The significance of this passage is that when a person begins to commit a sin, it appears to his eyes like a very minor transgression. When he performs a misdeed a number of times, however, it eventually becomes like the ropes that draw a wagon. Even a thread of silk when folded over many times becomes like a thick cord, and certainly if a thick cord is folded over numerous times surely will it become strong and tough. The same reasoning applies to the subject under discussion. Even if the trespass were small it would still be considered a grave sin by virtue of being repeated many



times, and certainly is this true when the transgression is a violation of the Torah and is performed constantly and in the presence of many people. How many times is the evil multiplied when committed by a woman thousands of times during her lifetime!

Also known is the saying of our Sages (of blessed memory) that for every sin that a person commits on this world, a harmful angel is created which is designated to avenge each particular offense, and these angels accompany the person when he passes away from this world and goes to his eternal home. Consequently, how much must a woman accustomed to this sin lament constantly over this terrible matter after she realizes that for every instance when she went out in public with her hair exposed with the intention of beautifying herself, she thereby created a harmful angel who would take vengeance from her. How many thousands of harmful angels must be keeping themselves ready and waiting for the time of her demise in order to accompany her and take their revenge of her. Then shall she wail and cry woe over her wicked deeds and there shall be no one to help her, as is written in the passage: "And you shall bewail your end, when your skin and flesh shall terminate." And the person alone must finally confess all the sins that were committed on this world and say, "I, who am named in this matter, have committed this particular sin in this place on this day in the presence of these people." Thereafter the person vindicates the judgment that has been passed and says, "L-rd of the universe, rightly have you judged, rightly have you acquitted, rightly have you condemned, rightly have you created *Gehinom* for the wicked and *Gan Eden* for the righteous."

The Gemara (*Sotah* 8) tells us that "the manner in which a Person measures is the manner in which he is measured. Avshalom sinned because of his hair, and he was hanged by his hair." Accordingly, with regard to our matter in which the sin consists of hair being exposed to the public eye, surely every harmful angel which is created by this hair shall afterwards punish the woman

with her very hair in *Gehinnom*. Therefore let each person contemplate all this while still living and go in the ways of the Holy One Blessed is He and be saved from all distress.

#### IV. Seduction by the evil impulse

Nor should a woman be misled by the evil impulse into believing that she will be spared retribution because she needs to adorn herself in her husband's presence so that she shall not become despised – in truth, that is an error. Such an excuse would be valid within the house only and not in the street, and even indoors a woman has the alternative of wearing some becoming kerchief or hairpiece rather than expose her hair.

Now if we should study this matter, we would find that there are two causes which are responsible for the prevalence of this offense: one, indolence due to being required to cover one's hair every day, and secondly, the seduction of the evil impulse which entices a woman into beautifying herself for others and adorning herself with her hair. And for both of these she shall have to give a final reckoning!

In truth, how can a person help but be filled with fear and awe when he contemplates his destiny. Ultimately, he must ascend before the Throne of Glory and account for his deeds. There he shall be a witness to the splendor of G-d's glory and see the tens of thousands of companies of angels who stand before him constantly, quivering and trembling, as they perform the majestic will of their Creator. Where is the person who shall gaze upon this sight and not be filled with shame that, because of indolence or some fleeting, wordly pleasure – such as pleasing others who are mere earthly clods like himself – he transgressed time and again the will of the Sovereign of the Universe. the L-rd of Hosts.

Then shall all the deeds that a person performed on this world come and stand in his presence in order to give their testimony at the time of his judgment. Whereupon the heavenly hosts shall ask, "Lowly being, were you not afraid to rebel against your Creator? Rise to your judgment and recognize these deeds of

yours: If you have no reply, is there anyone who can reply in your behalf?" How low must his head be bowed in utter shame.

The *Tana* in *Avoth* says: "Ponder upon three things: Whence did you come . . . whereto are you going. . . and before whom will you give reckoning." Observe that it is all written in the second person – did you come, are you going— rather than in the third person. It is a patent fact that, whereas any person who attends a funeral or visits a mourner realizes that every person must die, nevertheless this realization bears little if any influence upon him. The reason is that a person tends to conceive that it is only the other person who is going to die. Therefore does the *Tana* teach every person the importance of keeping his own future attainment in mind. He is the very one who will be transformed into rot and worm, and he himself will have to render account before the Sovereign of the Universe who shows no partiality nor accepts any bribe. Thus he speaks to a person directly – whereto are you going . . . and before whom will you give reckoning.

Were a person to take this into account while he still lives, surely would he be blessed both in this world and in the world to come.

## V. Further seductions of the evil impulse

Neither should a woman be seduced by the evil impulse into saying, "Well, I am not the only one in this town who does such things. Whatever happens to these other women who go about with their hair uncovered will happen to me, too." Let me use a parable to explain why this attitude is unreasonable. Once a person was arrested on some pretext and put into prison where he suffered bitterly. After a year spent there, his brothers and relatives came to visit him. They offered him solace, telling him that a similar incident had occurred recently in another country. There, too, a person had been imprisoned under extremely harsh conditions.

Upon hearing this report, the prisoner replied: "What kind of

a consolation is this? Now I have even more reason to mourn. Had you told me that this person was eventually released from his sufferings, perhaps I would have been partly relieved from my anxieties. Or at least if you had told me that this person who had been arrested would soon be sharing the same cell with me, this, too, would have been something of a comfort since I would feel that I am not the only one being treated this way. But if he is imprisoned in another country, what cheer do I gain if some other person is being beaten and put into chains?"

The same argument applies precisely with regard to our own discussion. What joy does a person gain if another person commits a sin and is imprisoned elsewhere under harsh conditions. It is well known that *Gehinnom* is very vast, that our own world is only a very tiny fraction of the size of *Gehinnom*. Thus it is able to contain many hundreds of thousands of persons, each one hundreds of miles distant from his neighbor, and each one completely out of sight and out of hearing of the other.

Furthermore, the fire of *Gehinnom* is not like earthly fire which illuminates but rather the fire of darkness which has the power of consuming but is totally without the power of illumination. As the Midrash states, the darkness which existed at the time of Creation later remained in *Gehinnom*. Consequently, no person either sees or hears his neighbor, and each one is compelled to cry and wail in utter loneliness. Concerning the magnitude of this punishment, our Sages say that many kinds of fire are to be found in *Gehinnom*. Some coals are like mountains, some like hills, some like the Dead Sea, and others like great boulders. And there are rivers of pitch and brimstone, flowing and seething.

When, heaven forbid, judgment is passed on the wicked person to descend into *Gehinnom*, he sheds tears so profusely that it resembles a spring. So runs the comment of our Sages on the passage, "Those who pass by the vale of tears shall make it into a spring," since *Gehinnom* is called "the vale of tears." Lo! even our great King David, when reminded of *Gehinnom*,

was filled with trembling. Thus he declares: "My flesh bristled at your terror, and your judgments did I fear," and it is known that "terror" is a reference to Gehinnom. This passage can be interpreted according to the commentary of the Vilna Gaon on Mishlei wherein he writes that so long as the soul itself is not purified by the punishment of Gehinnom, also the flesh of the person which is the material part of him suffers torment in the grave. This is the thought conveyed by the passage: "My flesh bristled at your terror" – through terror, which is Gehinnom, the flesh, too, receives torment as though it would be pierced with spikes – "and your judgments did I fear" – meaning that the soul fears the judgment that it must give before the Throne of Glory.

May the Almighty deem us worthy to be among those who repent sincerely, and may He favor us so that we shall fear no evil, as is written, "Though I go in the valley of the shadow of death I shall not fear evil, for you are with me."

## **VI. The Husband's duty of admonition**

Now it is well known that admonition is one of the commandments of the Torah, as it is written, "You shall admonish your friend, and you shall not bear sin because of him." Furthermore, our Sages have said that whoever is able to prevent a sin from being committed by his household and fails to do so shall be penalized for the sin of his household. Accordingly, how great is the duty of the husband to prevent his wife from committing sin and to gauge for her the seriousness of the trespass that lies in going in public with her hair or arms exposed. Also, by not conducting herself with modesty, she corrupts the children that are born to him and to herself, as explained in Chapter VII.

Even if a woman were to go with her hair exposed only at home and not in public, still she corrupts every holy utterance that her husband makes during his lifetime. Since it happens quite commonly that while a man is at home he prays, makes a blessing

over bread, says grace, makes other blessings, or studies Torah, if his wife goes about the house with her hair exposed it is extremely difficult for him to avoid uttering some word of holiness while she is present.

Nor should a person think to himself, "But I have already told her about it twice and three times and still she does not listen to me. What more can I do about it," Let this person reflect to himself whether he would act this way if his wife were to interfere in his business affairs. Wouldn't he protest bitterly and say, "What are you doing? Not only are you not helping me, but you are ruining my livelihood. What will the whole family live from? Should we all starve to death because of your stupidity?" He would make use of every possible stratagem in order to make her realize the magnitude of her folly. Sometimes he would speak softly, and other times harshly, until she would understand the need to cease her foolishness. The same applies to our matter. The husband must constantly admonish his wife concerning this issue. He must indicate to her the enormity of the harmful consequences of her action, that because of her conduct both will be made to suffer bitterly for the many thousands of blessings that were improperly made. Surely by dint of these arguments she herself will become willing to wear some covering (either a piece of cloth or a hair-piece) over her hair.

Let me use a parable to illustrate this point. In the royal city there lived a prosperous merchant who dealt in precious stones and pearls. While his wife took care of the trade, he would travel to faraway lands to purchase gems which he would send to his shop. One day, while the husband was on a trip, ministers of the king came into the shop and said to the woman, "We have heard that your husband is an important merchant and knows the value of precious stones and pearls. The coronation of the king is now at hand, and we are in need of precious stones and pearls for the royal crown. Do you have anything of the sort in your shop?"

The woman replied: "Right now I do not have such terribly expensive stones that would be fit to put into the king's crown.

If you like, I shall write to my husband and ask him to secure such stones for the great glory of our king."

The ministers said: "If you do so, then you will receive the greatest reward that the king can bestow. Be doubly certain, however, that heaven forbid there should be any flaw in these gems. During the coronation, many kings gather who are great experts on precious stones. If any flaw should be found, it would be a terrible disgrace to the king and to ourselves who have been engaged in securing them. You, too, would not escape if, heaven forbid, this were to happen. Therefore, take heed."

"Neither I nor my husband," answered the woman, "are accustomed to selling imperfect stones, and especially when the royal crown is involved."

Immediately afterwards the woman wrote a letter to her husband urging him to purchase very expensive gems for the king's crown, cautioning him to make certain that the stones were perfect. She received the following reply: "I have the stones that you request, and I am sending them to you. However, having stones put into the king's crown is an awesome thing. Therefore, although I have inquired somewhat of experts who declared that the stones are perfect, you, too, when they arrive, make sure to inspect them beforehand and show them to some experts to make sure that no flaw is to be found. Afterwards, you may deliver them to the king's ministers."

When the gems and the letter arrived, the woman read that in the opinion of her husband the stones were perfect. Strongly tempted by the profit that she would reap and also by the honor which she would secure when she would publicly pride and preen herself with the royal order that the king would bestow upon her, she failed to heed her husband's command to make a further investigation. Immediately, she informed the palace that the gems had been sent to her. When the royal ministers came to the house for the stones, they paid the woman the full value and presented her with a handsome gift in addition.

The time of the coronation arrived, and many kings gathered for the occasion. In their presence, the king boasted about the precious stones that had been sent to him from a distant land to be put into his crown. When they examined the stones, however, they discovered that they were not perfect, and the king was put to shame. Quickly the ministers sent for the woman and berated her loudly. "You should be put to death," they shouted. "Didn't we warn you that there should be no flaw in the stones because the king's crown is involved and you might bring disgrace to His Majesty?"

"I am not so much to blame," the woman replied. "Didn't I write to my husband and warn him to make sure that there should not be any flaws in the stones? Why am I at fault?"

The husband, too, was brought to trial afterwards. "You are guilty," accused the ministers, "of having sent these imperfect stones and thereby causing the king and his crown to be disgraced."

"True," the man replied, "but I had no intention of bringing disgrace, heaven forbid, to His Majesty. I was defrauded by the dealers. Why, I even wrote to my wife that she should show the gems to other experts beforehand and not to deliver them immediately to be placed in the king's crown."

"When the king's crown is in question," they reproached him, "you yourself should have thoroughly investigated the matter and not relied upon your wife who is irresponsible. Consequently, instead of the honor that you would have received from us had you dealt honestly in this affair, rather will you be sentenced to a double indignity." Whereupon both of them were sent to the dungeon where they suffered severe torture.

"It is you," cried the imprisoned woman to her husband, "who are the cause of my ruin. You are the one who gives me these murderous lashes and not the guard. Didn't you know that the stones were being bought for the king's crown. Why weren't you careful that they shouldn't have any flaw. That way both you



and I would have been able to live happily. But now look what you have done with your business. You brought upon me all these blows and tortures. Woe is me. How shall I ever live to see the end of these torments".

"Alas for you and for me, too", the husband cried bitterly, that you caused us all these troubles. Didn't I write to you in the beginning that buying precious stones for the king's crown is a very dangerous thing, and therefore you must first investigate to make sure there are no flaws and then deliver them to the king. It was just your greed to make a lot of money and to wear fine embroidery so that you could preen yourself in front of your friends that blinded you and caused you to fall into a pit of misfortune. And I suffered the same downfall because of your conduct. Woe is us. How shall this ever end?

The same argument applies when a person accumulates Torah and good deeds on this world. Out of these acts great things are accomplished in the worlds above for they give rise to the creation of crowns with which the Almighty is crowned. • This is true, however, only if the deed was properly done in every detail, in a manner of holiness and in a place of holiness. This is stated in the passage: "And your camp shall be holy, nor shall any indecent thing be seen in your midst that He should turn away from you." On the other hand, if the deed were performed in the presence

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• Eventually, When a person comes to the future world, as a reward for the glory which he gave to the Almighty by virtue of the crowns which he caused to be created through his deeds, those very same crowns Will he given to him by the Almighty and will be placed upon his head, as the passage states, "For those Who give me glory shall receive glory." This is also inferred by the words of our Sages who said, "In the world to come the righteous shall sit with *their* crowns on their heads. and derive pleasure from the radiance of the Diving Presence." *Their* crowns will be the very ones placed on their heads. And so we also find the passage: "Go out and see, daughters of Zion, Solomon the King with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding and on the day of his heart's joy."

of an indecency: for example, if at the time that he uttered some words of Torah or made a blessing it was done in the presence of a woman's hair or arms or breast that was exposed and thereby he failed to heed the words of our Sages who absolutely forbade this practice, surely there is no sanctity attached to these words and in place of light there comes darkness, heaven forbid. Even if no more than a few words were expressed in the presence of the above mentioned parts, still the light of holiness which corresponds to the place that these words occupy in the Almighty's crown is lacking, and in its place there is darkness.

Now we know that the Almighty always takes pride in Israel before his heavenly court by virtue of the crowns with which they crown Him constantly through their Torah and mitzvos. So it is written, Israel, that I take pride in you.

Consequently, should dark blemishes be found on any of the crowns, it would be a terrible disgrace that on the crowns of the glorious Almighty such spots should appear. Accordingly, when the souls of this man and woman shall eventually ascend to give account before the Sovereign of the Universe, the heavenly hosts shall thunder at them loudly and exclaim, "You deserve the terrible penalty of the fire of Gehinnom. Let alone that you did not give glory to the King of Kings for the life and the nourishment and the health which He bestowed upon you constantly, but you went and corrupted His royal crown, darkened His light, and disgraced His glory through your hair or arms and breast which were always exposed even when your husband made a blessing or studied Torah."

Then the woman shall cry bitterly and say, "I am not so much to blame. • It is my husband's fault that all these crowns were ruined because he made all these blessings in my presence."

The husband, too, shall then be brought to trial and they shall show him the spots on the celestial crowns that were caused by him

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•This is a true representation. When the awesome trial takes place,

and his wife. Fear and trembling shall grip him as they proclaim, "You are the one who made these blessings which brought disgrace upon the glory of the Almighty and upon his crown."

"But I am not the main cause," he shall cry "she is. She used to sit in front of me with her hair and arms and breast exposed when I was making a blessing. I even told her that it wasn't proper to do so, but she wouldn't listen to me."

"If you were really concerned about the honor of the Almighty," they shall reply, "you would have gone someplace else or at least turned your face from her and completed the blessing. Both of you, therefore, must suffer the penalty for this sin, and instead of the glory that you would have secured had you served G-d properly, a double indignity shall you suffer." Whereupon angels shall grasp them mercilessly and take them down to *Gehinnom* to suffer horrible tortures [As is written in *Mesechess Gehinnom* that there are women there who are hanged by their breasts, measure for measure, as well as others who are hanged by their hair, and so every person is hanged by the organ with which he sinned.]

Then, the woman shall cry aloud to her husband and say, "You are the one who is beating me so ruthlessly and not this guard. Didn't you know while you were still on the world below that out of your blessings and your Torah a crown is created for the heavenly king. Why weren't you careful that there shouldn't be anything wrong with them? You should have told me what a serious punishment there is for such deeds and warned me all the time. That way both of us would have enjoyed happiness. Now see what you have done through your actions. You have brought upon me all these beatings and cruel tortures. Who knows what my end shall be?"

every person seeks to remove the guilt from himself. Even the body and the soul, which are surely firmly united throughout their lifetime, also seek to place the blame on each other out of fear of the terrible judgment (See *Sanhedrin* 91)

"Alas for you," he shall reply, "that you have brought all these troubles upon yourself and also upon me. And yet you think that in truth you are right. Didn't I tell you many times that such things are forbidden? You yourself should have taken every possible precaution not to go about with your hair or your arms exposed. It's just that your love of making yourself pretty in front of everybody and doing like your unseemly friends – who will also suffer the same harsh Tortures here – that caused you and also myself to fall into this pit of misfortune."

Consequently, let the wise man realize that while he is still alive he must constantly admonish his wife concerning this matter and inform her of the seriousness of her transgression. Otherwise, she herself will cry alas and alack for this deed. Surely his words will have some effect and thereby will he save himself from the Day of Reckoning of the future.

## VII. The virtue. of modesty

A woman also needs to reflect constantly upon the known fact that if a woman conducts herself with modesty. she is privileged to bear righteous, scholarly children who shall illuminate the world with their Torah. So it is written in the *Talmud Yerushalmi*: "'All the honor of a princess is indoors, from settings of gold are her clothes': that is, a woman who is modest is fit to produce high priests who are dressed in settings of gold" Also, we find in the *Gemara (M'Gillah 13)* that because of the modesty which Rachel possessed she was privileged to have Saul descend from her, and because of the modesty which Saul possessed he was privileged to have Esther descend from him.

By virtue of modesty, a woman will enjoy happiness in this world and in the hereafter she will be privileged to sit in the world above in the palace of G-d with great splendor and glory. This we find in the *Zohar on Parshath B'chukothai*" which indicates that the commandment "Honor your father and mother" applies even after death and states that "when a son follows the proper path and improves his deeds, surely he is honoring his father: he is

honoring him in this world in the eyes of people and is honoring him on the other world before the Almighty. Thereupon the Almighty has mercy upon him and places him on the Throne of Glory. Surely the righteous are privileged to deserve holy children, holy stock, to whom applies the passage "All those who see them shall recognize them that they are the seed which G-d has blessed."

On the other hand, heaven forbid, should a woman follow indecent ways, then she shall bear children who are with fault. As a result, she will eventually suffer shame and disgrace in this world – as is written, "a foolish son is his mother's sorrow" – and also in the world to come will the mother and father bear disgrace for having borne a son Who angers the Almighty. So writes the Gaon of Vilna in his holy epistle, *Alim Lisrufah*, that even if one constantly trains his son by reprimanding him for his faults and his son does not respond, alas for the shame and the pain and the disgrace that he will suffer in the world to come.

Consequently, in view of all this, we may understand how careful a woman needs to be concerning her hair or arms or breast so that they should not be revealed. The *Zohar* in *Parshath Naso*, furthermore, is very strict about any hair at all of a woman being exposed. On page 125 it states: "Said Rabbi Chizkiah: A folly upon The person who allows his wife To expose The hair of her head, for this is one of the modest manners of the household. The woman who shows the hair of her head in order to beautify herself brings poverty into the house and causes her children not to be esteemed by their contemporaries. Also she causes unseemly things to be present in the house. What is the cause of all this? The hair of her head which is exposed. And if in the house it is so, surely in the street It is an even greater insolence. Therefore it is written: 'Your wife, like a fruitful vine, by the walls of your house.' Therefore is a woman required that even the rafters of her house should not see a single hair of her head. See how much corruption is caused by a woman's hair! It corrupts above, it corrupts below. It causes her husband to be cursed. It causes

poverty, unseemly things in the house, and it averts esteem from her children. May the Almighty save us from insolence!

Therefore should a woman cover herself even in the corners of her house. And if she do so what is said concerning her? 'Your children like the shoots of olive trees.' Just as an olive tree, through fall and summer, does not lose its leaves and is always superior to the other trees, in the same way the children of such a woman shall be esteemed above everyone else. Furthermore, her husband shall be blessed with all kinds of blessings, both on earth below and in heaven above, with wealth, with children, and with grandchildren, for so it is written: 'For in this way is blessed a man who fears G-d.'"

### VIII. The Father's duty towards his child

Now according to what has been said above: that is, that this matter is the cause of poverty, heaven forbid, and other misfortunes, how necessary it becomes for every man and woman to take heed of their modest behavior. They also need to arouse their daughters to being accustomed from their youth not to conduct themselves indecently, heaven forbid. For example, in many places it has become a custom, in our sinfulness, to make blouses without any sleeves at all. Alas what a terrible offense this constitutes in that it causes many men to have improper thoughts as a result. In addition, how many hundreds of vain blessings are caused thereby when they are made in the presence of a woman thus attired. It is well known that in the *Gemara* and also in the *Shulchan Aruch* (Section 75) it is decided that if as much as a handbreadth of a woman's body is exposed in a place where it is customarily concealed it is considered an indecency, and one is forbidden to say any sacred words before it. This applies to a girl as well as a married woman. The only distinction that is made is that a girl may go about with her hair exposed but with regard to other concealed parts of the body there is no difference at all. Even where it has become a custom for women and girls to go about in this manner, nevertheless all of our authorities have

judged that there is no justification at all for following this evil and indecent practice.

Nor is there any difference, with reference to this trespass of uttering sacred words in a woman's presence between a stranger who is no relative and her father or brother. One law applies to all: namely, even the father must beware of uttering holy words in the presence of an exposed handbreadth of his daughter if she is eleven years of age or above. • If a man shall accustom his daughters from their youth to follow the ways of modesty, also when they become older they will not turn away from that way of virtue and he shall be privileged to see her bear proper and worthy children, in accordance with the words of our Sages mentioned above.

In our sinfulness, the matter of modesty is very much neglected nowadays. In some places, boys and girls go strolling together, and who is able to estimate the seriousness of the transgressions and corruptions that result from this. Who ever saw or heard anything of this sort in the generations that preceded us – such indecent behavior! Even if one does not actually commit an offense, the sinful thoughts are worse than the sins themselves. Thereby he trespasses the words of the Sages, in connection with the passage which states "and you shall be guarded from all evil things," Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said that this is a notice that one should not have thoughts by day and thereafter become unclean at night. And this is a very serious transgression, as is known from the sayings of our Sages.

Aside from all this, it is common for boys and girls to go outside the city and to be isolated when they stroll, and the prohibition against isolation with a forbidden woman is in itself also a very great offense. Furthermore, this trespass nowadays includes unmarried women since they are considered to be in a state of *Niddah*.

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•And with anyone else even if she is younger (See *Shulchan Shlomoh*.)

Moreover, it should be known that even if a young girl is intended to be a man's wife – for example, if it is after the writing of the *t'naim* – even though he might take the liberty of going for a stroll with her [although even this is humiliating to a proper person, (see *Berachos*, 43)] nevertheless he should be careful not to isolate himself with her without any other person present because she is like all other women in this respect. Even if she would be "clean" this would not become permissible by virtue of the *t'naim*, and surely now that she is considered a *niddah* as long as she has not immersed herself according to the law the prohibition against isolation remains unchanged.

Surely, too, does the Torah prohibit caressing and kissing, in which regard the passage states "You shall not come near to perform an indecency." Thus the Rambam writes (Chapter 21, Laws of Prohibited Cohabitation): "One who caresses or kisses one of the forbidden women violates the prohibition 'You shall not come near to perform an indecency.'" Anyone who is lenient in this matter shall be forced to give reckoning in the world to come nor will he have any fortune in this world.

How much must a person seek counsel with himself and to be observant in this matter of his sons and daughters so that they shall not go in this evil way and to evaluate constantly to them the seriousness of the sin that lies therein and the great merit that they will attain if they take heed of this. He should also constantly seek mercy from the Almighty on their behalf so that they may not be guilty of sin or any unseemly act, and he may be sure that G-d will help him and accept his prayer.

Thus we find in the *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu* the story of a *cohain* who kept his fear of G-d in secrecy and who had a wife and ten children, six boys and four girls. Every day he prayed and prostrated himself and licked the dust with his tongue so that none of them should be involved in sin or anything improper. Concerning him it was said that less than a year afterwards Ezra appeared and the Almighty brought Israel up from Babylonia, and this *cohain* too, was brought up from there. Up to the time of



his death, he lived long enough to see high priests and priests in their youth descended from his children and his grandchildren for a period of fifty years. With regard to this sort of a person the passage states, "Trust in G-d and do good," and also it is written, "Trust in G-d forever and ever" for there are two worlds that are his, as it is written, "For in the Almighty G-d is the rock of worlds." This is intended to show that one who prostrates himself before G-d and puts all his trust in him and seeks mercy so that his children may go in the path of Torah and fear of G-d will secure the help of the Almighty and shall receive from them honor and greatness in this world besides the great reward that awaits him in the world to come.

### Close of the volume

Know, furthermore, that the outbreaks which are currently taking place in certain localities where young men (libertines and undisciplined sons) dance with girls at weddings constitute a terrible sin and many, many offenses are thereby committed. Our Sages have said that one who gazes upon a woman – even at the little finger of a woman – once he has gazed upon her in order to derive pleasure from her, even though he may possess Torah and good deeds, nevertheless he will not be spared the judgment of *Gehinnom*. Now this is merely for gazing, and surely this is the case when one dances with her. In addition, he trespasses the passage which states "and you shall not look after your hearts nor after your eyes" (see interpretation in *Minchas Chinuch*). Likewise he violates the passage "and you shall beware of every evil thing." These words our Sages have interpreted as an admonition that one should not have sinful thoughts during the day and thereby come to uncleanness at night. Thus even thoughts that are improper are forbidden by the Torah, and surely the performance of such overt acts which lead to such thoughts and to gazing, and inevitably to uncleanness at night.

Above all else, it commonly happens that by dancing one also violates the commandment "you shall not come near to

perform an indecency." As is known, the authorities have written that girls nowadays are considered to be in a state of *niddah* once they reach puberty and are included among those with whom it is forbidden to have relations. Whereas when dancing, while the evil impulse burns within like a fire, dancers frequently embrace and kiss each other in violation of this commandment (as written in Chapter VIII in the name of the Rambam) and commit a very terrible sin. Such an offense is considered an accession to an adulterous act with regard to which one is required to allow himself to be slain rather than violate. If this be the case even when one is under compulsion, then alas for those who trespass with indifference. Even if the girl is his intended wife – for example, if the *t'naim* have already been written – a man is still forbidden to do any of the above mentioned things, and nothing becomes permissible by virtue of the fact that he is joined to her by the *t'naim*. Furthermore, from this evil practice of being close together there result many grave sins for which the penalty is premature death, heaven forbid, and this may be compared to the nazarite whom our Sages have admonished, "Go around, go around, do not come near to the vineyard!"

The *Sefer Chasidim*, Paragraph 168, writes as follows:

Boys and girls should not mingle lest they sin, and thus it is written: "Then shall the girl rejoice with dance" – that is, alone—but "boys and old men together." Similarly, at the end of *T'hillim* we find "boys and also girls" and not "boys with girls" as we find afterwards "old men with boys."

There is a story of a man who was once riding alone at night. The moon was shining that night as he rode across the desert, and he saw a large expedition with great wagons. There were men sitting on top of the wagon and also men pulling the wagon, and he wondered what they were doing. As he approached them, he recognized some of them who had already been dead.

"What is this that some of you pull the wagons all night long and some of you are on top of the wagons?" he asked.

"This is because of our sins," they answered. "When we were on the other world we used to amuse ourselves with women and girls, and now we are forced to pull the wagon until we are so tired and weary that we can drag it no further. Then those on top of the wagon descend and we go on top and rest. Then they pull us until they are tired and weary, and afterwards they go on top and rest."

The idea of the story is that all things are judged measure for measure. Just as on this world each one used to dance before his companion until he would be tired and rest, and the next one would dance before him until he would be tired and rest, so it is with the punishment which comes afterwards. And whosoever acts like a beast on this world must serve like a beast on the world to come.

Therefore let every person take very great heed in this matter.

Now it is known that it is incumbent upon every Jew to fulfill the commandment of the Torah to admonish one's comrade who is guilty of an error, as it is written "you shall admonish your comrade." By virtue of this admonition, he safeguards himself against the same trespass, for just as the Almighty seeks retribution from those who commit an offense so does He seek retribution from those who might have prevented it and failed to do so. Thus our Sages have said (*Shabbas 55*) that one who might have averted a sin by the population of his city and failed to do so shall also fall victim because of them, and one who might have averted a sin by the members of his household and failed to do so shall fall victim because of his household.

Now everyone is also aware of the fact that a prohibited act which is performed in public is much more serious than one which is performed privately, since such an act is a public desecration of G-d's name. It follows, therefore, that the duty of admonition is also so much the greater so that people should not get the Impression that the Almighty's commandments have been nullified. Consequently, also with regard to this evil practice of

publicly violating the serious offenses of contact with forbidden women and sinful thoughts which was mentioned above, heaven forbid that any person with fear of G-d in his heart should be silent and not seek to prevent this. And the one who is able to prevent this trespass and fails to do so shall himself fall victim to the seriousness of this crime, as mentioned previously.

This thought is also contained in the comment of the *Vayikra Rabba* on the passage, "A stray sheep is Israel." Israel is compared to a sheep: just as sheep when struck on one limb feel it in all (that is, in all the sheep since they have a tendency to remain together, and when one is afflicted in its limbs and halts, all the others remain on that spot), so too, Israel, when one sins all are punished. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai drew a parable. Several people were traveling on a ship. One of them took an awl and began boring beneath him. His companions said to him, "What are you doing!" He answered, "Why is it any of your concern? I am only boring beneath myself." "Yes," they replied, "but all of us will have our ship flooded."

The person who admonishes should seek to describe, in a calm tone, the seriousness of the sin and its shameful nature. Besides the gravity of the crime, such behavior is a disgrace to Jewish youth which has always been lauded for its modesty, and it is very unbecoming that such immorality should prevail. Only because of the seduction of the evil impulse have young people allowed themselves such conduct because they do not understand the seriousness of the offense and the baseness of the deed. Even if the people will not listen to his admonition, in any event the one who admonishes has fulfilled the commandment and has saved his own soul at least. In truth, however, although they may not all listen to him, there are many decent youths who fall victim to this sin only because they do not understand its seriousness, and if he shall describe it to them they shall surely seek to avoid the offense.

Moreover, how great is the merit of the one who admonishes and thereby averts transgression. When a serious crime is

performed in public and not even a single person is to be found who seeks to avert it, the wrath falls upon everyone, heaven forbid, because the will of the Sovereign is being publicly violated and there is no one who cherishes the king's glory and seeks to avenge him. On the other hand, the person who cherishes his glory and seeks to avenge it has very great merit because he thereby calms the wrath of the Almighty. This we find in connection with the incident of Pinchas where the passage states "Behold I bestow upon him my covenant of peace," because he turned back the wrath of G-d from Israel by his vengeance. The *Midrash* draws a parable of a king who was passing by. A group of boys was standing near, and one of them cursed the king. The king became terribly angry with them. A citizen of the town, who was standing with them, came up to the youth who cursed the king and slapped him on the face. Immediately the king's anger was quieted.

Above all, I am amazed by the parents of the bride and groom. Surely their hope and desire is the good fortune of their children whom they lead under the canopy, that they may lead a peaceful life, raise proper children, and be privileged to enjoy prosperity and blessing. For this purpose our Sages have instituted the seven blessings for the couple so that the blessing of G-d will descend upon them by virtue of His presence residing in their midst. Now surely that blessing shall remain with them from that moment on until the rest of their lives, since they are blessed with the name of G-d (as it is written, "In any place that My Name shall be mentioned, I shall come to you and bless you.") . This occurs, however, only if the *chuppah* and the rejoicing have been performed according to the law and the will of the Almighty. On the other hand, if the joy is mixed with sorrow so that the rejoicing is done in an indecent way which is odious and revolting to the Almighty (for the Almighty hates immorality), is it possible for the blessing of G-d to descend there? Will all the blessings that are being made in His Name be of any value when His Will is being violated with indifference? Rather it is written that if He shall see in you any indecent thing, He shall turn away from you.

As a matter of fact, in the *Beis Shmuel* in the *Even Haezer*, Section 62, it is stated that it is forbidden to make the blessing "the joy is in his dwelling" when men and women are sitting together and thus causing improper thoughts, and this is surely the case with regard to the matter of dancing together which is something that our early authorities never imagined possible among Jewish persons. Now since the couple remains without the blessing of G-d, what hope is there that they will lead a life of peace and good fortune? Consequently, every man and woman who is truly concerned with the welfare of his or her children and desires that the blessings which are made over them in G-d's name should take effect must strive fully that their rejoicing should be a true rejoicing according to the law of the Torah and pleasing to G-d. Their joy must not be tainted with indecent conduct which is disgusting in the eyes of G-d. They must seek counsel and plans to prevent this from happening. By virtue of their striving to fulfill the will of the Almighty, they shall be privileged to see their children raise a generation of proper children blessed by G-d, as it is written, "Fortunate is the person who fears G-d... A brave man in the land shall be his seed, a proper generation which shall be blessed." Moreover, others will see and take example from them, and the merit of many will be to their credit.

Now the chief source which is responsible for all these indecent affairs is the custom which, in our sinfulness, has currently arisen to delay marriages, contrary to physical hygiene. As a result of this, the evil impulse is greatly strengthened, and many, many sins are caused. Our Sages have said that to the one who marries his sons and daughters close to maturity is ascribed the passage "And you shall know that peace is in your tent, and you shall attend your dwelling and not sin." To this day in the countries of Babylonia and its neighbors it is customary to marry off children in their youth. And what a wonderful thing this is for the father. Besides safeguarding his children against sin, as mentioned in the Gemara, a burden is relieved from him and he need not marry them off in his old age.

Now in most cases the main reason for the delay is that the parents seek a man who has terminated his military service and who possesses all the good virtues. In truth, this is not proper. Even if they do not encounter a man who has all the virtues as they would like, or if he has not yet been freed from military service, nevertheless they should enter into contract with him once their daughters have reached maturity. Thus the passage says: "Not for barrenness did He create it; rather for settling did He form it."

If your daughter has reached maturity, our Sages say, then free your slave if necessary and marry her off. Nor should a person mislead himself into believing that by this delay he is doing his daughter a favor. That is not the case, for in this way he accustoms her to indecency, and this may lead, heaven forbid, to immorality and other pitfalls since women are generally light-headed. Afterwards the father will be filled with regret, but he will be unable to save himself from his great embarrassment.

It is also known that a lengthy delay of marriage causes many ailments. Moreover, if the father should think that by searching about a great deal in order to find a suitable husband for his daughter he will secure for her wealth and good fortune, he is in error. As the *G'ra* writes in his sacred epistle, each and every person is born with his own fortune and divine providence. It is also a known fact that when children are very much grown they do not listen to their parents at all, and they select whichever man is pleasing to their eyes even if it is contrary to the wishes of the entire family. The wise man, therefore, will have the foresight not to delay the marriage of his daughter if he should encounter the proper man who follows the ways of G-d so that this matter shall not create a pitfall for him afterwards.

Nor should the fact that a man is not free from military service prevent the father from marrying his daughter to him. See the end of the volume *Machaneh Yisrael*, in the essay entitled "A Current Matter," where an explanation is given at length to refute all arguments and suspicions concerning this matter. One must

also realize that it is much better to be joined with a proper man who has not yet been freed than with an improper man who has been freed, since marriage is forever while service is only for a short time. Those parents who do not allow their daughters, after they have reached maturity, to marry these men because it does not seem respectable shall have to give reckoning, for they lead them into sin, as discussed above. In our sinfulness, this has already been proved in the crucible of experience in other countries where it was also the custom to delay marriages, where daughters became the victims of many pitfalls and also of many ailments, may G-d keep us. But fortunate is the man who places his trust in G-d and follows the same path that our forefathers followed eternally, and surely the Almighty will not withhold good fortune from those who fulfill His ways.

לעיני

האשה חיענה בת הרב הגאון ר' משה ראזין זצ"ל

נפטרה כ"ו שבט, תשנ"ו

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

מוקדש ע"י משפחתה