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TORAH TZNIUT VERSUS NEW MORALITY AND DRUGS

Torah Tzniut and the new morality represent two opposite poles in the world of ideas. *Torah tzniut* stresses the absolute distinction between right and wrong, sacred and profane and pure and impure. The new morality, on the other hand, is based upon the hedonistic concept that there are no immutable laws of morality and that whatever gives pleasure is good. There is, however, a common denominator in *Torah tzniut* and the new morality; the negation of hypocrisy manifesting itself in inconsistency between a person's private life and his public conduct, between the inner life of the person and his outward appearance. Our Sages coined the expression *tocko kebaro* (his interior is like his exterior), which implies that a truly moral person is one who trained and cultivated his character so intensely and thoroughly in depth as well as in breadth that his inner life is in harmony with his outward conduct.

The meaning of this is obvious. Man is born with certain innate instincts, drives and urges. Man is also subject to numerous and multifarious inhibitions. These two phenomena necessarily lead to psychic and emotional conflict which can be resolved in three ways. One method was adopted in our times by the older generation. In hypocritical fashion, they pretend to comply with all the numerous inhibitions, while privately and furtively, they allow themselves to be swayed by their biological drives. This method is more repugnant to *Torah tzniut* than even the new morality. The other method for resolution of the conflict is *Torah tzniut*, which retains the inhibitions, sublimating the

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instincts and channels them into a constructive and creative direction so that the inhibitions will serve as the weapons to ward off the evils of the biological instincts and drives. It is this method which is designated by our Sages as *tocko kebaro* — “*tocko*” refers to the inner biological drives in the person which are vulgar, profane and immoral. “*Baro*” refers to the numerous inhibitions operating in the psyche of man which prevent man from following his drives openly and publicly. A third method of resolving the conflict is the approach of the new morality. It considers the numerous inhibitions as a destructive factor and glorifies indulgence of the biological drives, thus eliminating the conflict between the instincts and the inhibitions. Hence, the *tzniut* method and the new morality method — though at opposite poles in the realm of ideas — share a common aspect; the elimination of hypocrisy and inconsistency in the human personality.

The fundamental difference between these two methods consists in the fact that while the *tzniut* method has as its ultimate objective that the *tocko* should conform to the requirement of the *baro*, the new morality has as its ultimate objective that the *baro* should also reflect the *tocko*. The uninhibited drives is what is the quintessence of *tzniut*. This Hebrew term has two connotations which obviously are linked to each other. One meaning is purity in action, speech or thought. Another is shyness and humility. The English equivalent of *tzniut* — modesty — also possesses the same two connotations.

What are the elements of *tzniut*. What fundamental traits of character constitute the quality of *tzniut*? I mentioned earlier that *tzniut* has two elements: purity and humbleness. While the essence of purity is purity, humbleness consists of two components which on the surface appear to be mutually exclusive but which in reality combine to form the integrated quality of humbleness. They are: 1) meekness before God and before men; 2) a sense of dignity and pride. Meekness before God emanates from a sense of belonging unto God. Only a person who is fully cognizant of the fact that he belongs exclusively to God can be meek before God and men. This leads us to the conclusion that *tzniut* has three components: purity, meekness

and dignity. Our primary task then is to determine the essence of each of these components.

What is purity? The verse "*yirat Hashem tehorah omedet la'ad*" — "the fear of God is pure; it is everlasting" (Psalms 19:10), gives us a clue as to the real meaning of *taharah* (purity). Purity is that which is permanent. Purity is to be equated with permanent, continuity and everlastingness. Impurity, on the other hand, is to be equated with deterioration, decomposition and temporality.

The corpse of a dead person is *tameh* — impure, because it represents the decomposition and deterioration of a heretofore noble existence. *Neveilah* (the carcass of an animal) is impure because it represents the deterioration of a former animal existence. Lust, or any act that is conducive to lust — as contrasted from love or any act that is conducive to love — is immodest because it is impure. Lust is impure because it is not *omedet la'ad*, it is not lasting. Its objective is to satisfy a fleeting appetite. Premarital relation or any erotic experience between a man and a woman who are not married — even if it consists only of holding hands — is impure, because it emanates from lust. An erotic experience between husband and wife can be noble, lofty and sacred because it emanates from love rather than lust. There is a fundamental and essential difference between lust and love. Lust is animalistic and parasitic. Love is humane and altruistic.

Premarital relation or extramarital relation is parasitic for the simple reason that each partner is only interested in satisfying his or her impulse. In a marital relationship where husband and wife are sincerely united and attached to each other for better and for worse, the erotic relationship is humane, altruistic and even angelic because the erotic act under such circumstances is only a physical manifestation of a total identification and union between husband and wife. The animalistic and parasitic character of an erotic experience that originates in lust is poignantly expressed in the account of the episode of Amnon and Tamar in chapter 13 of II Samuel 13:1-15. After Amnon had raped Tamar to whom he was intensely attracted, he was subsequently overtaken by hatred toward Tamar that was much more

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intense than his former desire for her. "Then Amnon hated her with exceeding great hatred; for the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her." This transformation of an intense eros into an even an intenser hatred is typical of an animalistic lust. Immediately upon sexual gratification the impulse turns into an intense hatred which by far surpasses the lust that the male animal bears toward the female animal. A non-marital erotic experience is necessarily an impure experience since it stems from lust which is temporary and fleeting. This does not mean that every marital erotic experience is pure. Even a marital erotic experience can also be impure, if the attendant circumstances are such that they lead to a reduction of the mutual love and affection existing between the spouses. Only a marital erotic experience that is consistent with *omedet la'ad* is pure. This is the rationale for the Law of Nidah. As Rabbi Meir says:

Why did the Torah says that a woman in her menstrual period is forbidden to her husband? The answer is that man on account of his being accustomed to his wife is likely to become bored with her. Consequently, the Torah said: "Let a woman who menstruated count seven days and then immerse herself in a Mikveh, thereby refreshing herself and renewing herself into a new bride unto her husband."

The purpose of the Law of *Taharat Hamishpachah* is to eliminate boredom and monotony in the marital relationship. It enables the woman to maintain her ever-renewing and ever-refreshing bridal beauty, graciousness and nobility so that the mutual love, affection and attachment existing between the spouses will be *tehorah omedet la'ad*. The new morality endorses pre-marital relation because the new morality negates the concept of the distinction between impure and pure, between profane and sacred. Consequently it glorifies lust and censures inhibitions. It advocates the use of drugs because they eliminate the tension that results from the numerous inhibitions restraining human personality. The advocates of new morality claim that only he who is released of inhibitions is free. However, the very anti-thesis happens to be true. The use of drugs is conducive toward the total deterioration and emasculation of the human person-

ality, depriving it of every vestige of freedom. This fact makes the use of drugs an extremely impure and immodest act. Use of drugs is forbidden by the Law of the Torah inasmuch as it involves the violation of three positive commandments and the numerous negative commandments. The first violation relates to the positive commandment "Ye shall be holy." As Nachmanides points out, this commandment implies that one is obligated to lead a life that conforms to the concept of purity. Secondly, the use of drugs involves a violation of the positive commandment of "Thou shalt follow in His Ways." According to Maimonides, this means that a person is obligated to become a *baal midot*, to strive for the perfection of one's character. Thirdly, the use of drugs involves the violation of the positive commandment of "Let your camp be holy." According to the *Sefer Mitzvos Katan* this stipulates that a person must be modest in his behavior. The use of drugs also involves the violation of the negative commandment "Thou shalt be on guard against all evil." It also involves the violation of the negative commandment of "Ye go not about after your own heart and your own eyes." Accordingly a person should not allow himself to be swayed by his appetites to such an extent that the formulation of a habit infringes upon his freedom (*Sefer Hachinuch*). Moreover, since the use of drugs is to impair one's health, it involves a violation of the negative commandment of "Inflicting harm upon oneself" as well as, the negative commandment of "Watch for yourself and watch your soul."

The use of drugs, far from removing the tensions of life in the long run, deprives a person of his freedom and dignity and gradually results in the disintegration of the human personality.

Tzniut has another aspect; namely, humbleness, which in turn consists of two components: 1) Meekness before God and before men; 2) A sense of dignity and pride. These two component traits, which on the surface appear to negate each other, in reality complement each other. To the superficial mind God-consciousness and meekness appear to be inconsistent with a sense of dignity and pride. However, for him whose meekness emanates from the awareness of God, from the belief that man was created in the image of God, to such a person meekness

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before God and before man is not inconsistent with a sense of dignity but it even endows dignity with meaning and resourceful creativity. If man's meekness emanates from God-consciousness then he will necessarily be cognizant of the fact that he belongs to God and that he must be totally committed to God's ethical attributes. Hence, he will be moved to assert his own unique image within the framework of the image of God that inheres in every human being. Judaism believes that meekness before God must go hand in hand with meekness before men. The Scriptural source for the obligation to be imbued with a sense of meekness before God is the verse "Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God." According to our Sages this paragraph forbids an attitude of haughtiness before God. The obligation to be imbued with a sense of meekness before men derives from "That his heart be not lifted above his brethren" (Deut. 17:20). According to Rabeinu Jonah this verse imposes an obligation upon every person, including even the King, to display a sense of meekness before men.

In addition to the sense of meekness before God and men, the quality of humbleness contains also the attribute of dignity, which is a natural, concomitant of the synthesis of meekness before God and meekness before men.

We can conclude that full and total *tzniut* or modesty can be broken up into the following elements or constituents:

- 1) Purity;
- 2) Meekness before God;
- 3) Meekness before men; and
- 4) A sense of dignity.

Consequently only one who possesses all these attributes can be considered a *tzanua*, a modest person in the full sense of the term. We all realize that every act that is impure or is conducive to impurity is not in consonance with the concept of *tzniut*. However, we may not be aware of the fact that any undignified behavior is also a violation of the concept of *tzniut*. Rabbi Yochanan declared that a person's clothes are his honor. This means that a person cannot be regarded as dignified and as a *tzanua* if he does not have regard for cleanliness, whether it is

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

cleanliness in body, clothes or home.

We must, however, realize that any form of snobbishness is incompatible with the concept of *tzniut*. This rules out any form of snobbishness towards irreligious people, and for that matter, toward all those who unfortunately lack the proper moral attributes for a life of dignity.