



YOCHEVED COHEN

Frozen Butter Tears the Bread

Imagine sitting your daughter down when she is 14 and saying, “Now that you are old enough to do some real cooking, dear, I want to teach you some important things. Always check the eggs for a blood-spot in a clear plastic cup, so you can throw it out if there is one. When you double or triple a salad dressing recipe, don’t double the oil, and...”

You would never do that. You would never *need* to do that, because by the time your daughter is ready to do independent cooking, you have been talking with her about cooking and showing her things for so many years that she knows already. You issue occasional directives and reminders, but the main body of knowledge has already been imparted.

Imagine sitting your son down when he is eight years old and saying, “Darling, when I introduce you to a guest, look directly at the guest and say hello. If a man extends his hand, you take it. If a guest asks you for a towel or a drink of water, quickly bring him what he asks for, and ask what else you can do for him. Never, ever make personal comments to a guest about his hair or his clothes, and if he wants to come to shul with you, make sure you give him a siddur and show him...”

You would never do that. You would never *NEED* to do that, because by the time your son is old enough to open his mouth and say, “Hey Mister, are these your real clothes, or

are you dressed up for Purim?” he has been taught and told and shown and warned and he knows how to treat a guest.

In all the crucial areas of life, we train our children from birth, both by example and by talking with our children. Even when they can’t understand what they are doing, we train them to do it, for example, by having babies put coins into the pushke.

So what happens with Tznius? Why do we wait until our daughters are teenagers to have discussions about this crucial topic, on which it is written, “The ultimate distinction of a woman and her supreme greatness is her perfection in Tznius” (Maharal, Sefer Gevuras Hashem)? Tznius is for women what Torah learning is for men! Just as boys must not waste time from learning since that is how they perfect themselves and the world, so too is it with girls and Tznius. (Please note: This is not to suggest that men may be completely immodest or that women may forego learning altogether. It is a question of where each must focus most strongly in order to fulfill his/her purpose in this world — which is, naturally, the exact place where

each one's yetzer hora puts more effort.)

The morality of the Jewish nation is its secret strength and in a very direct and visible way that depends on the Tznius of the women. Tznius is the vehicle women and girls use to uphold Klal Yisroel and to bring kedusha into the world. Shouldn't we tell our little girls about this while they are still wide-eyed and adoring and oh so eager to do whatever we suggest?

One reason (that we tend to wait to educate in this area) may be because so long as our daughters are young, their bodies are babyish and it seems silly to us to be so careful about how exactly we cover them. Only when they become young ladies do we suddenly realize how awful it looks and is, chas v'sholom, when they dress in a manner that is inconsistent with Torah.

But what a counter-productive idea that is. What a dangerous misconception. In general, it doesn't work well to introduce new boundaries when a child is entering the teen years. The teen years are fraught with emotional difficulties, especially for girls. Often there is some form of rebellion. The girl wants to be in charge of herself, yet wants her mother to be involved, and sometimes cries, "You don't care!" even as her mother goes out of her way to do things for her daughter.

The last thing a mother and teenage daughter need is one more area of conflict. Introducing rules of Tznius now is a recipe for disaster. Heaven knows it is hard enough for mothers to remain strong with enforcing the old rules.

A recipe for success and peace, on the other hand, is to make Tznius a part of our daily instruction with our child from the start, just as we do with cooking, hachnosas orchim, making brochos, bentching, Shema at night

and negel vaser in the morning or any number of Jewish concepts that have practical application in our lives all the time.

Inculcating Tznius in a little girl as opposed to doing so in a teenager is like spreading butter (that has been out for a few hours) on bread, as opposed to spreading frozen butter. The little girl is like the soft butter, more than ready to listen and absorb and practice. The other kind, well, it will go on the bread if you try hard enough, but it tears the bread, too.

Tonight, try suggesting to your seven-year-old that you go through her closet together and give away anything that is not Tzniusdik on her (often, it will be just fine for a smaller Jewish child; if not, it can be given

to a non-Jew or made into dolly clothes). The seven-year-old is likely to go along with your suggestion happily. She will probably make her own suggestions about which articles to get rid of and why. "This skirt is long enough when I stand up, but when I sit down, it's too short, see Mommy?" It's a game and Mommy wants to play! What fun. At the end of the session, if the mother gives her daughter a big hug and says, "I am so proud of you! And you must be so proud of your closet. If Moshiach comes right now, I think you are ready," then the daughter is in seventh heaven. What, a compliment from Mom?! And the good feeling towards Tznius grows.

But try suggesting to a teenager that you go through her closet together. Try telling her to get her closet ready for Moshiach. Enough said. Mothers of teenagers will understand. The scenario that is likely to ensue is not fit to print.

Then why wait? If we ignore the cute pudgy baby

ANOTHER ANGLE:

...Or maybe the problem is not that we don't bring up Tznius when they're young. I think we do teach Tznius the same way we teach kosher cooking and hachnosas orchim. We take them shopping, we tell them to pull up their socks, we remove items that become too short. The word Tznius is definitely a part of their vocabulary from a young age.

The problem is that many children do not find themselves, in the teen years, suddenly tempted to serve chicken soup in milchig bowls. But they are tempted to dress like their friends are dressing, to fit in, to assert themselves. The area of Tznius in dress is often where a girl can find herself challenging the rules — and her parents.

The solution is to help your daughter — in advance — to make Tznius her own, not a way to please her mother. A 14-year-old doesn't want to take your opinion at face value anymore. She has her own opinion. But if you have involved her in the process of choosing her clothing, deciding what is appropriate, and discussing the guidelines all along — she will come to follow the guidelines because she sees the value of Tznius for herself.

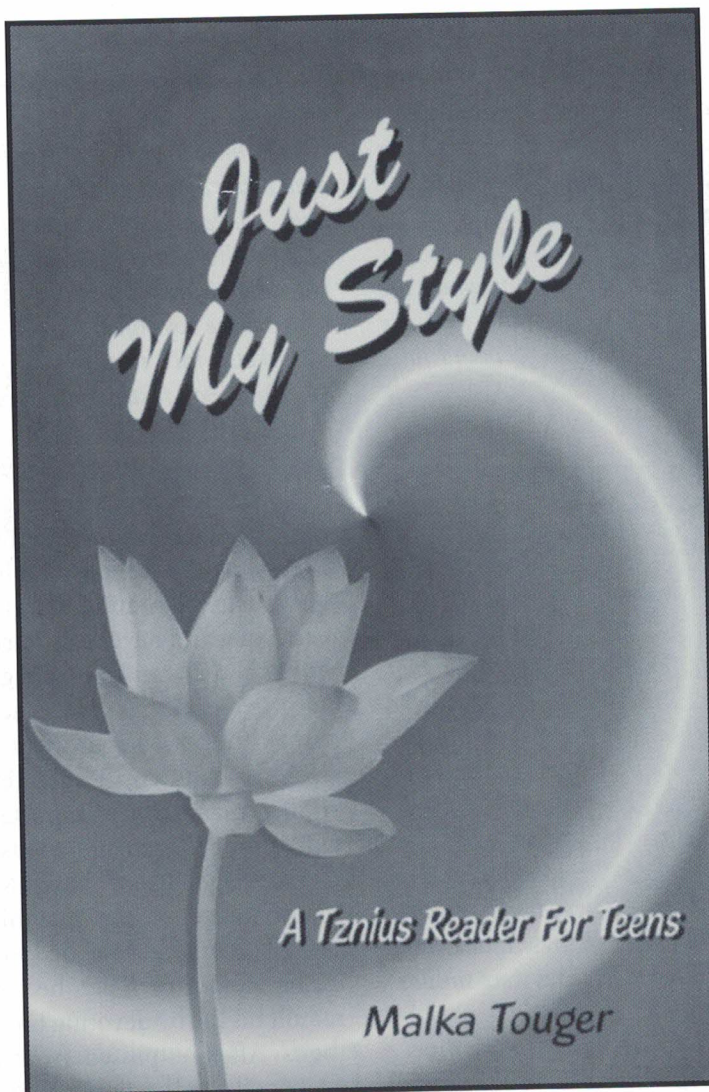
She has to care. This does not start in her teen years, but from a young age. This is what is accomplished by talking to her and teaching her through the young years. Baalei Teshuva are not the only ones who make a choice in life. Children born into frum homes also must, at some point, choose to make the Torah theirs. They have to make the right choices because they want to — because it means something to them — not because their parents do it that way.

— *Simcha Fine, Shlucha and mother of 10 ka"n, Montreal*

fat that may seem incongruous with Tznius laws (but truly is not) and begin when our daughters are three years old, and keep talking and showing and discussing and sorting when they are four, five, six, ten, and twelve... then by the time those inevitable parent-teen conflicts surface, by the time the girl no longer wants her mother to go shopping with her but prefers her friends, by the time she is not really in the market for her mother's approval and company... Tznius is "in the bag."

One excellent tool to help inculcate Tznius into young girls is the book "Just My Style" by Malka Touger. The subtitle is "A Tznius Reader for Teens" but if the girl is a fluent reader, then it provides interesting reading for one as young as 8 or 9. Here are some of the questions that the book brings up for discussion:

- Which word is more accurate: Tznius or modesty?
- How can Tznius affect the way we keep other Mitzvos?
- Can we rely on our ingrained natural sensitivity to Tznius to guide us?
- Shouldn't a person's midos and good manners count more than her appearance?
- Do you agree or disagree with the person who says, "Dressing properly on the outside when I'm not so frum on the inside makes me a hypocrite?"
- Should we not wear any of the styles worn by the general public?
- What are your suggestions for dealing with peer pressure?
- Why do some girls moan and groan when teachers bring up Tznius, and others don't mind at all, while yet others enjoy the topic?
- Can sensitivity be learned? Isn't it one of those things you either have or you don't, like the ability to play piano by ear or carry a tune?
- Tefillah is called "service of the heart," and is so



important for a Jew. So why does how we look on the outside make a difference to Hashem?

- If a friend of yours decides to dress in an extremely Tzniusdik way, would you try to dissuade her, or subtly make fun of her decision?
- Can there be different manners of speech, behavior, or clothing that are acceptable in one place and unacceptable in another?

The book contains Fun Pages which young girls enjoy filling in. The Fun Pages, like the stories and Divrei Torah, are designed to make a girl think. She gains a heightened perception and becomes aware of Tznius in a new way. Suddenly she sees things she didn't notice before.

"Just My Style" is packed with stories, Divrei Torah,

and discussions. Youthful readers are given credit for intelligence; the lessons are not hammered in.

...so long as our daughters are young, their bodies are babyish and it seems silly to us to be so careful about how exactly we cover them.

Here are two of my favorite excerpts:

(page 58) *Chavie lives in New York, but spends her summers working in Jewish day camps around the country. In her senior year she worked in Texas. One Sunday afternoon, Chavie and the other counselors took advantage of the free afternoon to stock up on arts and crafts supplies.*

"Let's walk to the store," Chavie suggested. "I had a big lunch and it would be good for me to walk it off." Everyone agreed. The seven girls took to the road under the hot Texas

sun, dressed in stark contrast to the locals.

After a mile hike, they reached the store's parking lot. Making their way across the expanse, they approached the doors eager for air conditioning. "Hey y'all, howdy there girls!" Suddenly they heard a woman's voice with a distinct Southern drawl.

Chavie and her friends turned to the woman questioningly.

"I've been watchin' y'all marchin' across that there lot," she said with a smile. "Ah say, in that there clothing y'all are wearin' in this heat, and that innocent look y'all got aboutcha... you must be G-d's children, now ain'tcha?"



(page 11) The wisdom of Shlomo HaMelech spread far and wide. Word reached the African kingdom of Sheba and the Queen was both curious and skeptical. "I'll go check for myself," she decided. "I will challenge him with hard questions and riddles and see if he is as wise as everyone claims." She set out for Yerushalayim and gained an audience with the king.

One of the riddles was almost like a performance! The queen presented a group of children, who were about the same age and height, before the king. They were all dressed alike and had the same haircut — even their facial features were similar.

"Can you point out which are the boys and which are the girls?" she asked.


Shlomo HaMelech ordered a servant to set before the children bowls of nuts and roasted seeds. "Help yourselves," said the king. "Have as much as you'd like and take some for later, too."

In a short time he had an answer for the Queen of Sheba. How did he know?

...All the boys lifted the corner of their robes, creating a kind of pocket, which they filled with nuts. But the girls would not lift their robes. Instead, they used kerchiefs to collect the snacks. (Midrash Shochar Tov, Mishlei 1)

Despite occasional lapses into incorrect punctuation and faulty sentence structure, some painfully bad rhymes, and an illogical habit of asking the reader if she agrees with someone else's feelings, the book is bound to be of enormous benefit to any little girl who reads it. It is only 77 pages long and never gets boring. Drawings are engrossing. Stories and Divrei Torah are given over in a clear, appealing and conversational style. One can see that this is the same Malka Touger who brought us the brilliant and unique series for children, "Please Tell Me What the Rebbe Said," among many other important and popular books and videos for children and adults.

On page 40 of "Just My Style," we read of the Klausenberger Rebbe, may his memory be for a blessing. The Klausenberger Rebbe lost his wife and eleven children in the Holocaust. Then he came to the United States and rebuilt his life by devoting himself to helping others rebuild theirs. After he passed away, during the shiva, an elderly woman arrived and took out two worn-out, torn, old socks. She explained, "The Rebbe and I were in the camps together. One cold, rainy day I was walking along the path, and the Rebbe saw me. He stopped me, took me aside, and gently said, 'I know you have tried to be as Tzniusdik as possible, even here. But to go with bare legs... it is not right.' I just stood there. What could I say? I would have loved to wear socks, but had none. Then the Rebbe removed his shoes which were nothing more than a few torn strips of leather. He gave me his socks, and said with fatherly love, 'It is your obligation much more than mine. Here, you wear them.' And I did. I have kept them all these years." ■



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