



Exposing the Lesser Discussed Modesty Issue

To Camp or Not to Camp?

During school vacation we took our granddaughters camping. We wanted to expose these three princesses to the un-pampered experience of roughing it close to nature. Truthfully, I also wanted to challenge my own pampered existence and enjoy the satisfactory feeling of still being a youthful camper! It had been at least a decade since we last went camping with our sons when they were children. So, we had to buy all new tents for the occasion. To our disappointment, two weeks before our planned trip, our oldest granddaughter who had just celebrated her Bat Mitzvah announced that she was not a camping girl and she didn't want to join. Out of solidarity, her younger sisters too decided to stay home. There was a bit back and forth about the issue, followed by a final 'no.' Although I initially was disappointed by the rejection, I decided to look at the bright side of how much easier a camping trip would be with just my husband and adult, single son. We had already spent some meaningful days with our granddaughters the week before. While we offered to do more, "you can only take the horse to the water..." if it wants to follow you. So, I looked forward to a quiet intimate excursion with lots of visits to the graves of holy Rabbis in Tiberias. To my dismay my husband brought home three brand new tents. I guess it wasn't clear to him that the girls weren't joining us. I withheld myself from scolding him, seeing that the tents had their receipts tagged on them so they could easily be returned. Later that afternoon, my Bat Mitzvah granddaughter took me by surprise by declaring that she had changed her mind and decided to join the camping trip after all. "But why? What made you change your mind?" I asked. "Seeing the new tents, they look cool!" She replied! This story taught me two principles: 1. If you detach yourself from wanting something so badly from others, letting go and accepting, then they are more likely to come along. 2. Respecting your husband including his extravaganzas and refraining from criticizing him brings blessings to the family.

Torah Rules for Proper Toilet Manners

We finally arrived at my favorite camping site, the northern seaside of the 'Lake of the World.' Yes, you guessed it, it's the Kineret or Sea of Galilee. There is no other lake like it. Especially, this part of the Kineret has captured my heart. Its 20-30 minutes' drive from Tiberias city so there are no motorboats, smoke, city towers or buildings in sight of the sea. When you are in the water, all you see is the spectacular view of the blue sky reflected in the ripples of the water caressing you and the awe-inspiring towering mountain ridges. So peaceful and serene! Just love to dip, float and swim in the gentle, cool waters of the Kineret! The amazing thing about this particular place is that all the women are modestly dressed and there are minyanim for the men around the clock. It was lovely how our entire family reveled in the lake for hours, playing with frisbees and tumbling in our rubber boat. The downside of my camping experience consisted of the bathrooms. I will refrain from going into details. It is perhaps less known to most people that the Torah has laws about everything in life, including proper toilet manners. These things, that even a garbage cat knows, would seem evident, but apparently, they aren't.

Modesty Includes Properly Covering Our Body and its Waste

ספר דברים פרק כג פסוק יד וַיִּתֵּן תְּהִיָּה לָךְ עַל אֲזָנְךָ וְהָיָה בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ חוּץ וְחִפְרָתָהּ בָּהּ וּשְׂבֵתָהּ וְכִסִּיתָ אֶת יְצִאָתָהּ: (טו) כִּי הֵשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ לְהִצִּילְךָ וְלִתֵּן אִיְבֹיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה מַחֲנֶיךָ קְדוֹשׁ וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה בְּךָ עֲרוֹת דָּבָר וְשֵׁב מֵאַחֲרָיִךְ:

“You shall keep a stake in addition to your weapons; and it shall be, when you sit down outside [to relieve yourself], you shall dig with it, and you shall return and cover your excrement. 15) For Hashem, your G-d, goes along in the midst of your camp, to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you. [Therefore,] your camp shall be holy, so that He should not see anything unseemly [literarily nakedness] among you and would turn away from you” (*Devarim* 23:14-15).

These Torah verses are often quoted in defense of modesty, as עֲרֹוֹת דָּבָר /*ervat davar* means ‘nakedness.’ Exposing skimpy bathing-suits to unrelated men does indeed drive the Shechina away. How wonderful to have the privilege of living in the Holy Land with separate beaches or hours for men and women at seashores and swimming pools. At our campsite there were something for everyone: A women’s beach, a men’s beach and a mixed beach for the family to be together where the women were fully covered. I’m still wanting to take the campsites to the next level where not only our bodies but also our excrements are properly covered.

The Torah Mandate to Cover Your Excrements

The context of the Torah verses quoted above is referring to a military camp. If even during the emergency of war, along with “your weapons” the soldiers are required to put effort into proper toilet manners for keeping their camp clean and holy, how much more so in our camps of leisure. Put simply, this entails to include in our camping gear a stake or a shovel to dig with in nature places where there are no modern toilets. Whenever a camper needs to relieve himself, he must go as far away from the campsites as possible to a secluded place, dig a hole, move his bowels and then cover everything up well with dirt including any stray toilet paper. Please permit me to extend this Torah mandate into the sphere of the more common modern toilets of our time. Surely flushing the toilet is a way of fulfilling the mitzvah to “cover your excrement.” However, this is not always completely so. Often traces of feces remain on the side of the toilet bowl after the flush. From the age of three a child can be trained in the important mitzvah to develop awareness of the laws of modesty that includes covering or cleaning the traces of his personal waste each time he visits the toilet. To take care of this matter we have a toilet brush! Such a device is not exclusively for the cleaning lady or the housewife to use once a week. If we wouldn’t want to expose your private parts to the cleaning lady, why would anyone want to expose the traces of their private bowel movements?