

WHAT PEOPLE THINK

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

Peer pressure is a powerful force. Styles of dress, hairstyle and home furnishings are followed by the great mass of the population because each one feels that it is important to look sharp in the eyes of others. On the other side of the coin are the rebels who feel that in order to make a statement he or she will not follow the trend. The rebel may even behave in a way contrary to the accepted norm in order to raise a few eyebrows and exhibit independence and individuality. "I don't care what people think" is the credo.

Moshe Rabenu said, "You shall be clean (vindicated) in the eyes of G-d and Israel" [Bemidbar 32:22]. A person should be concerned not only to satisfy the will of the Creator but also must be concerned about his or her reputation. The respect of others is important too. The concern should not be to gain the respect of others for the sake of one's honor, rather the motivation should be that one wants to behave in a manner that is above reproach because that is the right thing to do.

When one reads stories about the conduct of our great predecessors, one often can't believe that anyone human could think or act in the way that they did. One should realize, however, that even if the stories are exaggerated -- (which they are not) -- no one is telling stories like that about us. It is the reputation built by the giant of the past -- day by day -- incident by incident -- that creates an aura of greatness and respectability around his or her personage to prompt others to write about his or her life.

Today as you go through life's activities -- work and leisure -- physical and spiritual -- stop. Consider what others might say about your behavior. True one should not be controlled by the peer pressure of friends and neighbors, however, it only takes a minute to paint another beautiful brush stroke in the picture others will see called -- YOU.

CONSIDER THIS FOR A MINUTE

Rebbi Yohanan said: "We learn fear of sin from a young pure woman." Once Rebbi Yohanan heard a young girl saying: "Master of the Universe, You created a Gan Eden and You created a Gehinom. You created the righteous and you created the wicked. May it be Your will that no one sins because of me."

Rebbi Yohanan sensed the piety of this girl who was fearful that someone else might be attracted to her and sin in thought or deed. She dressed and acted in the ways of modesty but feared the possibility that she may bring another to sin. [Sotah 22a]

Note: One should realize that this young girl did keep all the laws of modesty as prescribed by the Torah and still she feared that another might look at her and sin. How much must one guard against bringing others to bad thoughts

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