



**The Hamodia Readers' Forum, August 25, 2004 Page A72**

## **Beware! You Are Being Watched**

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During the year that I spent as a visiting professor at the United States Military Academy in West Point, NY, I became aware of the special rules of conduct that each cadet was required to adhere to while in uniform. This also included uniforms being clean and neatly pressed at all times, shoes shined to the point where one could see one's face in them, hats worn when not inside a building, and refraining from behavior not becoming an officer while in uniform. The reason for these requirements is quite simple. A soldier in uniform is immediately recognizable as a member of the US Military. As such, his or her appearance should reflect well on the military. Dress and behavior that negate the positive image the military wants to foster is unbecoming and subject to disciplinary action.

Whether we like it or not, Orthodox Jews are readily recognized. When a passerby sees a woman wearing long sleeves and a long skirt, he or she assumes that this person is an observant Jew. A man with a yarmulke or a hat wearing a white shirt and dark trousers is categorized as an Orthodox Jew. Indeed, the nonobservant Jewish and gentile public see us and recognize us for what we are – Orthodox Jews.

Given this, we must keep in mind at all times that people, whether rightly or wrongly, often judge Orthodox Judaism based upon how Orthodox people look and behave. If one is not courteous, then the general public is likely to conclude that, "Orthodox Judaism is a religion that fosters a lack of manners." I once heard a modern Orthodox woman say, "Their skirts are down to the floor, but they cannot say 'Hello' to me!"

We recently had dinner with some friends from London who were visiting the US and staying in Boro Park. They commented, "We thought that Americans were supposed to be friendly. In England, when a new face appears in our shul, we greet this person warmly. People do not greet us with a simple 'Good Morning' or 'Hello.'" He added, "Here no one says anything to me when I go to daven even though it is obvious that I am a stranger." By the way, these are comments from

observant people. One can only imagine what the general public thinks of such behavior.

If a young man appears in public with his shirt hanging out of his pants, his clothes looking dirty and disheveled, then observers are likely to conclude that this is what Torah true Judaism is all about. When he is discourteous and double parks, creating a traffic jam because he has to run in to catch a minyan for Mincha, this does not reflect well on the religiously observant. Indeed, one might categorize such behavior as an “Aveira HaBah B’Mitzvah.”

People are indeed watching us at all times, and this implies that we have a responsibility to behave and dress in a manner that reflects positively on Orthodoxy. Our behavior must always be beyond reproach. Wouldn't it be a Kiddush HaShem if the nonobservant and gentile world always had positive experiences when dealing with Orthodox people? We are supposed to serve as a light unto the nations to show them the truth. What better way to foster this than to make sure that our appearance and behavior are exemplary wherever we go and with whomever we encounter?