

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah tells us this week, "For Hashem, your G-d walks in the midst of your camp to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you; therefore, your camp should be holy, in that He (Hashem) should not see an immodest thing among you [causing Him] to turn away from you." From this verse we see that the success of the Jewish people is largely based on their modesty.

What is modesty? The Jewish concept of modesty can be defined as: dressing and acting in a way to cover that which should not be displayed to others. The last 80 or so years has seen a steady decline of modesty in America. Revealing modes of dress, public displays of affection and foul language which until recent history were the sign of a person with low moral character, are now flaunted both in the media and on the streets of America. There seems to be a contest in society to see who low America can go.

We must understand that this behavior is contrary to Jewish ideals. Any Jew wishing to protect his spirituality and the spirituality of his family, must distant himself from these modern trends of immodesty. The following amazing true story illustrates one young Jewish girl's struggles to remain modest during one of the most trying times in our recent history.

In October 1938, the hatred that the German populace had for Jews boiled like a hot cauldron on a raging fire. The German SS indiscriminately dragged Jews off the streets or from their homes, humiliated them and carted many off to slave labor camps, where torture and cruel death often awaited them. R' Dovid Tzvi Cohen and his wife Sorah Zisel lived with their four children on Linien Strasse in the Jewish district of Berlin. Shops and stores owned by Jews lined the streets of the district, and dozens of shuls — many of them architecturally beautiful — were spread throughout the area. The Cohens, who lived on the second floor of an apartment building, had friendly relations with their German gentile neighbors, particularly the Reinmann family, who lived on the third floor. On Thursday morning, November 10, 1938, Frau (Mrs.) Reinmann came downstairs and said to the Cohens with urgency, "I hear there is going to be a pogrom and it may even be today. You would be safer if you left this neighborhood for now." The Cohens had also heard rumors to that effect, but who could know which threat was real and which was not? Frau Reinmann assured them that she had her information from reliable sources. Unbeknownst to the Cohens and most Jews, the night before at 11:55 p.m., Gestapo Chief Heinrich Mueller had sent a telegram to all police units ordering them not to interfere with actions that would be taking place against all Jews, especially their synagogues. Fire companies were instructed not to protect the synagogues but to make sure that the flames did not spread to Aryan property.

Believing that Frau Reinmann may be correct, the Cohens decided to act at once and flee with their children to the other side of town, to the home of Mrs. Cohen's parents, Dovid Shaye and Brindel Shankal on Elsasser Strasse where few Jewish families resided. Surely it would be safer there to weather a possible storm of violence. The Cohen's 12-year-old daughter Esther asked her parents if she could come to her grandparents an hour later. She wanted to finish her homework and she had all her books at home. Esther was a feisty child and her parents trusted her instincts. She knew the route to her grandparents' home and assured her parents she would be there as soon as possible.

The Cohens left with their three other children as Esther remained home alone. Within an hour, Esther heard wild screaming and rioting. She ran to a window facing the street and saw a mob of what seemed like a thousand people rampaging down Linien Strasse, roaring in piercing maniacal voices at the top of their lungs, "Get the Jews! Kill the Jews!" She watched in terror as pandemonium reigned. The mob smashed windows, looted stores, threw rocks, hurled insults, and threatened the lives of Jews anywhere and everywhere throughout the Reich. Frau Reinmann was right. This was a pogrom of the worst order. Esther knew she could not remain in the building for if she were found her life would be in danger. She was trapped. Trembling and isolated, she tried to devise a plan to save herself. Esther began reciting any Tehillim she knew by heart, all the while thinking desperately of a plan of escape. She was often told that she didn't look Jewish because of her fair skin and blonde hair. Perhaps now she could use that to her advantage. She tousled her hair and combed it the way the German girls in the Hitler Youth Association did. She looked into a mirror and was revolted at what she saw. She was afraid, though, that it still wasn't enough of a decoy. She adjusted her jacket and clothes in a provocative way, so that no one could imagine she was an Orthodox Jewish girl. She hated dressing that way. She felt cheapened and degraded, but there was no choice. Her life hung in the balance. She decided she would go outside and walk nonchalantly, hoping no one would suspect she was Jewish, for logically no Jewish girl in her right mind would brazenly walk among such an anti-Semitic mob. With the words of Tehillim on her lips, she reached up to kiss the mezuzah as she left her apartment. "Ribono Shel Olam, please save me," she whispered softly. As she walked down the stairs in the hallway she suddenly remembered an expression she often heard from her mother, "Ahfilu fahr dee feer vent, darf mehn zich shemmen." ("Even for the four walls [in a home] one should feel shame.") Her mother meant to convey the message that tznius (modesty) was a code of behavior that was required even in the privacy of one's home. She was startled that those words would come to her just now. She rationalized that she had to look like "them" to spare her life. Surely her mother would understand and even encourage her behavior.

But now, in the empty darkened hallway she was having doubts. Perhaps this was a message from Above. Esther decided that come what may, she would not go out the way she was dressed. She re-buttoned her blouse to her neck, tucked it into her skirt and straightened the collar of her jacket, but kept her hair tousled. As she walked out into the street the noise burst at her with a crescendo. She mumbled more words of Tehillim, making sure, however, that no one realized she was praying. The yelling and screaming of the mob was deafening. She walked hesitantly, checking to see if the horde had reached her grandmother's fabric store on the first floor of their apartment building. (They had not reached it yet, but later the shop was looted and ransacked.) She walked as quickly as she could, avoiding eye contact with anyone. She tried to keep to the middle of the street, away from the flying glass and swinging clubs that smashed into every Jewish window in sight. She tried not to panic as her mouth went dry from fear. In 10 minutes, that seemed like ten days, she was past the mob. As soon as she was sure she wasn't being observed, she began to run as fast as she could.

When she came to her grandparents' home, she knocked on the door rapidly. Her heart was beating wildly as she waited for a response. Did her parents make it? Had the Nazis come here earlier? Was anyone home? The door opened and she ran right past her sister into her mother's arms and wept uncontrollably. The emotion and tension of the last hour burst forth in a torrent of tears. At first she could not speak, but kept looking back at the door, hoping she had not been followed. Then slowly, between sighs and sobs, she told her anxious parents and grandparents about her frightful experience.

When she finished, Mrs. Cohen took Esther's face in her hands and said softly, "Don't you realize my child, you saved your own life?" Esther was bewildered. "Esther," her mother said again, "look, you are wearing your gold necklace with a Mogen Dovid on it. Had you left your buttons open, the Mogen Dovid would have identified you as a Jew. Your mitzvah protected you without your even knowing it." Reflections of the Maggid, Reb Paysach Krohn, p. 32)

Although the Germans murdered her parents and most of her family in the holocaust, Esther Cohen, now Mrs. Esther Biller survived the war, later moving to Monsey, New York, where she lives today with her husband Reb Kalman Yakov Biller, he should live and be well. Mrs. Biller and her husband, who also lost his family in the war, have taken revenge on the Germans in the best way possible; namely, by being the grandparents and great-grandparents to probably over 25 minyanim (25 x 10 bli eyn horah) of G-d-fearing Torah observant Jews, including the author of this weekly's wife.

Let us remember this story and remember that our holiness and success as a Nation depend on hiding that which must be hidden. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**