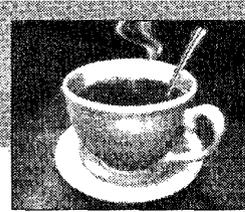


Over Coffee

By Rachel Bluth



As I sit at my desk watching the morning arrive, a steaming mug of coffee at my right hand and stack of newspapers to my left, I thank the Almighty for His glorious gifts and simple pleasures. Hashem blesses all of us with joys and talents and gifts that suit our needs; the trick is to understand and appreciate them, even though they may not be exactly what we *want*. Rich or poor, young and old, male or female, Hashem loves us equally, created us with a purpose and a place in His world, thus making each and every one of us uniquely individual and special. Each one of us is a custom-made creation and a one of a kind individual created with a purpose to fulfill.

Just as these thoughts were running through my head, I randomly began scanning the newspapers. An advertisement caught my eye – one advertising costumes for Purim. Usually a pleasurable experience, this time I was filled with sadness and a sense of disgust. Oh, it had nothing to do with the costumes portrayed. What offended my senses was that all the little boys had faces *but none of the little girls were so lucky!* It seems that there was a pictorial epidemic that whited out every little girls face! I sat there in absolute awe, not wanting to believe that this was done intentionally and looking for reasons to validate this terrible aberration.

My first thought was that it was done for safety reasons, to protect these little girls. But then the reasoning that little boys deserved the same consideration kicked in and that theory simply didn't defend this defamation of gender. Forcing my brain to think deeper and more logically, I came up with the *inyan* of *tznius*. However, upon scanning this advertisement again I saw that every

costume was ultra-modest -- long sleeved, closed neck, proper length -- and the little girls were not older than six or seven, at most, eight. And, if it was indeed *tznius* that played a hand here, why not just use mannequins or dummies to display the girls' costumes? Why erase a child's features, obliterate her face so as to make her from a person into a *thing*? What parent agreed to this? Do these children appear faceless in family photo albums? Do they not take class pictures? Are they never photographed at *simchas*? I find that hard to believe and even harder to justify.

Over the 18 years, as I have been helping people deal with their pain, fears and problems, I have seen many young girls with identity issues, insecurities, low self esteem and no self image. I have dealt with tweens (girls 9 through 12) and teens who have translated their low self image into Anorexia/Bulimia, cutting and mutilation, OCD and various other configurations resulting from no self worth. How far removed is the idea that pictures such as these, of faceless little *yiddishe techter*, precious *neshomos* who may be seeing this advertisement at this very moment and being conditioned to see themselves as faceless, worthless, indentiyleless. How many of them will grow up to suffer from the above-mentioned maladies, or worse, accept the misconception that they have no value (unlike little boys) and must pay for their part in the sin of the *Eitz Hadaas ad olam!*

I am curious what the person who erased these young girls faces was thinking. I wonder what right he or she has to take Hashem's children and deface them? Did this person have special dispensation from Hakodosh Baruch Hu to redesign His design? Or was

it simply a matter of knowing better what *Klal Yisroel* should aspire to, better than the *Ribono Shel Olam* Himself? Whatever the reasoning is, it cannot justify the presentation of faceless creatures in order to sell costumes.

As a mother, I raised all my children with the concept that every one of them was a work of art, especially created for this world by The Master Artist, to serve Him and *Klal Yisroel* with a G-d given purpose. My sons and my daughter are gifted, self-assured and happy individuals, raising their children to thank Hashem for all that they have and secure in the knowledge of who they are. My children all know that no one is loved more or less, is better or worse, more important or diminished in worth in Hashem's heart or in mine. They are all equal, beautiful in character, features and spirit, in mind, body and soul. But obviously, there are some adults (parents, teachers, community leaders?) who choose to make one gender superior over another and it is their children (daughters) they bring to me and to my colleagues years down the line, with *machlos* related to mental and emotional disfigurements.

I am a strong believer in prevention over cure. Take a reality check and see if you see yourself and your children here. Perhaps, if you catch it early enough and change the concept of *who is more important to each child is equally important, worthy and loved*, then, perhaps, I'll be seeing less dysfunction and more well-adjusted children and adults. It's easier to fix something that's cracked than something that's broken, *like little dolls with no faces*.

It's almost 8:00 am, where has the time gone? I take a sip of the last of my cold coffee and try to wash away the bad taste all this has left in my mouth and ponder who is waiting to see me today.

Healing

By Dr. Mel Waldman

How do I heal?

The Darkness speaks to me through my dreams and traumatic memories; my personal history is a guide to understanding and redemption, the solution or *cure* hidden in the caves of my unconscious.