

Cologne for Men? Husband/Wife Tensions? **Elongated Prayers? Panhandlers?--Rabbi Marc** **Angel Replies to the Jewish Press**

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Is it appropriate for a man to wear cologne?

The Talmud (Berakhot 43b) and Rambam (Hilkhot De'ot 5:9) indicate the impropriety of Torah sages “going abroad while scented.” Perhaps such behavior was deemed to be too hedonistic or effeminate; perhaps it could have led people to suspect inappropriate behavior.

Attitudes have changed dramatically over the centuries. In our times, it is fairly common for men to use after shave lotion or cologne, and few—if any—would deem this to be hedonistic, effeminate or suggestive of immoral conduct. An industry study of several years ago found that 63% of American men aged 18-64 wear fragrances at least occasionally, with 23% indicating they use it all the time. In many cases, the scents are used as antiperspirants. Or they simply make the man feel more cheerful or more presentable.

Using colognes/scents is a personal decision which affects each man and those with whom he has regular contact at home or work. It is appropriate to let each man decide what is best for himself and his immediate family and friends.

Is it ever appropriate for a husband to put his foot down with his wife or a wife with her husband? (Or is compromise the answer no matter what the issue is?)

Husbands and wives must always strive to deal with each other with love, respect, patience...and a good sense of humor. They must be able to communicate their feelings and their needs, and must be sure that their spouse genuinely listens and understands. With these ingredients, couples will be able to negotiate almost every area of conflict. Almost...but not all.

Sometimes there are deep differences that cannot simply be ignored or laughed away. But when such differences arise, authoritarian attitudes seldom result in satisfactory conclusions. You don't “put your foot down” if you treat your spouse as an equal partner in marriage. On the other hand, compromises are not always workable or appropriate.

If a couple cannot reach a satisfactory resolution to their differences, they should consult their rabbi or a marriage counselor. It sometimes is helpful to have a trusted professional help the couple work through the issues and come to a mutually acceptable way forward.

The goal is not to have either spouse say: “I won, you lost.” The goal is for both to be able to say: “We won.”

Should a person *daven* a long *Shemoneh Esrei* if others around him might consider him arrogant (or holier than thou) as a result?

A person should pray humbly and sincerely. Proper prayer puts one into relationship with the Almighty; it is a sacred time, a quiet and transformative time.

When one prays, one focuses on being in the presence of Hashem.

True religiosity is marked by personal, private devotion. Yuhara—pretentiousness—is a violation of the essence of religious experience. Tradition speaks of 36 hidden righteous people upon whom the world depends. They live piously and inconspicuously. They do not seek—or want—to flaunt their piety.

When one prays *Shemoneh Esrei* (or any other parts of the service) one should do so in a way that combines these two principles: 1) sincere personal outpouring of heart; 2) inconspicuous devotion.

One should pray *Shemoneh Esrei* as long as it takes for him or her to do so properly. No one should stand in judgment of how much time another person takes for his or her prayer.

If a person is the rabbi or shaliah tsibbur of the congregation, he should not elongate his prayer so as not to cause excessive delay to the worshipers. But a private individual may take as much time as needed, as long as he/she does not disturb other congregants.

If a person is indeed trying to appear “holier than thou” let Hashem be the judge. We are better off concentrating on our own prayers and not worrying about how long it takes for our neighbor to complete the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Should you give money to a panhandler on the street (or a subway car) if you have no idea if the person really needs it or not (e.g., he may take the money to buy drugs)?

The mitzvah of giving charity has two goals. One is to provide assistance to the recipient. The other is to develop a charitable personality in the donor. Ideally, both goals are accomplished when one generously gives to a genuinely needy person.

When one is asked for funds from an unknown individual, a charitable person will tend to donate without asking questions about how the recipient will use the charity.

When one is asked for funds from someone of dubious character, even a charitable person might choose not to donate. Why give one’s hard earned money to someone who may be a con artist, or a drunk, or a drug addict? The dilemma is exacerbated when there are so many requests from beggars on the streets and subways. It is natural to become mistrustful and to avoid giving alms to such individuals.

We should give charity when we feel it will genuinely help the recipients; and when we feel that our donation will help us in our own moral development. When in doubt, it's best to err on the side of being too charitable.