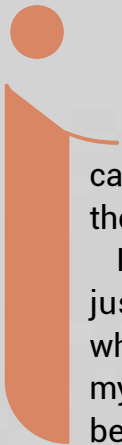




The brachos that are waiting for us

RAIZEL SEREBRYANSKI



can still hear the squeals of excitement filling the arrivals hall of the airport.

I was eight years old. My family and I had just touched down in the United States where we had flown in from Australia to visit my grandparents. Lucy, one of my mother's best friends from childhood, had come to pick us up from the airport, and now met us at the luggage carousel.

But the sounds weren't just the usual "Welcome!" exclamations you'd expect to hear at airport arrivals. These were the type of sounds that cause the entire crowd at the airport to turn around and look, the type that cause one's luggage to be left for last, and the type that gets imprinted in the memory of the children.

Why the excitement?

Because Lucy, who had been making the journey in her Yiddishkeit as a *baalas teshuvah*, showed up wearing a wig! She had just made the decision to cover her hair, but had not yet informed us, choosing instead to pick us up from the airport sporting it as a surprise.

The memory of my mother laughing and hugging Lucy, exclaiming "WOW!" again and again (while all the strangers around us looked on in curiosity) impressed upon me as an eight-year-old the pride and privilege of wearing the crown of a Jewish married woman.

(And maybe also that if I didn't want to make a spectacle of myself mid-life in front of my very exuberant family, I was going to cover my hair from day one!)



hannah

Hannah and her husband and daughter were amongst our Friday night regulars when I was growing up, and by then, they had already *kashered* their kitchen and enrolled their child in the Jewish day school.

Born and raised in Russia, Hannah and her husband were denied a Jewish education. “Now that we have the opportunity, we choose one member of our family—the most clever of us—to study Torah and then come home and teach the rest of us. That’s why we send our daughter!” she would say.

One Friday night they arrived and Hannah was glowing, and so was her brand new wig. She was covering her hair for the first time. The *sheitel* was dark brown, sleek, with a fringe and a sharp cut framing her face at shoulder length.

After the excitement and compliments subsided and we settled down after *Kiddush*, she told us all about it. She explained that she was aware that my mother and all the religious women in the community wore wigs, but she didn’t know that it was anything more than a traditional fashion, or that it could have anything to do with her. Recently, though, she had attended a *shiur* on the subject, given by Mrs. Shternie Althaus, *shlucha* in Sydney, Australia.

“I learned about the *brachos* this *mitzvah* brings—*brachos* in livelihood, health, and *nachas* from children,” said Hannah. “Now, I can’t understand why any woman would hesitate! I’m disappointed for all the time I have missed out on all the *brachos* by not covering my hair!”

Right away, after the *shiur*, she told us, she had gone out to buy a wig. When she saw the price tags, though, she realized she wouldn’t be able to afford it right then. But she didn’t want to have to put this *mitzvah* on hold until she saved up. So she asked around about pre-loved wigs and was told that she could try her luck at the place where people drop off clothing donations.

“I hope you didn’t get your hopes up,” my mother interjected. “It’s hard enough trying to find the right wig at a shop.”

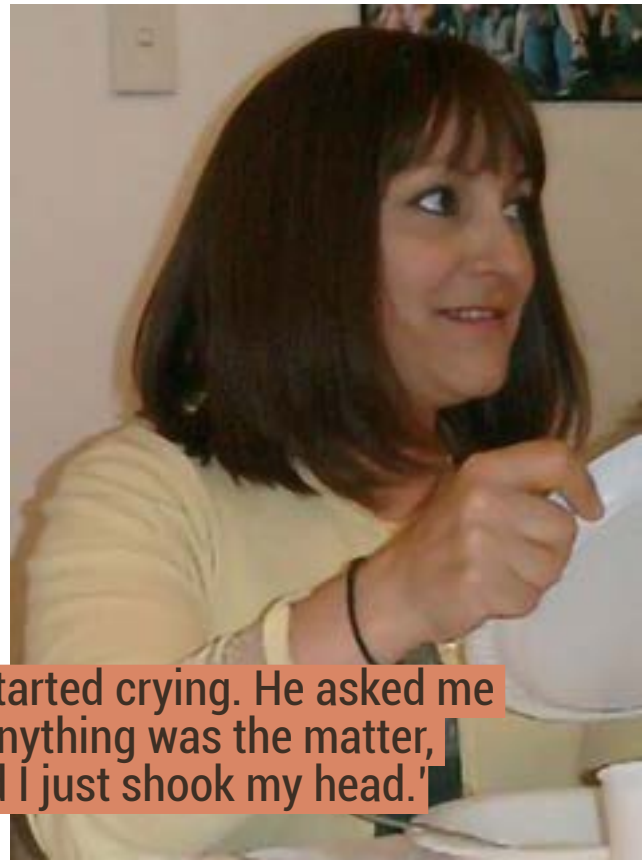
“Yes,” she agreed, “But I gave it a shot. And you’re right; there wasn’t a great selection. In fact, in the whole place, there was only one wig.”

But before our faces fell, she continued.

“This one!”

Our jaws dropped. Really?! It was just the right color and a perfect fit! We were sure it had been custom-made for her!

“It looks better than my own hair, right?!” she smiled happily. “I took it to my hairdresser to get it washed and tinted with the same highlights that I use in my hair, and my stylist told me



Hannah Menaker wearing her wig at my parents’ Purim *seudah*, 2008. Sadly, she passed away on 5 Elul 5769 (2009). May her dedication to the *mitzvah* of *kisui rosh* be an inspiration to us, and a *zechus* for her *neshamah*.

how high quality this wig is and that it seems brand new to her.

“It was ready this morning,” Hannah continued, “so I picked it up and I surprised my husband...”

Her husband took over. “I admit I wasn’t prepared for my wife to be covering her hair, but now that you see her for yourself, can you help but be impressed?”

We were impressed.

Hannah wasn’t finished. “After picking up my wig this morning and putting it on,” she continued, “I headed to my next errand. I went to get my car registered. I had spent a few hundred dollars fixing it, and now I’d have to pay the \$350 registration fee, and you know money is tight for us right now. Well, while I was waiting at the counter, the clerk noticed my open purse—and I never usually leave my purse open—and he asked me, ‘Is that pensioner’s card yours?’ I replied that it was. He asked me, ‘Don’t you know that pensioners get free rego?’ “I replied that I’d had this pensioner’s card for a while now and I had never been told that rego is free. He started looking up my record on his computer and said that not only was this year free, but he was also going to get me a refund for last year, as well as a refund of what I had paid for my driver’s license.

“I started crying. He asked me if anything was the matter, and I just shook my head. But I was thinking, this is only the first day of covering my hair and look at the *brachos* from Hashem already!”

Read Malka’s story on page 46

WHAT THE REBBE SAYS ABOUT COVERING OUR HAIR

The following excerpts are reprinted from Chabad.org, Sichos in English (SIE), and Kehot Publications.

The Zohar states, and I choose to quote only the blessings mentioned there, omitting the negative aspects resulting from failure to comply with this law:

"Her children will enjoy increased stature over other children; moreover, her husband shall be blessed with all blessings, blessings of above and blessings of below, with wealth, with children and grandchildren, etc."

I would also add to the above that it boggles the mind that this should be a "problem" for anyone who has a spark of faith in their heart and desires that their married life be truly fortunate and blessed with these blessings and the good fortune extending to the husband, the wife, and the children that Hashem will bless them with.

Can there be any comparison whatsoever of the unpleasantness (even if you wish to say that there is unpleasantness) that exists in hair-covering in comparison to Hashem's blessings, the blessings of He who formed man and created and conducts the world?! Such an attitude is exceedingly irreverent, even if there was but a scintilla of assurance about this requirement, and surely when this matter is stated explicitly.

(Excerpt from Igros Kodesh, Vol. XXIII, pp.345-346)

Since Hashem clearly said that for the benefit of the wife, her husband, and their children, the hair should not be revealed, surely it is so. Thus it is impossible that because of keeping Hashem's commandments the head should hurt. When you write that wearing a *sheitel* makes

your head hurt, it is possible that (a) this is a falsehood of the *yetzer hara* who does not want *mitzvos* to be performed and does not want Jews to be showered with blessings, or (b) if indeed it is true then this indicates that you should cut your hair short. Then it surely won't hurt when you wear a *sheitel*.

(Excerpt from Likutei Sichos, Vol. XXXIII, p. 264)

Covering her hair brings with it success from Hashem's Hand for herself, her husband, and her children. This being so, what possible comparison can there be between the difficulty (even if this

You should also find out from your brother whether his wife is careful to cover her hair.

were to be considered a difficulty) in covering her hair in relation to what Hashem rewards her for doing so?
(Excerpt from Igros Kodesh, Vol. VI, pp. 117-118)

In response to your letter... in which you ask my advice regarding your brother having male children, and healthy children: You should also find out from your brother whether his wife is careful to cover her hair. For Zohar's statement is known, that a woman's observance of *tznius* and especially hair covering brings about "blessings of above and blessings of below, with wealth, with children and grandchildren, etc."
(Excerpt from Igros Kodesh, Vol. VII, p. 259)

You mention about the difficulty of earning a living after you write about [a lack of] hair covering: Why the surprise at the financial straits when the holy Zohar (III, 126a) explains that when the hair covering of the wife is in order, then "they shall be blessed with all blessings, blessings of above and blessings of below, with wealth, with children and grandchildren...?"

(Excerpt from Igros Kodesh, Vol. XIX, pp. 326-327)

You write the good news that you have ordered a *sheitel* during your recent visit in New York. The Al-mighty will surely fulfill His promise, as it is written in the holy Zohar, that [covering your hair] will bring *hatzlachah* to you, to your husband, and to your children in good health and prosperity, especially in your case, where in addition to the deed itself there is also a *kiddush Hashem*. I am sure you will wear it with joy, as the Baal Shem Tov emphasized the importance of serving the Al-mighty with joy, and Hashem's blessings will be even greater. I want to add my prayerful wishes that the Al-mighty grant you the *zechus* to be instrumental in helping your friends and acquaintances follow your good example... Not only does your wearing the *sheitel* show the true Jewish spirit of adherence to our laws and customs, but it also shows strength of character, a strong will, and the power of your convictions; you are not being swayed by external influences and the opinions of people who are rather devoid of content inwardly and even outwardly are of no consequence.

(Excerpt from a letter dated 19 Cheshvan 5715)

malka

Another regular at my childhood Shabbos table was Vicky, also a Russian Jew. We always knew she had a dramatic past, and when I asked her the specifics, she said she had worked the runways with famous models, working for high-end designers such as Charlie Brown and Julien MacDonal in London (who now designs for Givenchy). She'd met the King of Sweden and the Queen of Pop, Kylie Minogue, and had sailed the world working on a cruise ship. But then she had given all that up, and she started keeping Torah and *mitzvos* and using her Jewish name.

Vicky, now Malka, kept telling us that she wanted to fly from Sydney to New York for Chof Beis Shvat, and one year she really did! When she came back, she told us all about it over our Shabbos table. On the Sunday afternoon of the *shluchos* convention, she had found herself in a ballroom filled with hair — there was a wig sale at Oholei Torah.

And she thought: “Shabbos, *tznius*, and *kashrus*, I already keep, but hair covering? Not only does that not apply to me right now since I’m a single woman, but to resolve to cover my hair is going all the way with Yiddishkeit—no turning back—and I am not quite sure if I will ever be ready for such a commitment even after I do get married...”

So she wavered there at the sale, would she one day cover her hair, or would she not? And then she told Hashem, “You know I have broken off relationships since becoming *frum* and haven’t yet had success on the *shidduch* scene. If I take this leap to commit to cover my hair when I’m married, You have to do Your part!”

With that, she started skimming through the selection of wigs, as our friend Sara Tova Yaffee, a *shlucha* in Sydney, came by. “Malka!” she exclaimed. “You’re trying on *sheitels*?! Is there something we should know about?”

Malka answered her, “There will be soon *b’ezras Hashem*, because I’m making a *keili*.”

Malka found a wig she liked, short, dark brown hair, but the only problem was that it was \$800. She only had \$712 on her for the remainder of her trip in America. “Hashem,” she said, “if they agree to sell it to me for \$700, then I’ll take it as a sign that I should cover my hair.”

The saleslady wasn’t hopeful that the price could be lowered because the wigs were already discounted as it was, but she went to call the boss. While Malka was waiting, she turned the wig over. There on the tag was the wig’s brand name—Victoria—her secular name!

When the boss realized that the price was going to make it or break it, she agreed to lower the price.



Malka Victoria Davidov wearing her Victoria wig, holding her newborn daughter, Nisya Laya, 2011.

But Malka wasn’t done. “Hashem,” she said, “I need more from You. I’ve never tried on a wig before. I don’t know what I am doing. I have to know three things: a. if it’s good quality hair, b. if it’s a good price, and c. if it looks good on me. If only my good friend Esther Jenny Rosenson, who is like my sister, who knows wigs, would be here to advise me...”

As Malka finished telling Hashem what she needed, she felt a tap on her shoulder. It was... Esther. She had flown in for the *kinus* with her baby at the last minute, from their *shlichus* in Moscow. Esther had seen Malka in the ballroom and come over to say hello. They hugged and celebrated getting to see each other unexpectedly. Then Esther assured Malka that all three conditions were met perfectly.

Malka paid and left Oholei Torah with a tiny little box in her hands and virtually no money left. She walked across the road to 770. The third shul in the women’s section happened to be empty. Malka was the only one there. She approached the door to the Rebbe’s room and whispered, “I am done! I can’t prove to Hashem that I am ready to be a fully *frum* wife any better than this. Now it’s your turn, dear Rebbe, to help him find me, and now!”

In the right time, Hashem gave her what she wanted—a fully *frum* husband, and a good reason to wear the wig. ❧



RAIZEL SEREBRYANSKI is a stay-at-home mum who considers herself lucky to spend her days navigating life with her double stroller in tow. Her wish? That Hashem continue to bless her with children so that she always has an excuse not to go back to work!