

WHY MY GRANDMOTHER CRIED

THE POWER OF *KISUY HAROSH* AND
THE BEAUTY OF JEWISH CONVICTION

Tamar Chayempour

My dear sisters, Let us take a moment to reflect on the incredible power we hold as Jewish women. Each of us is a pillar of strength, influencing not only our families but also our communities and future generations. Among the many *mitzvot* entrusted to us, the *mitzvah* of *kisuy harosh*, covering our hair after we get married, holds a special place of honor, dignity, and importance. It is a testament to our deep connection to Hashem and His Torah.

I'd like to share a story close to my heart—one that intertwines generations, conviction, and the profound impact of the choices we make.

My beloved grandmother, Mrs. Rachel Levy, was a descendant of the great *mekubal* and Torah author Rabbi Sasson ben Harav Mordechai Shendoch, a revered Torah scholar and author of the kabbalistic work *Kol Sasson* (as well as many other *sefarim*). The Ben Ish Chai, who was born around 1750 in Baghdad, was Granny's great-great-grandfather.

Granny often reminisced about the *darushim* (Torah lectures) she attended as a young girl every Shabbat. These were vibrant gatherings where the Ben Ish Chai's words inspired an entire community, young and old. She would compare these *darushim* to the *farbrengens* I experienced in New York by the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Her eyes would light up as she blessed the Rebbe with a long life, stretching her hand out over and over, saying, "May Hashem give him a very long life. May he always strengthen the Jewish people, especially the youth."

Granny was a beacon of positivity, embodying the teaching, "*Tracht gut vet zein gut.*" I recall one afternoon when I was six years old, living in the serene neighborhood of Savyon in Eretz Yisroel. It was very quiet there; the sound of an ambulance was never heard. But one day, the silence was broken by a siren. Granny clapped her hands joyfully and exclaimed, "Mazal tov!" I was completely confused. How could she say "Mazal tov" for an ambulance? In my six-year-old seriousness, I explained that it must mean someone was going to the hospital. She simply smiled and replied, "Tammy'le, if you hear an ambulance, then expect it to be a woman going to have a baby. Mazal tov!"

That moment became a life lesson for me—one that I carry to this day.

Years later, when I became engaged to Rabbi Yitzchok Chayempour, I proudly brought



The author's great-grandmother, Mrs. Aziza Eliezer (R), is shown here at age 102. This is how her generation covered their hair. Unfortunately, her daughter, Mrs. Rachel Levy (Granny) (L), the next generation, had a very different experience.

my *chassan* to meet Granny. She hugged me warmly, blessed me, and then asked a question I hadn't anticipated: "Will you cover your hair when you get married?" I was surprised, given that Granny herself didn't cover her hair. Without hesitation, I answered, "Of course!" But in my youthful bluntness, I added, "Why do you care? You never covered your hair." Looking back, I feel so bad that I spoke to her that way. But I was young and spoke impulsively.

For the first time in my life, I saw my strong, ever-positive grandmother—who rarely shed a tear—begin to cry. I was stunned. She shared a story from her youth that I had never heard before.

Granny explained that as a young bride in Baghdad, she had proudly covered her hair, as her mother and grandmother had before her. But after the Ben Ish Chai's passing, the community faced immense challenges: war, famine, and assimilation. When she and my grandfather moved to Bombay, she found herself surrounded by friends who no longer covered their hair. At first, she resisted, but the social pressure became overwhelming. Slowly, her *mitpachat* slipped back until she stopped covering her hair entirely.

Gradually, the entire community

stopped keeping Shabbat and most *halachot*. Eventually, there were many intermarriages. She felt it all began with the women not covering their hair and not adhering to the *halachot* of *tzniut*. It set the tone in the community. The men too modernized; we have pictures of the Chacham sitting in the center surrounded by men wearing clothing that was modern for that time. *Baruch Hashem*, in recent years many of the descendants of those people returned to Yiddishkeit, but, sadly, quite a number was lost.

Years later, some of Granny's friends admitted, "Rachel, if you had stayed strong and continued to cover your hair, we would have followed you." Her choice, born of immense social pressure, had a ripple effect. With tears in her eyes, she told me, "Tammy'le, had I remained strong, perhaps today all my grandchildren would be married to Jews."

Her words were a heartfelt plea—a reminder of the power of standing firm in our convictions.

Granny's story taught me that when we stand strong, we not only fulfill Hashem's Will but also inspire others to do the same.

And when we stand strong, we not only fulfill Hashem's Will and inspire

others, but we have a better, happier life in every way.

The *mitzvah* of *kisuy harosh* is more than a personal commitment; it's a public declaration of Jewish pride and identity. When we uphold this beautiful *mitzvah*, we set the tone for our families and communities, influencing generations to come.

My grandmother's story also reminded me of the *nashim tzidkaniyot* of Mitzrayim, the righteous women whose merit brought the redemption from Egypt. They refused to assimilate, remaining steadfast in their dress and identity. Their unwavering commitment ensured the future of our people.

Dearest sisters, as *chassidim* of the Rebbe, we are blessed with the guidance and strength to carry forward our holy mission. The Rebbe believes in us—that we, the women, will lead the way out of *Galut* and into *Geulah*. Let us embrace this sacred task with joy and pride. When we walk out of our homes dressed in accordance with Torah, wearing our royal crowns of full *kisuy harosh* (covering *all* of our hair), we uplift not only ourselves but also everyone around us.

May we merit to see the ultimate redemption with Moshiach, speedily in our days.

With love and admiration,
Tamar Chayempour

THE CHAYEMPOURS are *shluchim* in Great Neck, NY, where (together with their married children) they run the Magen Israel preschool and elementary school. Many nearby *shluchim* send their children to Magen Israel. Tamar Chayempour was interviewed in the Nissan 2025 *N'shei Chabad Newsletter*, in the survey of mothers of large families called "How Do They Do It?" by Raizel Serebryanski. Tamar was born and spent her early childhood in Eretz Yisroel, then moved with her parents to London where she was fortunate to attend the Lubavitch girls' school. Tamar says, "Rabbi Shmuel Lew was my headmaster and he had a lifelong influence on me."