

ESTHER VILENKIN

קמו בניה ויאשרוה

Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed

לעלוי נשמת הרבנית צבי' מרים גורארי' בת הרה"ג מוה"ר יצחק הכהן הענדל ז"ל

Today, while browsing through a clothing store, I overheard a woman tell the saleswoman, "It's beautiful, but I can't get it. It's not my colors." I thought about our willingness to trust the judgment of "experts" to help us figure out how to be our best. If we could only look our best and act our best, we would be content. We want to be all we can be and live life to the fullest.

My mother passed away a year ago at a relatively young age, after a terrible illness. My mother once passed by the Rebbe for dollars, together with my grandmother. My grandmother, Rebbetzin Chava Gurary *a"h*, asked the Rebbe to give my mother a *brochoh*, to which the Rebbe replied that she already is a *gebenchte* (blessed), as she is the daughter of a kohen.

On Friday night, when my husband sings Aishes Chayil, I think of my mother and how the different verses apply to the life she led and the example she set before us. When it comes to the verse "Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her"[1], I pause and think about how she was truly blessed because she lived a life of truth, that reflected who she was most sincerely. She was a real *pinimi*, an inwardly focused person who lived her life with integrity. The above verse can be understood to refer to the time after shiva when the children "rise" and get up. There are certain qualities of the *nifteres* that only intimate family members are aware of, so it is they who acknowledge and praise her. After my mother's passing, I feel challenged by her example and can hear her prodding us forward. I feel her call for us to live *gebentchte* lives, to be all we can be and reflect our true souls.

One of my sisters overheard some girls discussing their mothers showing signs of aging, by describing how gray their mothers' hair was becoming. My sister was taken aback: "But how do you know the color of your mother's hair?"

My mother was meticulous about covering her hair. There was never a time she exposed it, even briefly. Her tichel would never slip. I took this behavior for granted until I got married and experienced first hand the level of dedication that this entails. But I do not believe this was a struggle for her; it was a part of who she was. She had clarity. The blacks and whites were never a blurred gray. What was right and true could not be compromised and was never up for negotiation.

How can we achieve that inner focus that my mother exemplified? How can we better understand the Mitzvah, indeed avoda, of Kisui Rosh? And why is hair covering a special obligation of married women? To understand this, one must first have a basic understanding of the system known as the sefiros.

In creating the world, HaShem used His ten attributes, known as the ten sefiros. The sefiros are divided into three categories: intellect, emotion and action. Since we were created in Hashem's image, the parts of our body actually correspond to the ten sefiros. For example, the brain is

QUOTES OF THE REBBE REGARDING WEARING SHAITELS

Regarding the well known story of Kimchis:
"One should not think: Must I act with such a tremendous degree of Tznius so that my children become Kohanim Gedolim; why should I care if my children grow up as regular priests. Furthermore, all Jews are holy!... If a woman is granted the ability to train her sons that they grow into Kohanim Gedolim, it proves that this is her task; should she not do this, she does not carry out her obligation and does not fulfill G-d's desire."

(Excerpted from a Sicha, Shavuous 5717)

"The general concept of wearing a shaitel and not making do with a hat or kerchief is explained in many places. We readily observe that wearing a hat or even a kerchief leaves part of the hair uncovered at least for a short while, causing one to transgress a major prohibition, as explained in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, Chapter 75."

(Igros Kodesh, Vol. XIX, p. 428)

"In reply to your letter of Iyar 28, in which you write about the suggestion of a shidduch for your son... It is obvious and self understood that a non-negotiable condition (that has to first be made) is that of (the young lady's taking upon herself to wear) a shaitel."

(Igros Kodesh, Vol XV, p.198)

"...and if your wife (would have listened to me) with regard to wearing a shaitel in accordance with that which is explained in Zohar III, p.126a, a tangible improvement in your material state would already have been palpably observed."

(Igros Kodesh, Vol. X, p. 311)

"...At times, I am pained by inappropriate conduct or by the fact that proper utilization is not made of the blessings and success that G-d grants and my heart hurts from the fact that matters could be better than they are, and merely, because of trivialities, one does not utilize G-d's blessings... The aspect that I am referring to (and about which I am pained) is something which I believe I have already written to you about, i.e., that your wife should wear a shaitel... The pain associated with the above is understandable in light of the statement of the holy Zohar III, p.126a... This feeling becomes even stronger when thinking about the so-called 'self sacrifice' necessary for conducting oneself in the proper manner and weighing it against the loss incurred (by failing to do so)."

(Igros Kodesh, Vol. XXVII, p. 288)

"A full shaitel ensures ample livelihood and health, and nachas from children and grandchildren... Do you desire anything more than that?"

(Leket Shikhat HaPeah, p.63)

"...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 — these blessings and good fortune extending to the husband, wife and the children that G-d 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 kisui harosh in comparison to G-d's blessings, the blessings of He who formed man and created and conducts the world?! Such an attitude is exceedingly irreverent, even if there were to be but a scintilla of assurance about this requirement, and surely when this matter is stated explicitly."

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

hair to cover hair? Understanding the practice of hair-covering in its Kabbalistic context makes clear why wigs are an acceptable head covering. A wig is made from hair that has been cut from its source, rendering it totally lifeless. Negative forces are like parasites; they hang on to where they can get some nourishment from a life source, albeit a limited amount. When even a limited flow of energy is not present, the negative forces have nothing to gain[7]. No matter how lifelike a wig appears, it is a kosher hair covering.

Many have asked whether it is appropriate to wear a shaitel since perhaps it's deceptive. According to Halachah, one must avoid giving the appearance that one is acting inappropriately, even if the behavior itself is not forbidden. This is called *maris ayin*. Is wig wearing a case in point? If a wig is lifelike and natural enough, people might assume that the woman does not cover her hair.

However, wig wearing does not fit the halachic criteria for *maris ayin*.[8] Firstly, if the Gemara doesn't forbid a wig on the grounds of *maris ayin*, we are not permitted to forbid it on grounds of *maris ayin*. People sometimes argue that perhaps the wigs permitted in the Talmud were not as real and authentic looking as today. The Talmud, however, was well aware of natural looking hair and discusses wigs made from friends' hair or whether a woman could use her own hair![9]

Secondly, *maris ayin* does not apply to positive Mitzvos[10]. (The Mitzvah of covering hair is deduced from the positive command for a kohen to expose the hair of a suspected adulteress[11]. Only a married woman could be suspected as an adulteress. Thus, it is deduced that a married woman covers her hair.) Thirdly, *maris ayin* only applies to something out of the ordinary. *Maris ayin* doesn't apply to widespread practices or something with which people are familiar.[12] Finally, when there is a "practice of a group", *maris ayin* doesn't apply, since "a group is not suspect"[13].

In the year 1854 in Russia, a decree was passed forbidding Jewish women to wear their head coverings. In 1874, a draft decree came out, requiring every male to present himself to enlist in the army. (Until then, every city had to provide a quota of people for the army.) The Rebbe Maharash stated that of the women that held firm and refused to remove their head coverings during the time of the edict (1854), every one of their children was spared from serving in the army in 1874.

The story speaks volumes. There are tremendous spiritual energies that are channeled and directed into this world, but how they manifest depends on our physical actions. We hold the reins for how the spiritual energies will influence us. When we follow halachah, we achieve the most worthwhile accomplishment, making this world a dwelling place for Hashem.

I saw these virtues of truth and sincerity in my mother. Every aspect of her life was about doing what was right in the truest form. The concept of a half-truth or a half-baked job was non-existent. She diligently followed the Rebbe's instructions and the rulings of Rabbonim; she never attempted to rationalize or discover loopholes which would conform to popular consensus. She often told us, "What is popular is not always right, and what is right is not always popular." She couldn't tolerate falsehood; it went against her essence. Her life was about fulfilling our mission in this world, doing her Shlichus with utter commitment. When faced with serious obstacles, she would remind my father to "remember who you're working for." With that perspective, obstacles weren't daunting.

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Covering her hair in the most impeccable manner was not something my mother regarded as anything out of the ordinary. She conducted herself the way she did simply because that's the way it's supposed to be; that's who we are. By letting our actions reflect who we are, we are able to change the world. My mother conveyed this message with the utmost simplicity and integrity. She was scrupulous with covering her hair, aligning her appearance with who she was on the inside. In this way, she mirrored Hashem's image and merited to channel His infinite blessings to her family, her community and the world at large. ■

[1] *Proverbs 31:28.*
[2] *See Posach Eliyahu.*
[3] *For the following, see Lkutei Torah; Emor 32:1, Tetzei 36:3, 37:2 and Derech Mitzvosecha Mitzvas Tiglachas Metzorah.*
[4] *Vol. 3 p. 126a.*
[5] *Shabbos 64b, Rashi Sanhedrin 112a, Rambam's commentary on Shabbos ibid. Shiltei Giborim (on Ri"f) Shabbos ibid. Tshuvas Hagionim Shabbos ibid. Pnei Yehoshua Shabbos 58a. Darchei Moshe Or Hachaim 303. See Lekutei Sichos vol. 13 p. 186.*
[6] *See Leket Sichkas Peah, R' Volpo chapter. 2*
[7] *Yaskil Avdi of R'Ovadiyah Hadayeh (Even Haezer 16)*
[8] *Leket Shichas Peah p. 76*
[9] *Shiltei Hagiborim (Shabbos, 64:2), Darchei Moshe Or HaChaim 303, Baer Haitev si'if katon 8, Mishna Berurah si'if katon 15 etc. See Leket Shichas Peah (Rabbi S. Volpo) for a more complete list.*
[10] *Igros Moshe, Even Haezer II, 12*
[11] *Bamidbar 5: 18, Kesuvos 72a*
[12] *Shulchan Aruch Yore Deiah 298:1, Orach Chaim 243:1 and Taz si'if katan 2, Mishnah Brurah 75. See Leket Shikchas Peah for a more complete list.*
[13] *Rama, Yore Deiah 141:4, Magen Giborim (Shabbos, ibid)*

chochmoh, the heart is *binoh*, the right arm is *chesed* and the left arm is *gevuroh*[2].

Each time we use a particular part of the body to fulfill Hashem's will, we are channeling the energy of that sefirah into the world.

When we face moral decisions or opportunities to do mitzvos that are challenging and we follow the right path, we are not suppressing our inner nature but rather allowing it to flourish. We are being true to ourselves and acting according to our Jewish DNA. We are affecting ourselves, our family, our people, our world, the past and the future.

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What does all this have to do with covering hair? To understand this[3], consider the physical properties of hair. Hairs have no nerve endings and can be cut off without a person feeling pain. Although it is attached to the scalp and nourished by its roots, hair contains a minimal amount of life. So too, Chassidus teaches, does each sefirah have metaphoric "hair." The "hair" represents an extremely condensed, limited and external radiance of that particular sefirah.

The sefirah of Malchus, the feminine attribute, is the final sefirah. Positioned as it is, it contains a most condensed level of Hashem's light. Its hair therefore embodies the most external and concealed level of Divine energy.

When Hashem's light becomes so condensed and concealed, it gives room for forces of impurity, *klipos*, to arise. Forces of impurity have no direct life force of their own. The only way they can sustain themselves is by latching on to something holy, something pure, and subverting it for their own ends. The more limited and concealed Hashem's life force is, the more the *klipos* can attempt to attach themselves to whatever Divine light can be found.

This is why the hair of a woman (Malchus) must be covered and protected. Her hair represents the external, limited revelation of Hashem from which the negative forces of *klipa* seek nurture.

We are now in a position to understand the profound spiritual significance of hair covering, and why it applies specifically to married women. Women represent the sefirah of Malchus. Malchus is the bridge between one level of revelation and the next. At each level, the Divine light becomes a little more condensed, a little more concealed. The sefirah of Malchus receives energy from the higher sefiros and passes them down to the next level. This is similar to the role that a woman plays in reproduction. She receives the seed and then develops it inside her body to give birth to the next generation of offspring. Thus, a woman's sefirah of Malchus does not become fully activated until she is married and in a relationship with her husband. Without the give and take of the higher sefiros being passed down and invested in the next level, the attribute of Malchus is inactive. This is why a woman is only obligated to cover her hair after she is married. It is only then that *klipa* seeks to attach itself and feed off of her hair.

When a woman covers her head, she actually protects these spiritual "hairs" from *klipa*. For this reason, the Zohar[4] emphasizes the importance of covering hair, enumerating the many blessings a woman receives as a result of her physical protective actions. This precise Mitzvah enables the blessings (Divine energies) to be drawn down and revealed in this world without interference from *klipa*.



Rebbetzin Tziviah Miriam Gurary of blessed memory

Hair covering is not intended to detract from a woman's beauty. It is important to note that the halochos concerning *erva* teach that a woman must not expose the private parts of her body, not that she must suppress her beauty. The Talmud is replete with halachos and stories of women adorning themselves and making themselves attractive for their husbands both in and out of their homes, and these practices are regarded as praiseworthy![5] Torah incorporates physical beauty within our G-dly service.

The point of the hair covering is solely to keep the hair covered. The hair covering itself need not be drab looking; on the contrary it should be beautiful and feminine. A modestly dressed woman looks regal, refined and well-dressed; she looks fresh and lovely without attracting undue attention to herself.

It may seem unusual that after all this talk about hair, one of the most halachically acceptable hair coverings is specifically a wig, made of hair![6] What is the logic in using