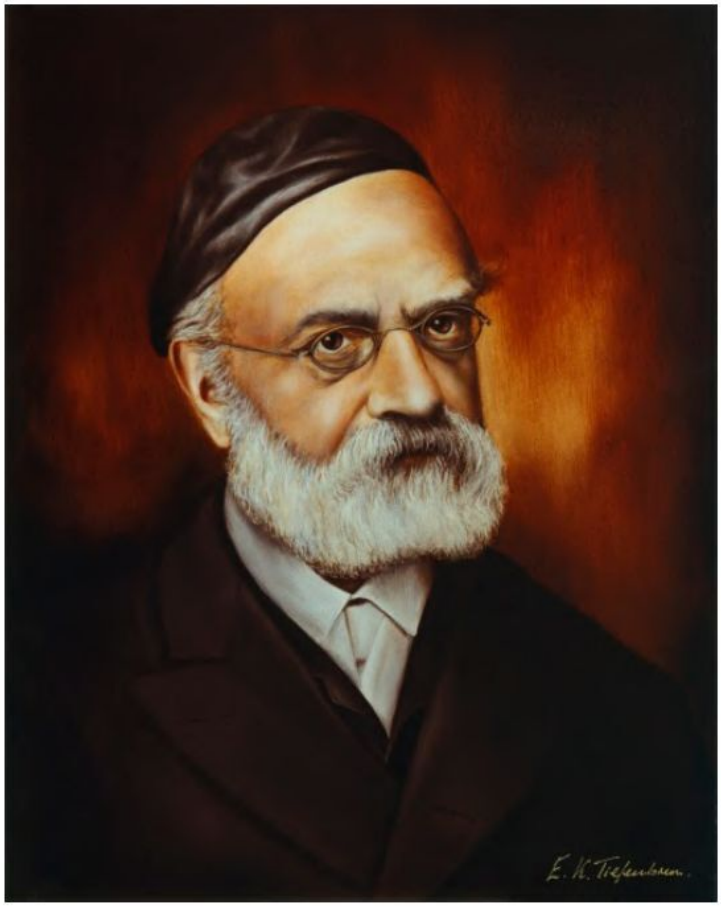


Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

What Three Women Did

CHAYA SHUCHAT

It's a new age, a modern age. The old norms of dress, speech, and behavior are being rapidly swept away. Who can resist the pressure? Those who try to buck the trend are called bubbes, rebbetzins. The young people want to be seen as with-it, as relatable. So gradually at first, and then with alarming swiftness, community standards decline. Those who try to stop the tide are denigrated. Rabbanim and community leaders are mocked as out of touch, behind the times. Soon the community

is hardly recognizable.

The Jewish community of Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, was a center of Jewish life for over 500 years. It was home to great Torah luminaries such as Rabbi Yehoshua Falk, author of *Pnei Yehoshua*, and Rabbi Yeshaya Hurwitz, the Shaloh Hakadosh, author of the *Shnei Luchos Habris*.

In the late 1700's, the *haskalah* movement, founded by Moses Mendelssohn, swept through Germany. Its mission was to modernize Judaism, to make it more "rational." Echoing the teachings of the ancient Greeks, who tried to make the Jews forget the Torah of Hashem, the *haskalah* movement tried to eliminate the study of *Gemara* and the practice of *halachah*. *Chumash* was studied as literature, as language arts. They attempted to sever the connection between Jews and G-d, *R"l,* turning Judaism into a culture, not a religion, and certainly not a way of life.

Unfortunately, their efforts were all too successful in eroding generations of vibrant Jewish life in Germany. By 1850, the Jewish community of Frankfurt was practically defunct. There were no active *chadarim* or *mikvaos*, no *shochtim*, no Orthodox shuls. A young rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, arrived in Frankfurt determined to reverse the tragic trend. He, in turn, inspired three young women who were the key to the Jewish revival of Frankfurt, as recounted by the Frierdiker Rebbe in his *Igros Kodesh, vol. 3, p. 524:*

> In the winter of 5667 (1907) I was with my father [the Rebbe Rashab] in Frankfurt, Germany. Rabbi Breuer *z"l* came to visit my father and in the course of conversation he mentioned that the *frum* community in Frankfurt now numbered thousands of families.
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> After Rabbi Breuer left, my father told me that when he was in Berlin in 5645 [1885] he visited with Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer, who showed him great respect since he had known his father, my grandfather [the Rebbe Maharash]. When my father came to visit, Rabbi Hildesheimer introduced him to a very respectable woman and said, "This distinguished woman is one of the first students of my teacher, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, and one of the three matriarchs of the Frankfurt Jewish community.
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> "Mendelssohn's *haskalah* movement destroyed—*lo aleinu*—the German Jewish community in general and the community of Frankfurt in particular. When my teacher Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch came to Frankfurt, there were no Jews left who kept Shabbos, *kashrus* or *taharas hamishpachah*. Rabbi Hirsch founded two *chadarim*, one for boys and one for girls, and taught them Torah, a matter that is already widely known.
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> "The honored woman who is standing here," said Rabbi Hildesheimer, "and two of her friends were the first three *kallahs* in Frankfurt to accept upon themselves to cover their hair, keep *taharas hamishpachah* and [other] *mitzvos*… This had an effect on others, and from them grew the

Torah Sources for Hair Covering After Marriage

"Disruption of spiritual consciousness will befall a man who allows his wife to expose her hair; this [the covering of a woman's hair] is one of the foundational principles of modesty. A woman who lets her hair be seen in order to appear attractive causes poverty to her home, spiritual inferiority to her children and causes a negative spiritual influence to reside in the home… If all this applies in one's own house certainly in public places, and certainly other brazen acts of immodesty…." *(Zohar, Parshas Naso, 125b-126b)*

Then the *kohen* shall stand the woman up before Hashem and expose the [hair on the] head of the woman; he shall place into her hands the remembrance meal offering, which is a meal offering of jealousies, while the bitter curse-bearing waters are in the *kohen's* hand. *(Bamidbar Parshas Naso 5:18)*

Rashi on "and expose": He unravels the plaits of her hair to humiliate her. From here [we derive] that a bared head is considered a disgrace for the daughters of Israel. — *(Kesubos 72a)*

Zohar (brought by poskim to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, siman 75)

strong, G-d-fearing community of Frankfurt-am-Main."

The "Problem" of Hair Covering

The Rebbe writes in a letter to an individual:

In response to your question, quoting your words, about "the problem of hair covering, and what this custom is based upon":

It is an explicit law and not only a custom of the Torah that a woman (who is married, obviously) is to cover her hair, *kisui harosh*. Moreover, from the great reward received for performing this law one can appreciate that there is great import to fulfilling this law....

As the *Zohar* states in *Parshas Naso* [quoted in *Mishnah Brurah*, Laws of *Krias Shema*, Chapter 75], 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. …these blessings and good fortune extend to the husband, wife and the children that G-d will bless them with.

Can there be any comparison whatsoever of the unpleasantness (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.

It is self-understood that I am aware of the objection to the above, to the effect that there are many who do not observe this law. But this question already exists for thousands of years, for "you are a minority among the nations," and how is it that "our laws differ from all other nations"? And unfortunately, within the Jewish people there are still to be found individuals who for the time being publicly desecrate the Shabbos and even intermarry, Heaven forfend.

The honored woman who is standing here and two of her friends were the first three kallahs in Frankfurt to accept upon themselves to cover their hair, keep taharas hamishpachah and [other] mitzvos...







The Women's Circle on a Wednesday morning.

Surely this does not at all affect in the very least, G-d forbid, the vital aspects of our Torah, the Torah of Life and its *mitzvos* concerning which Scripture states, "You shall live by them," just as the making of the Golden Calf in its time (close to the time of receiving the Torah) did not diminish one iota from the importance of the Ten Commandments, and subsequently the entire Torah and all its commandments up to the present day.

Finding ourselves just several days before Purim, [we read in the *Megillah* that] objections such as the above [that "our laws differ from all other nations," etc.] was the complaint of Haman, whose conclusion was not only the spiritual destruction of the Jewish people, but "to annihilate all the Jewish people, from young to old, children and women."

For the existence of the Jewish people in all places is exclusively through performance of the Torah and its *mitzvos,* that were given by the One G-d to the "one nation on earth."

(Excerpted from *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 23, pp. 345-346)

Why Sheitel is Best The Rebbe speaks:

Wearing a *sheitel* has a beneficial impact on children and grandchildren, sustenance and health, as the *Zohar* states (III, 126a) that it affects children, health, and sustenance.

One should not ask, I know of a woman who does not wear a *sheitel* and still things go well for her regarding children, health, and sustenance, as well as life in general.

First, we do not know what is happening with the other person, what type of travails they are undergoing; no one tells the other about all that transpires in their life.

Second, we are not to look at what is happening with the other; we are to do that which G-d commands us to do.

[The Rebbe mentions here that "we are a minority among the nations."] There are more gentiles than Jews in this world, and things are going well for them. Does that mean that we are to imitate their ways? Were we to act in such a manner, the Jewish people would have ceased to exist, G-d forbid, a long time ago.

When a Jewish woman walks in the street without a *sheitel* there is no [discernible] difference between her and others. However, when she wears a *sheitel* one can tell that here is a Jewish religious woman. It is not necessary to go in the streets loudly proclaiming "I am religious," but ... who is one embarrassed of? Of one's friend? Should they say that 'here walks a religious Jew,' what is the shame of the matter?!

Does such conduct require much *mesirus nefesh*? If, Heaven forfend, there is a lack of food to eat, the children are hungry, and it is necessary to keep Shabbos in one's work and business, this requires great *mesirus nefesh*. And still, without a doubt Shabbos is kept.

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The difference between a *sheitel* and a kerchief is the following: It is easy to take off a kerchief, which is not the case with a *sheitel*. When one is at a gathering and wears a *sheitel*, then even if President Eisenhower were to enter the room she would not take off the *sheitel*. This is not so with a kerchief which can easily be taken off.

The objection that wearing a *sheitel* was not made a condition of the match prior to the wedding is not at all convincing. Does wearing a *sheitel* have anything to do with keeping one's word? It should be worn because it brings true good fortune to the husband, the wife, to children and grandchildren.

... Wearing a *sheitel* is especially appropriate now, when one can obtain a *sheitel* in various shades, which look even nicer than one's own hair.

Let the woman ponder this matter. It doesn't take an hour or even a half-hour of contemplation. Why doesn't she really want to wear a *sheitel* but only a kerchief: because she knows that a *sheitel* cannot be taken off when she is walking in the street or is at a gathering, while a kerchief can be moved all the way up and sometimes taken off entirely, as known from practice.

It is possible that she will say that she will wear a kerchief properly. If she does so, then surely it is well. But experience has shown that this is not the case.

Why place oneself in the path of temptation? We beseech G-d prior to our prayers, "Do not bring us into temptation." Who is greater than King David, concerning whom the *Gemara* states that he completely vanquished his Evil Inclination, and nevertheless he did not withstand the test.

Even the reformers do not say that a *sheitel* is counter to ethics, only that it is old-fashioned. What then is there to fear? Let it be said that here goes a Jewish daughter.

My father-in-law related that the city of Frankfurt had very religious Jews; their piety made a name for them over all of Germany. This notwithstanding the fact that previously Frankfurt was filled with freethinkers. All this came about in the merit of three women who were firm in their resolve to wear a *sheitel*, observe family purity and provide their children with a kosher education. This had an effect on the men and other women. With the passage of time the community of Frankfurt changed for the better.

From a *sichah* of the Rebbe, *Rosh Chodesh Elul* 5714

The above excerpts are printed in Beautiful Within*, a book of the Rebbe's talks and letters on tznius translated by Rabbi Sholom B. Wineberg and published by Sichos in English (SIE.org).*

This article is based on hand-outs prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Lipskier for The Beis Medrash Women's Circle (TBMWC). TBMWC, directed by Mrs. Chanel Lipskier and Mrs. Dvora Lakein, meets weekly at 580 Crown St. on Wednesday mornings at 9:30 to learn Chassidus and halachos and to enjoy lively discussions about topics pertaining to women. Babies are welcome; snacks and toys are provided.

TBMWC also has special evening events throughout the year with speakers from all over the world. Be a part of it! To receive information about upcoming events, or to support the work of the WC, email wc@thebeismedrash.com.