

HOLY  
*intimacy*



SARA MOROZOW

RIVKAH SLONIM



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Holy Intimacy

Sara Morozow, Rivkah Slonim

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בס"ד

Dedicated in loving memory  
of our grandparents

**Rabbi Schneur Zalman and  
Rebbetzin Chava Gurary ע"ה**  
who gave us our deep roots.

In honor of our beloved parents

**Rabbi Yitzchok Maier and Chana Gurary שי' and  
Rabbi Menachem Nochum and Esther Sternberg שי'**  
who nurtured our growth and  
continue to raise us always, *l'orech yamim v'shanim tovo*.

With endless appreciation to our husbands,

**Rabbi Shia Morozow and Rabbi Aaron Slonim שי'**  
whose loving and unstinting support facilitate the  
continued spread of our branches.

To our precious children and grandchildren,  
the sweetest fruits of our lives.

And to our dear students, our most important teachers.  
You have been our sunlight, and it is in your direction  
that we have arched our growth.



## ADVANCE PRAISE

What an important book. Rivkah Slonim and Sara Morozow tackle head-on the often avoided topic of sexual intimacy in a clear but respectful manner that demonstrates the comfort level for which they are advocating. While the framing of much of the discussion is on the Chabad outlook, the discussion of intimacy around familiar Jewish themes will speak to Jewish women of all backgrounds.

By interspersing their work with narratives of a large variety of women and readings by professionals, they have created a book that imparts crucial information in an eminently readable fashion. As a physician and Nishmat trained *yoetzet halacha* who has answered thousands of questions surrounding all of the topics discussed in the book, I know how important it is for women to have such information and how much accurate knowledge prevents suffering. I highly recommend this book for all, both lay and professional, to whom these topics are relevant.

### **Deena Zimmerman, MD, MPH, IBCLC**

Dr. Deena Zimmerman is a pediatrician for Maccabi Health Services and TEREM-Immediate Medical Care in Israel, and Medical Advisor to the Jerusalem Breastfeeding Center. She is also a lactation consultant, *yoetzet halacha*, and medical advisor of Nishmat's Women's Health and Halacha websites.

Morozow and Slonim carry their balancing act through with panache, delicacy and realism, all shot through with holiness, practicality and even humor.

They take the most popular topic in the world, and project an inspirational view of the marriage relationship. This book suggests how to inspire respect, warmth, love, spirituality, dedication and other virtues into this relationship – which for most of us, is the most important relationship of our lives.

The focus is on Orthodox Jewish marriage, but there is much to inspire any reader. Whether you come from an environment which bombards readers with endless details about intimate relationships, or from an environment which shelters people completely, here is a beautifully described handbook enlightening the reader on ways to instill vital qualities into marriage – vital, but seldom or never explicitly discussed.

### **Kate Miriam Loewenthal, PhD**

Kate Miriam Loewenthal, PhD, is emeritus Professor of Psychology in London University – Royal Holloway College and Professor of Abnormal Psychology at New York University in London, and editor of the journal *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*. Her research focuses on mental health, religion and culture, particularly mental health in the Jewish community.



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## chapter eight

# Hide and Seek:

## THE MITZVAH OF KISUI ROSH

**A**woman's hair is the most striking aspect of her beauty, setting the tone of her overall appearance. The Torah relates how Hashem fashioned Chava after separating her from the back-to-back, dimorphous existence she originally shared with Adam: ויבן ה' אלקים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה, Hashem *Elokim* built the side that He took from Adam into a woman.<sup>1</sup> In commenting on the word *vayiven* in this verse that describes the moment prior to Adam and Chava's first face-to-face encounter, Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, braided Chava's hair before presenting her to Adam.<sup>2</sup> From the beginning of time, beauty and the pains it takes to achieve it has been intrinsic to the female experience.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that many young women fully committed to *halacha*, and even to *minhagei chassidut* and Chabad, find it difficult to embrace the mitzvah of *kisui rosh*. Making the transition to a reality in which your hair will never or rarely be exposed to the sun or be blown by the wind is hard. While there are conveniences that come with wearing a *sheitel*, like perfect hair ready to be popped on at a moment's notice, there is simultaneously an unquantifiable constraint that comes with it.

1 *Bereishit* 2:22.

2 *Shabbat* 95a.

An additional challenge is that even in this day and age of increased Torah study for women as well as men, there are still many observant individuals who do not realize the immense importance of this mitzvah. *Kisui rosh* is often abandoned out of a lack of knowledge and understanding. While this book does not present *halachic* sources and analysis, we present below the five most often asked questions on this subject and make reference to *halachic* sources that we strongly urge our readers to pursue in depth.

Additionally, understanding *kisui rosh* through the prism of the Rebbe's teachings on the subject can help us appreciate the centrality of this mitzvah and its monumental impact on our families. Here, as ever, the Rebbe's approach blends a keen understanding of contemporary concerns with steadfast anchoring in age-old *halacha*. Against this backdrop, the Rebbe emerged as a unique and tireless champion of the modern *sheitel*.

## The Top Five Questions People Ask About Kisui Rosh

**Authors' note:** Different communities have embraced varied *minbagim* in regard to *kisui rosh*, and many opinions exist regarding the specifics of this mitzvah. What we present below is the Rebbe's view which is the accepted *hanbagah* among Chabad Chassidim. The Rebbe's wisdom and blessings are relevant to all, even to those who observe differently. We recommend that each woman consult with her rabbinic authorities as to practical application of the *halacha*.

### ***1. I heard that a married woman covers her hair to "reserve it" specifically for her husband. Is that the reason for the mitzvah of kisui rosh?***

There is no reason given in the Torah for why a married woman must cover her hair other than it is Hashem's will. Torah law forbids exposure of the hair of the head by women who are married or were once married (i.e. widows and divorcees) in the public thoroughfare.<sup>3</sup> The *Shulchan Aruch* states<sup>4</sup> לא תלכנה בנות ישראל פרועות ראש בשוק אחד פנויה ואחד אשת איש אחת פנויה כגון אלמנה וגרושה, ואחת אשת איש, the term unmarried women refers to women once married i.e. widows and divorcees<sup>5</sup>... and to married women. To go with uncovered hair in a public thoroughfare is forbidden from the Torah.<sup>6</sup>

3 *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezer* 21:2 and 115:4; *Ketubot* 72a; *Sifri Naso* 11; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 9:16; *Rambam, Ishut* 24:11-12; *Isurei Biah* 21:17, *Smag* Positive Commandment 48.

4 *Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezer* 21:2

5 If the need arises, each woman should consult with her Rav on this matter.

6 *Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezer* 21:4

A survey of primary sources reveals no reason for this prohibition. There does, however, seem to be a connection between hair covering and loss of virginity.<sup>7</sup> The hair of a *betulah*, a virgin woman, irrespective of her age, is not considered *ervah*, which is the *halachic* term for nakedness, or an aspect of the body considered to be erotic. With marriage, however, a woman is initiated into sexual experience. When she taps into the power inherent in intimacy, the need for an additional aspect of *tzniut* emerges, which is *kisui rosh*.

While there might be poignance and beauty in framing hair covering within the exclusive marital bond, that is not the reason for hair covering, or covering other parts of our bodies referred to in *halachic* terms as *ervah*.<sup>8</sup> Simply put, the exposure of *ervah* contravenes the axiom of *tzniut*.

This mitzvah is inferred from words in *Parshat Naso*,<sup>9</sup> והעמיד הכהן את האשה לפני ה', and the *Kohen* will place the woman before Hashem and he shall uncover the woman's hair. The context of this *passuk* is the description of the protocols surrounding an *Isha Sota*, the suspected adulteress. Rashi explains that in an effort to tire out the woman, lower her defenses, and get her to admit to her sin, she is led from place to place and humiliated. This act of public humiliation sheds a light on the Torah perspective that for a married Jewish woman to expose her hair is shameful. While the *Mishna* fills in additional details such as tearing away the clothing from upon her upper body, the Torah mentions only the exposure of her hair. Apparently, a married woman's bare head is considered the quintessential act of exposure, the single most effective technique for persuading the woman to confess.<sup>10</sup>

In his essential distillation of all of Torah, the *Navi* Michah taught הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם אלקיך [Hashem] has told you, O man, what is good and what Hashem requires of you: Only to do justice, to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your G-d.<sup>11</sup>

*Tzniut* is not an outfit; it is a worldview. It begins with a constant consciousness of Hashem's presence that fills all time and space. This is why *tzniut* is necessary even

7 Tamar put a scarf upon her head after Amnon violated her. *Sbmuel* II 13:19; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 9:33.

8 *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 75:2. *Even Ha'ezer* 21:1-2.

9 *Bamidbar* 5:18.

10 For a comprehensive overview, tracing the *halachot* of *kisui rosh* from the Torah, through *Mishna*, and Gemara all the way to *Shulchan Aruch* and contemporary *poskim*, see [thebatshevalearningcenter.com/textbooks/KisuiRosh](http://thebatshevalearningcenter.com/textbooks/KisuiRosh).

11 *Michah* 6:8.

when we are alone and even in the dark.<sup>12</sup> And it is certainly about carrying ourselves with dignity befitting the daughter of the King of all Kings, when we are with others.

We do not cover our hair to keep it special for our husband, just as we do not cover other private aspects of our body for that reason. A married woman covers her hair to walk with her Creator.

***2. If a sheitel looks just as good or better than your hair, especially with the newest sheitlach looking like they are 'growing out of your scalp', what is the point of a sheitel?***

The Torah mandates that a married woman must cover her hair, and a sheitel allows a woman to do exactly that. Questioning the efficacy of an extremely natural looking *sheitel* is based on the mistaken premise that a *sheitel* is meant to detract from a woman's beauty. This idea is likely connected to the erroneous notion that a woman's hair is covered for the purpose of reserving it for her husband. In fact, if a woman's hair and beauty are solely to be enjoyed by her husband, it might be the case that a *sheitel* or other hair covering should diminish her attractiveness in the eyes of others. This is, however, most definitely not the case.

Beyond questions about the beauty of a *sheitel*, there seems to be concern with just how closely some *sheitlach* resemble a woman's natural hair. In this vein, some argue that wigs might be just as erotically stimulating as one's natural hair, assuming that dynamic poses a *halachic* problem. Centuries ago this very issue was addressed quite pointedly by *Poskim*: The *Shiltei Giborim* wrote that the principle that the sight of a woman's hair constitutes *ervah*, שער באשה ערוה, an erotic stimulus<sup>13</sup>, applies only to the hair visibly connected to her scalp but not to natural wigs.<sup>14</sup> Neither does use of such wigs constitute leaving the hair uncovered. It seems to make no difference whether the wig is made of her own hair or from that of another woman, as long as it is made as a hair covering, and is unconnected to her scalp.<sup>15</sup>

*Halacha* mandates that a married woman's hair must be covered. As to exactly how it should be covered, various *shitot*, opinions, give rise to differing *minhagim*. As long as a woman's hair is completely covered, how she achieves that goal is a matter

<sup>12</sup> *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 3:1.

<sup>13</sup> *Brachot* 24a.

<sup>14</sup> *Shiltei Giborim* on *Rif, Shabbat* 375.

<sup>15</sup> Some Rabbonim prefer that a certain percentage of hair that is not her own be interwoven in such a wig.

of her choice, provided her method does not contravene the *minhag* of her family or community.

The Rebbe's opinion on this matter is abundantly clear. During a *farbrengen* the Rebbe noted:

**The wearing of wigs became a widespread custom—especially today, when one can buy wigs in many colors, which may look even nicer than one's own hair.<sup>16</sup>**

The Rebbe encouraged women to buy the most beautiful *sheitlach* they could acquire, even paying for some of these *sheitlach* himself (see the stories below). Still, a wig should reflect her overall *tzniut*; modesty and beauty are not mutually exclusive. For example, lacetop wigs look extremely natural and beautiful; that in and of itself is not problematic. From a modesty standpoint, the *sheitel* should however, have a lining sewn underneath the netting section where a woman's hair might be exposed through the small openings so that her natural hair is covered.

No matter how natural a wig might look, *halachically*, it is still not analogous to natural hair attached to the scalp. Rabbi Ovadya Hadaya wrote that man is tempted only by things attached directly to the body of a woman herself, for those things have life. Once the hair is separated from her, it ceases to be forbidden.<sup>17</sup>

The Kabbalistic explanation for the mitzvah of *kisui rosh* adds additional depth to these *halachic* conclusions.

### ***3. What about *marit ayin*,<sup>18</sup> people mistakenly thinking that my hair is uncovered? Wouldn't a hat or tichel be a better option for obviating this concern?***

While some *halachic* authorities express concerns about a hair covering appearing too much like one's hair, *halacha l'maaseh*, practically, most *poskim* concur with the words of the *Shiltei Giborim* who said "Although the wig is an adornment creating the impression of uncovered hair, this poses no problem."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Rosh Chodesh* Elul, 1954.

<sup>17</sup> *Yaskil Avdi*, vol. 7, *Even Ha'ezzer* 16.

<sup>18</sup> The concept in *halacha* which states that certain actions which might seem to observers to be in violation of *halacha*, but in reality are fully permissible, are themselves not allowed due to *gezeirot* that were put in place to prevent onlookers from arriving at a false conclusion.

<sup>19</sup> For *halachic* sources which discuss natural-looking and specifically, human-hair wigs, and find them unobjectionable, see *Shiltei Giborim* on *Rif*, Shabbat 29a. *Yaskil Avdi*, vol. 7, *Even Ha'ezzer* 16. *Igrot Moshe*, vol. 4, *Even Ha'ezzer* II, 12.

The Rebbe's focus was squarely on ensuring complete coverage of a woman's hair in a way that was practical and reflected her aesthetic preferences. While the Rebbe's position was seen as stringent, some considered his stance a lenient one. In some communities, wigs are not deemed *halachically* acceptable at all based on their similarity to a woman's hair. In others, women do wear wigs but cover them partially with a scarf or hat so as to signal that they *are* covering their hair. The Rebbe believed that there was no *halachic* obligation to cover the wig.<sup>20</sup> In one of many letters on this subject the Rebbe wrote:

**As to her wearing an exposed wig (a wig with no hat or other covering over it)—for the past several generations, this practice has become widely accepted. Understandably, however, it is necessary to ascertain the custom of your place so as to ensure that this does not constitute breaking a precedent, G-d forbid.<sup>21</sup>**

22

On the other hand, the Rebbe was concerned with an aesthetic look that could lead some to think that hair was covered only partially. For instance, Mrs. Esther Sternberg, director of the Lubavitch Women's Candle Lighting campaign, related<sup>23</sup> that when the candle lighting guide was prepared for the year 1984, some felt that the model on the cover should wear a covering over her wig so that it was clear that she was covering her hair; additionally, a covering on a woman's head (very often made of lace) stirred memories for many of a grandmother or mother who lit candles. Once the brochure was printed, however, some commented on the fact that the covering on the model's wig left some of the hair uncovered. Mrs. Sternberg turned to the Rebbe to ask him what should be done. The Rebbe instructed that going forward, the cover photo should feature a woman wearing a wig only and not a kerchief atop her wig. For that year, since 500,000 brochures had already been printed, the brochures were sent back to the press and a sentence: "The woman in the photograph above is wearing a *sheitel*." was imprinted directly under the photo.

20 Yet, the Rebbe encouraged women who hailed from various chassidic communities to maintain the custom of their mothers vis a vis *kisui rosh*, even after they had adopted a Chabad lifestyle.

21 *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 16, pp. 330–331, dated 10 Adar, 1958.

22 The Rebbe was not castigating previous generations of women who had covered their heads with scarves, as there is no *essential* advantage to the wig over the scarf. As far back as Talmudic times, women wore a *redid*, a larger scarf over a smaller hat, that covered their heads. As such, even if hair protruded from the first hair covering, the strands were covered by the *redid*, as delineated in *Ketubot* 72a.

23 Related to the authors by Mrs. Sternberg in a 2022 interview.

Finally, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, a leading American *posek* during the 20th century, negated the concern of *marit ayin* in his responsum on this exact issue, listing three reasons in support of his stance.<sup>24</sup> First, since there is no prohibition against this in the Gemara, there is no grounds for prohibiting it. Second, people can (especially women), in most cases, discern the difference between natural hair and a wig. Finally, it is common knowledge that wigs exist and might be worn as a hair covering.<sup>25</sup>

**4. *I have heard that it is not, strictly speaking, necessary to cover one's hair while at home, and that when out and about, some hair can be exposed. Can you help me understand the differing opinions on these two matters?***

For Lubavitcher women, carefully covering the hair at all times is a matter of *halacha* and not only a *minhag*, as per the *psak* of the Tzemach Tzedek:

**Privately in the presence of her husband, a woman is permitted to expose 'side hairs' which extend beyond her tichel (i.e. her payot - the hair growing in front of her upper ear). While other men are present, however, there is no heter at all to do so.**

**For hair protruding beyond the tichel is halachically identical with ervah, nakedness, just as (or even more severe than) the exposure of the leg....**

**Exposure of the hair outside the tichel is pritzut, licentiousness. Regarding the custom to do so, it is written: [the word] Minhag is comprised of the same letters as gehinom...**

**To expose even the least bit of hair is absolutely prohibited...  
May this practice be eradicated forever.<sup>26</sup>**

For women who are not Lubavitch, we encourage you to speak with your *posek* regarding this issue. For all of our readers, we present the *halachic* background so you can understand the source of the varied opinions.

24 *Igrot Moshe*, vol. 4, *Even Ha'ezer* II, 12.

25 This same logic is at work in a *kashrut* related context. For the first few decades after the manufacture of non dairy creamers, kosher caterers routinely put a sign on the tables at *smachot* informing the guests that the coffee creamer and desserts were not dairy. This is no longer necessary as there is a proliferation of non dairy milk substitutes on the market and everyone is aware of this.

26 Quoted from *Tzemach Tzedek*, Responsa *Even Ha'ezer* 139 and 363; Responsa *Yoreh Dei'ab* 93:10. *Chiddushim Al Hashas to Brachot*, ch. 3.



For a married woman to be *b'shuk*, in the public thoroughfare, with her hair completely uncovered is an *issur d'orayta*, otherwise referred to as a trespass of *dat Moshe*; if her hair is partially uncovered, she trespasses *dat Yehudit*. The Mishna rules that a woman who trespasses *dat Moshe or dat Yehudit* is divorced with forfeiture of her *ketubah*, alimony.<sup>27</sup> The Rambam writes that a woman who exits her home with exposed hair and enters a public space violates *dat Moshe*.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding a woman whilst in her home, the Gemara relates the story of Kimchit, a famous righteous woman from the Second Temple period.<sup>29</sup> She had seven sons all of whom served as *Kohanim Gedolim*.<sup>30</sup> When asked what she did to deserve this remarkable *zechut*, she replied: “the walls of my house have never seen the braids of my head.” This Gemara coupled with the *Zohar* form the basis of the *halachic* discussion regarding hair covering while at home.<sup>31</sup>

Although some *Poskim* maintain that a woman need not cover her hair at home, many conclude that a woman's hair should remain covered at all times.

The *Rama* wrote that it is considered modest for a woman never to reveal her hair even at home, as we find regarding Kimchit, who was rewarded for this.<sup>32</sup> The *Magen Avraham* references the *Zohar* when he urges women to cover their hair even while at home.<sup>33</sup> The *Mishnah Berurah* quotes the *Zohar* as well.<sup>34</sup> The *Bach*, going further, wrote: Leaving the hair entirely uncovered is forbidden, even if she remains in her courtyard...Among Jews the world over, even before the men of her household, a woman will not appear without a kerchief and head covering.<sup>35</sup> And the *Chatam Sofer*, going further still, wrote that a wife requires a kerchief even in her own room.<sup>36</sup>

27 *Ketubot* 7:6.

28 *Rambam, Ishut* 24:11.

29 *Yoma* 47a.

30 Kimchit's son, Rabbi Yishmael, the regular *Kohen Gadol*, was ineligible to serve due to temporary impurity. Over time, each of his brothers had the opportunity to substitute for him as *kohen Gadol*. (*Tosafot Yesbanim, ad loc*)

31 Rabbi Yehuda said that the exposed hairs on the head of a woman cause another kind of hair [of the *sefirah* of *malchut*] to be exposed [to external impure forces] and impair her. Therefore, a woman should be careful that none of her hair is visible even to the beams of her house, and all the more so outside.

32 *Darkei Moshe, Even Ha'ezzer* 115:4.

33 The exact words of the *Magen Avraham* are: But the *Zohar* (*Nasso* p. 239) is very stringent that not a single hair of a woman should be seen and thus it is fitting to practice. (*Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 75:4)

34 75:14.

35 *Bach, Even Ha'ezzer* 115.

36 *Responsa Chatam Sofer, Orach Chaim* 36.

From a practical standpoint, the Rebbe reminded us:

**Repeatedly acting in a certain manner causes it to become second nature. It is possible to forget oneself and act in this manner even when someone else is in the house, then one does this as well in the yard, then on the street! Because it has become a habit, one is not aware.**<sup>37</sup>

He also taught:

**Since this tale [regarding Kimchit] is related to us by the Oral Torah, it follows that this is not just a story of something that transpired in the past, for “that which has passed is past.” Rather, it comes to teach every Jewish daughter how much she is to scrupulously observe tzniut, even when there is no one else in the house, etc. For the Aibershter is in the house with the Aibershter’s Torah and the Aibershter’s tzniut.**<sup>38, 39</sup>

The Rebbe tirelessly reiterated that this *hanbhagah*, behavior, is a wondrous conduit for blessings in our life. May we see these *brachot* come to fruition *b’tov hanireh v’hanigleh*, in a most open and revealed manner.

***5. I have heard that the Zohar emphasizes the importance of a married woman’s hair being completely covered, and teaches that abundant blessings flow to the woman, her husband, and her children in this merit. Which Kabbalistic teachings can help me understand the importance of this mitzvah?***

The mystical implications of a married woman keeping her hair scrupulously covered go beyond ordinary considerations of modesty. The *Zohar’s* position connects to broader Kabbalistic ideas according to which hair – most generally – and a married woman’s hair, in particular, is associated with *dinim*, harsh judgment, and is thus uniquely vulnerable to *kelipah*, negative energies. A married woman’s scrupulousness

<sup>37</sup> *Chai Elul*, 5742.

<sup>38</sup> *Chai Elul*, 5742.

<sup>39</sup> Even if it were solely about fulfilling the Rebbe’s *horaah*, we have been taught (20 Av, 5710) that a *minhag* that a Rebbe establishes is a *dorayta* for his chassidim. The Rebbe made it crystal clear that this is what he wanted of us, and for us. In a letter that the Rebbe wrote on Gimmel Tammuz, 1950, he defined the term *nassi* as one who “radiates both inward and encompassing influence – in Torah, in *avodah*, and in the practice of good deeds; and conveys blessings both spiritual and material.”

in covering her hair acts not only as a protective device in warding off these unwelcome energies, but as a conduit for the most important *brachot* in life.

Before we can understand the spiritual implications of hair in Kabbalistic teachings, it is helpful to remind ourselves how Kabbalah works, more generally speaking. An apt metaphor might be the microscope, an instrument that provides an enlarged image of a small object, thus revealing details too small to be seen by the naked eye. As with every other aspect of existence, Kabbalistic teachings approach the topic of hair seeking to understand its ability to attract or conversely repel spiritual energies. Perhaps surprisingly, hair occupies a rather prominent place in Kabbalistic teachings and practice.

The forces of *kelipah* – translated literally as husks or shells, forces that cover and conceal the Divine oneness that underpins all of creation – are always seeking access to *kedushah*, especially through the Jewish body. To persist and flourish, the *sitra achra*, the other side, of which *kelipah* is a part, must siphon vivifying energy from the side of holiness. *Kelipot* can be compared, for example, to weeds which will never be watered by the owner of the garden, and must therefore derive their succor from the water poured lovingly over the rose bush.

The inherent *kedushah* of a Jew, however, repels these unholy seekers or parasites, overwhelming them with holy light, thus keeping them at bay. The hair, however, different from all other aspects of the anatomy, is not connected to the brain; it has neither nerve endings nor blood vessels.<sup>40</sup> Not quite alive but not completely dead, hair holds the minutest amount of living energy. In Kabbalistic terms, we would associate this minimized energy with the process of *tzimtzum*, contraction. As such, hair provides the only port of entry for the *kelipot* who seek desperately to siphon energy from the holy. Hair also provides the *kelipot* with the energy in a proportion they can comfortably ingest. *Tzimtzum*, which derives from Hashem's power to limit or withhold, gives rise to *dinim* or *gevurot*, severity, and often deleterious energies. *Tzimtzum* needs to be handled with great care.

To understand how this relates to the mitzvah of *kisui rosh*, it is helpful to review the Kabbalistic teachings concerning a man's hair.<sup>41</sup> These writings emphasize the need for a man to keep his hair short, in this way guarding against providing the *kelipot*

40 Tiny blood vessels at the base of every follicle feed the hair root to keep it growing. Once the hair is at the skin's surface, the cells within the strand of hair aren't alive anymore. This is why we feel no pain when our hair is cut.

41 The following is based on the book *HaShabbat* by Rabbi Y. Karasik, Vol 1 p. 165-179.

For an in depth study, refer to the extensive sources referenced in this book on page 166 footnotes 8, 10 and more.

with a place to take root and from which to siphon energy (*Yenikat Hachitzonim*).<sup>42</sup> A male's long hair attracts and beckons to the *kelipot*; their presence on one's person can precipitate all types of spiritual ill effects. This scenario, Kabbalistic writings warn, must be avoided.<sup>43</sup>

There is, however, no mention in Kabbalistic literature of the spiritual qualities of a female's hair separate and apart from the hair of a married woman. What accounts for this difference, and what changes vis a vis a woman's hair when she marries?

To answer those questions, we need to reference one of the most basic of all Kabbalistic axioms. We are taught that the entire world was created in binary fashion, with the *mashpia* and *mekabel* as perhaps the most prominent binary in the system. Generally, the masculine is associated with the modality of *mashpia*, bestowal, or filling, while the feminine modality is associated with receiving, providing vessels that welcome the bounty. We can now understand why, when the *kelipot* seek to parasitically feed, they will approach the male; they are drawn to the source of bestowal. The female's hair, on the other hand, holds no such attraction for the *kelipot*.

All of this changes, however, when a woman enters marriage. At that time, husband and wife become, in the *Zohar's* holy words, *chad gufa*, two halves of one body, in addition to two halves of a soul.<sup>44</sup> Given this "new body" from which to draw succor – comprised of both a male and female aspect – the *kelipot* prefer to feed off of the woman's hair. This is because, Kabbalistically, the feminine is associated with the *sefira* of *malchut*, the final *sefirah* of the ten *sefirot* and the one associated with the most intense contraction of Hashem's light.<sup>45</sup> As noted, hair connotes *tzimtzum*. Women's rootedness in the *sefirah* of *malchut*, also associated with *tzimtzum*, creates *tzimtzum* within *tzimtzum* or *tzimtzum* to the second degree. Thus, a married woman's hair proves especially appealing to *kelipah* in that, through marriage, she absorbs the more abundant energy of the *mashpia* but, at the same time, makes this energy available in bite-sized or doubly contracted dosages. The holy energies, delivered in tiny increments make a woman's hair perfectly conducive for *kelipot* seeking nurture. By means of analogy, consider a sippy cup for a toddler or, even before that, how small the hole in the nipple must be to accommodate the newborn. We note that while Kabbalistically a

42 *Pelle Yoetz, Likutei shoshana Parshat Naso* by the *Noam Elimelech, Tzava'at Reb Yehuda Hachassid*.

43 In sharp contradistinction, a man's beard attracts and facilitates the downward flow of spiritual bounty.

44 *Zohar* III 7b.

45 Hashem's light passes through the hierarchy of the *sefirot* and various spiritual worlds in diminishing measure via a process of *tzimtzumim*, or contractions.

man is bidden to keep his hair short<sup>46</sup> a woman, even after marriage, need not do the same; it is enough that she covers it.<sup>47</sup>

When a woman covers her hair punctiliously, she blocks the entrance and impedes the arrival of these *kelipot*. In fact, by carefully covering every strand of her hair she not only blockades the *kelipot* but weakens them.<sup>48</sup> This action becomes a conduit for the most magnificent blessings, as delineated in the *Zohar*.

Below, we cite the exact words of the *Zohar*<sup>49 50</sup>:

Rabbi Yehuda said that the exposed hairs on the head of a woman cause another kind of hair [of the *sefirah* of *malchut*] to be exposed [to external impure forces] and impair her. Therefore, a woman should be careful that none of her hair is visible even to the beams of her house, and all the more so outside.

Come and see! Just like for the masculine aspect [*ze'eir anpin*] hair represents the harshest of severe judgments. So it is by a woman [whose hair has a stronger attraction to external forces, and thus is necessary to not be revealed since that empowers them].<sup>51</sup>

...Therefore, a woman's hair should be covered even in the innermost parts of her home. If she adheres to this, it is written: בניך כשתילי זיתים, your children are like olive plants.<sup>52</sup> What does "like olive plants" mean? Just as an olive tree does not lose its leaf cover in winter or summer and always has more value than the rest of the trees, so will her sons be elevated in respect to other people. Her husband will also be blessed in everything, with blessings above and with blessings below,

46 But a man is encouraged to let his beard grow unhindered. According to Kabbalah a man's beard represents channels for divine abundance and acts as a conduit for the thirteen attributes of Divine mercy.

47 *Halachic* authorities have recommended and encouraged that a woman wear her natural hair cut short, although it is covered anyway. See *Sdei Chemed*, *Klalim* Lamed, 116; *Darkei Teshuvah* 198:91 and others. Among the explanations offered: Longer hair cannot be constantly contained and covered (especially while wearing a hat or a *tichel*), as is mandatory. Also, proper immersion in the *mikvah* is more difficult with long hair. [<sup>1/2</sup>-1 *tefach* has been quoted as the preferred length] *Kovetz Yagdil Torah* (N.Y.), 2:10 (22), in the name of the Rebbe Rashab of Lubavitch; Op. cit. 13 (25) in the name of our Rebbe, *Kvudah Bat Melech* 1:19.

48 *HaShabbat* by Rabbi Y. Karasik, Vol. 1, p. 169-180.

49 *Nasso* p. 239

50 Translated and annotated by Rahmiel-Hayyim Drizin from the *Zohar* selection in *Chok L'Yisrael*. Copyright 2003 by KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.

51 In keeping with the Rebbe's emphasis on the positive, we do not here cite the words of the *Zohar* on the deleterious effects of a married woman's hair remaining uncovered.

52 *Tebillim* 128:3.

with wealth, children and grandchildren. This is what is meant by [the continuation of this psalm]: ה' יברכך ה' מציון: וראה בנים לבניך שלום על ישראל, behold, thus shall the man who fears Hashem be blessed. Hashem shall bless you out of Zion, and you shall see the good of Yerushalayim all the days of your life. You shall see your children's children, and peace upon Yisrael.<sup>53</sup>

# Blessings from Above and Blessings from Below: The Rebbe's Teachings regarding Kisui Rosh

## A Brief History of the Rebbe's Focus on This Mitzvah

Living in the twenty-first century, it is sometimes difficult to conceptualize the vastly different religious landscape that dominated America and the greater Jewish world less than one hundred years ago.

In her definitive study of Orthodoxy in America between the years of 1880 and 1945, Jenna Weissman Joselit notes:<sup>54</sup>

What animated and sustained that experience was not a lasting preoccupation with Jewish law or a collective nostalgia for the piety of an earlier, parental generation but rather an ongoing romance with modernity. Instead of shunning modernity, the interwar Orthodox embraced it, deferred to its strictures, and fashioned their institutions in accord with its dictates... Keeping outwardly distinctive practices to a minimum, Orthodox Jews of this era did not publicly demonstrate or proclaim their Orthodoxy. "It was certainly not a time when you showed your Judaism outside," related one rabbi. "It was a time when you kept your Judaism to yourself. There was no such thing as wearing a *kippah* on the street."<sup>55</sup> The absence of distinctive dress was a hallmark of that era.

In the same book, in a chapter on women titled "The Jewish Priestess and Ritual: The Sacred Life of American Orthodox Women," the practice of married women covering their hair goes entirely unmentioned.

When the Rebbe assumed leadership in 1950, the Lubavitch presence in America was relatively small, depleted, like many European Jewish groups, by the events of the previous decade. With relatively few young women among the ranks of Lubavitch in those days, many of the young chassidim married into "American" Orthodox homes where the mitzvah of *kisui rosh* was honored more in its breach than in its fulfillment. Even many of the young women who came to America from Russia along with their chassidic families were not committed to this mitzvah whose observance had declined

54 New York's Jewish Jews: The Orthodox Community in the Interwar Years, p. 20–21.

55 Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, Ramaz School Oral History Project, 1986, p. 2.

under the Communist regime. In an era when standing out as Jew incurred dreadful consequences including death, it was difficult for most to perform the mitzvah.

Through the Rebbe's correspondences and public addresses, it becomes clear that he carried out a systematic campaign to promote and restore the mitzvah of hair covering as *de rigueur* for all married women. In this regard, it is important to remember that the Rebbe was not a spiritual leader only for the select group of individuals who considered themselves Lubavitcher Chassidim. From his published volumes of correspondence,<sup>56</sup> it is apparent that the Rebbe's influence extended over the widest cross-section of world Jewry.<sup>57</sup>

During the early period of his leadership, the Rebbe sought to establish that hair covering for a married woman was a matter of *halacha* and not an obscure *minhag*, a relic that belonged to another age. Furthermore, the Rebbe asserted that *halacha* requires all of a married woman's hair be covered.<sup>58</sup> And he unabashedly championed the *sheitel* as the optimal way for a woman to fulfill this crucial mitzvah.

The Rebbe's approach to promoting *kisui rosh* entailed a balancing act: He wanted to supplant the widespread aversion to appearing different and too Jewish with a strong sense of Jewish identity and pride. At the same time, he was acutely sensitive to many women's concerns about maintaining a fashionable and contemporary appearance. The Rebbe worried that most women, even those more *frum*, would not wear a scarf consistently and in a manner that covered all of their hair. It appears that, even then, the Rebbe foresaw the eventual swell of observant women whose professional and social involvements would preclude covering hair with scarves or hats. Certainly, without the option of a *sheitel*, many professional women might not consider observing the mitzvah of *kisui rosh*.

An early example of the Rebbe's thinking in support of *sheitels* is articulated in the following excerpts taken from his public address, or *farbrengen*, on Rosh Chodesh Elul 1954:

**The difference between a wig and a kerchief is the following: It is easy to take off a kerchief, which is not the case with a wig. For**

56 To date, thirty three volumes of the Rebbe's correspondence have been published under the title *Igrot Kodesh*, Kehot Publishing. They include selections from his correspondence through 1977-78.

57 According to Susan Handelman, a professor at Bar Ilan University, as cited by Mendel Kalmenson in the Chabad.org article "Local is Global," "The Rebbe would receive—and personally read and answer—around four hundred letters a day. And probably equally as many telephone calls, with questions for him and requests for blessings, would come in each day from around the world." Kalmenson adds, "Purportedly, research done by the New York Postal Service in the '80s found that the Rebbe received second to the most (non-commercial) mail in all of New York State!"

58 *Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 75:4. *Tzemach Tzedek, Responsa Even Ha'ezer* 139.



**instance, when one is at a gathering and wears a wig, then even if President Eisenhower were to enter, she would not take off her wig... Let the woman ponder this matter... Why doesn't she really want to wear a wig but only a kerchief? Because she knows that a wig cannot be taken off when she is walking in the street or at a gathering, while a kerchief can be moved all the way up and sometimes taken off entirely.**

**It is possible that she will say that she will wear a kerchief properly. If she does so, then surely it is well. But...why place oneself in the path of temptation? We beseech G-d prior to our prayers, "Do not bring us to temptation."<sup>59</sup>**

Not surprisingly, at first, the Rebbe's stance proved unpopular. Many women simply did not want to cover their hair while others found the notion of a wig utterly foreign, associating it with an outdated homeliness. Displaying patience and uncanny sensitivity to the psychological and sociological issues at play, the Rebbe persisted in his efforts. Eventually, it paid off. By the late 1960s, the Rebbe's ardent promotion of wigs led to adoption of the *sheitel* as a norm in most Orthodox circles.

Clearly, the Rebbe wished to inspire women to wear wigs and to stand firm in this observance in the face of the unique social pressures of the hour. A more careful reading, however, uncovers additional nuances worthy of mention. For instance, the Rebbe's attentiveness to how, for many women, identity is linked to physical appearance. He understood this dynamic as a critical factor when women considered whether to cover their hair. The Rebbe's *farbrengens* were serious affairs often lasting many hours; occasions when he discussed multi-layered Torah insights, sometimes deep into the night. Attending the aforementioned gathering were hundreds of men and relatively few women.<sup>60</sup> Yet given *kisui rosh's* universal importance, the Rebbe did not seek to obfuscate what is often construed as a solely feminine issue in *halacha* while addressing every audience.

The Rebbe went so far as to state that wigs might even be more attractive than one's own hair. At the time, the statement was meant to encourage and educate women who assumed all wigs were aesthetically unflattering. In comparison to what women might have worn in earlier generations, the new wigs, the Rebbe said, were attractive. (Here, it's worth recalling that the Jewish conception of modesty does not equate to

<sup>59</sup> *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 13, p. 189.

<sup>60</sup> In stark contrast to the later years when thousands of women attended regularly.

unattractiveness but largely entails covering areas of the body deemed *ervah*, nakedness, which, for a married woman, would include her hair.)

Today, when the highly sophisticated, proliferating wig industry offers truly beautiful options in synthetic and human hair alike,<sup>61</sup> it is instructive that the Rebbe had no objection at all to wigs that enhanced a woman's appearance so long as they completely cover the hair. On the contrary, he encouraged women to take advantage of their availability.

The Rebbe did not miss an opportunity to promulgate the mitzvah of *kisui rosh* and to promote the particular way he felt it was best observed. During the first decade of his *nesiut*, leadership, from 1950–60, the Rebbe served as the *mesader kiddushin* at numerous weddings.<sup>62</sup> Among the conditions he set for doing so was the *kallah's* commitment, once married, to wearing a *sheitel*. It was a great *zechut*, merit, to have the Rebbe be *mesader kiddushin*, and this opportunity inspired many young women to commit to wearing a *sheitel*. The Rebbe relentlessly championed this cause in conversations with *kallahs* and *chatanim*, their parents, and others who would come to him for *yechidut*. According to numerous accounts, the Rebbe urged young couples to make buying a *sheitel* a high priority in pre-wedding planning. The Rebbe made a point of reminding the *kallah* to buy the most beautiful *sheitel* she could find, and to some, he specifically stressed the need for two, so that if one was serviced, the other would be available.<sup>63</sup> In some cases, the Rebbe made the *chatan* responsible for this purchase. The Rebbe even went so far as to pay for the *sheitlach* of some young women during this period.

One such woman was Chana Sharfstein. In her own words:

Just a few days after my affirmative response [concerning wearing a *sheitel*] had been given to the Rebbe, we received a phone call from Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky, a member of the Rebbe's secretariat, that there was something important waiting for us at the Rebbe's office. Of course, my husband immediately went to his office, and I impatiently awaited his return. In a small white envelope was a personal check from the Rebbe, and with it came a special message that I should buy the most beautiful *sheitel* I could find; he said I should wear it in great happiness and joy. In a large flowered wig box on the top shelf of my closet is that first *sheitel*. It was custom-

61 For *halachic* sources which discuss natural-looking and specifically, human-hair wigs, and find them unobjectionable, see *Shiltei Giborim* on *Rif*, *Shabbat* 29a; *Yaskil Avdi*, vol. 7; *Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezzer* 16; *Igrot Moshe*, vol. 4; *Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezzer* II, 12.

62 The Rebbe was *mesader kiddushin* at weddings before this point, but not in his capacity as Rebbe, and he did make an exception for a few couples between 1960–63. After this time, because of the exponential growth of the Lubavitch community and the Rebbe's myriad involvements, the Rebbe no longer officiated at weddings. See *Mekadesh Yisrael* for more.

63 *Mekadesh Yisrael*, Kehot Publications, p. 291.

made by an outstanding wig stylist in Williamsburg. I wore it and wore it and wore it until the netting on the inside began to shred. Then I carefully mended it with loving care and patience. I always felt very special wearing that *sheitel*. And no matter how many *sheitlach* I have had since then, none were more wonderful than the first one. I always wore it with great happiness and pride and whenever someone would remark that I had lovely hair or a beautiful hairstyle, I would smile and respond with confidence that I was wearing a wig because I was an Orthodox Jewish woman.<sup>64</sup>

The Rebbe contributed to the purchase of Crown Heights resident, Mrs. Zelda Nemes' *sheitel* as well. In the summer of 1958, when Rabbi and Mrs. Zelda Nemes were expecting their eldest son Mendel, they merited to go into the Rebbe for *yechidut*. Mrs. Nemes was wearing a half wig, known as a fall, with a hat which completely covered the front part of her head. The Rebbe looked at her and said: "a half *sheitel* is half a *bracha* and a whole *sheitel* is a whole *bracha*." The Rebbe showered the couple with tremendous *brachot*, and he said he could even give more...

The Rebbe then asked to speak to Rabbi Nemes alone, at which time he took a large amount of money out of his drawer and told Rabbi Nemes to go to Manhattan and buy the most beautiful *sheitel* he could find from a wig maker that serviced the Hollywood actors and actresses.<sup>65</sup>

Rabbi Shmuel Lew, a *Shliach* in London, England since 1965, recounts that shortly after the Rebbe let it be known that he would be *mesader kiddushin* at his wedding to Hindy Jaffe in 1963, the Rebbe's secretary Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Aizik Hodakov asked him a number of questions.<sup>66</sup> "One of the questions was: Does your *kallah* have a *sheitel*? I answered yes. The next question was: How many? I said two. Rabbi Hodakov said, "That is what I wanted to hear. She should have another *sheitel*, so that even when one is being washed, set, etc., she does not go without a *sheitel*."

While the Rebbe communicated with individuals about the mitzvah, he simultaneously promoted its observance on a more communal level, "opening the door" for the modern day *sheitel* industry. Mrs. Freeda Kugel, whose name is synonymous with wigs, related the following:<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Excerpted from *The Letter* by Chana Sharfstein, printed in the N'shei Chabad Newsletter, December, 1993.

<sup>65</sup> Related in private conversation to the author by Rabbi Mendel Nemes.

<sup>66</sup> In an interview with the N'shei Chabad Newsletter.

<sup>67</sup> In a phone interview with the author conducted in Summer 2000.

I came from Israel as a young woman with small children, and at the time, my husband was unable to find work, so I became the breadwinner. In 1970, I had a small business as a wig stylist, and on one occasion, in *yechidut* with the Rebbe, I complained about how difficult things were. I worked long hours and did not bring in enough money. The Rebbe told me not to worry, that my line of work would become very lucrative because every woman would need at least one *sheitel* for every day and one for Shabbat. The Rebbe then said that there will come a time when wig salons the world over will order wigs from me. I was stunned by the Rebbe's words. First, because women were not buying multiple *sheitlach* at that time. The human-hair wigs of the 1960s were truly ugly, and synthetic wigs had just come onto the scene. [At the time, Fashion Tress produced a line called Look of Love; this preceded the wig business of Georgie, Yaffa, and others.] Even more astounding was the Rebbe's reference to an international business, which was beyond my wildest dreams.

Shortly after this exchange, women started traveling from the affluent Upper West Side to have their *sheitlach* done at my salon in Crown Heights. I considered this a direct result of the Rebbe's blessing.

In 1980, with the Rebbe's words echoing in my mind, I went to Korea in an attempt to start my own line of synthetic wigs. I was not particularly successful with this line; in fact, I was tired and discouraged, and with my husband now established in his own line of work, I took a hiatus from the *sheitel* business.

But with the advent of glasnost, my husband urged me to travel to the Soviet Union in search of European human hair for the "Shabbat" *sheitlach* the Rebbe had spoken of so many years earlier. My Korean adventure was not a total loss as I did learn a great deal about the manufacturing of wigs, and I never forgot the Rebbe's blessings. So I set out to seek the most beautiful human hair for sale in that vast and unknown territory.

Believe me when I tell you, all kinds of doors opened for me. I literally saw the fulfillment of the Rebbe's blessing. It was not without difficulty, but today I employ 150 people in my wig factory in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. My husband and children have joined me in the business, and wig salons from all over the world do indeed import the Freeda human hair wigs that so many women proudly wear on Shabbat.

## The Definitive Conduit for Bracha

In the following letter, we sense the Rebbe's palpable joy upon hearing the news that a particular woman has purchased a *sheitel*.<sup>68</sup> In his signature style, the Rebbe reminds her of the great *brachot* this mitzvah elicits and encourages her to share her commitment to *kisui rosh* with others:

**I was very pleased to receive your letter of Nov 3, in which you write the good news that you have ordered a sheitel during your recent visit in New York. The Almighty will surely fulfill His promise, as it is written in the holy Zohar, that it will bring hatzlacha to you, your husband, and 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, and as the Baal Shem Tov emphasized the importance of serving the Almighty with joy, G-d's blessings will be even greater.**

**I want to add my prayerful wishes that the Almighty grant you the zechut to be instrumental in making your friends and acquaintances follow your good example, which you will support also by other forms of influence. Not only does the sheitel show the true Jewish spirit of adherence to our laws and customs, but it also shows strength of character and will and the power of conviction, not being swayed by external influences...**

The Rebbe constantly reminded all those with whom he corresponded that a woman's scrupulous adherence to this mitzvah served as a conduit for blessings in life. To an individual who wrote concerning difficulties with earning a living and had apparently acknowledged that his wife did not cover her hair, the Rebbe responded:

**Why the surprise at the financial straits when the holy Zohar explains that when *kisui harosh* 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, etc." Our Torah is a "Torah of Life," instructing us how to live our lives, even on a daily basis.<sup>69</sup>**

68 Dated 19 Cheshvan 5715.

69 *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 19, pp. 326-327.

To another who asked the Rebbe for a *bracha* that his brother and sister in law be blessed with children, the Rebbe replied:

**You should also find out from your brother whether his wife is careful to observe kisui harosh. For the Zoharic statement is known, that a woman's observance of tzniut and especially kisui harosh brings about "blessings of above and blessings of below, with wealth, with children and grandchildren, etc."<sup>70</sup>**

## Easing the Impediments to the Observance of this Mitzvah

The Rebbe received a legendarily heavy volume of mail every day, including letters from women and men voicing hesitations about fulfillment of the mitzvah of *kisui rosh*. The concerns surrounding the Rebbe's call for women to wear *sheitels* ranged from anxiety about monetary costs to fears about physical discomfort, and from insecurities about the sociological implications to theological misgivings. In the sampling below, the Rebbe's responses are filled with compassion and an evident sense of urgency:

**Because your wife has resolved to wear a sheitel, and to do so gladly, and will not be bothered by those who may scoff at her observance, her merit will be great. Specifically, [she will gain merit] as she is among the first in her neighborhood to return to this custom of modest Jewish women. It is well known how our Sages valued and praised the ability of an individual to teach many through example.**

**It may be that in the interim it is difficult to commit to this because of the expenses involved. I want to inform you that there is here (administered through the Lubavitch office) a specific free loan fund for this purpose, which can be repaid over a lengthy period of time, in order to facilitate these purchases by anyone. It is not a good idea to delay this matter. As soon as you get this letter, write me with the name and necessary amount to issue a check; it will be sent out immediately and may Hashem grant you success.<sup>71</sup>**

70 *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 7, p. 259.

71 *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 8, p. 192, dated 25 Shevat, 1954.

As was his way, the Rebbe urged those committed to the observance of this practice to encourage their friends to act in kind:

**You should also see to it that others act in like manner, explaining to them that this is the path and segulah to health, sustenance, and true nachat from children. And Hashem should help that you report good tidings in this regard.<sup>72</sup>**

The following is excerpted from the Rebbe's reply to a woman who wrote that wearing a wig caused her headaches. That the Rebbe follows up his theological points with an eminently practical suggestion is absolutely striking and suggests that, for the Rebbe, no concern proved too trivial when it came to this mitzvah:

**With regard to your writing about covering your hair there is absolutely no question regarding this matter: Since G-d 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 by keeping G-d's commandments the head should hurt, etc.**

**For example, when you write that wearing a sheitel makes your head hurt, it is possible that: A) This is a falsehood of the evil inclination who does not want mitzvot to be performed and does not want Jews to be showered with blessings. B) If indeed it is true, then this proves that you should cut your hair short. Then it surely won't hurt when you wear a sheitel.<sup>73</sup>**

For the following correspondent, the problem is less pragmatic and more theological in nature. Interestingly, the Rebbe did not counter her challenge with philosophical or mystical arguments. For many women (and men), no reason for *kisui rosh* will ever prove compelling enough. Rather, the Rebbe stressed that observance of all *mitzvot*, including hair covering, is predicated on one's subservience to Hashem's will. The Rebbe concluded his response with reference to the abundant *brachot* accrued through care with this mitzvah:

**In response to your letter of the 13th of Iyar in which you ask how one is to explain the necessity of hair covering (for a married woman): One wonders at the very question, especially since we**

72 *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 8, p. 217, dated 11 Adar, 1954.

73 *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 33, p. 264.

now find ourselves in the days of preparation for receiving the Torah, which was only received by the Jewish people through their prefacing naaseh, we will do, to nishma, we will hear and we will learn.

It is self-understood and plain that man's belief in Hashem forces him to intellectually accept Hashem's commandments without seeking reasons for them in human intellect. For even simple common sense, if it is but healthy and sound, understands that it is impossible for a finite being to comprehend the infinite.

Indeed, it is a principle of faith among all the Jewish people, believers, children of believers, that Hashem and His understanding and will, are truly one and infinite, while man is finite in all aspects of his being.

In addition to the above, when one takes into account the explicit reward received for hair covering (Zohar), then even if one were to be extremely doubtful of this, chas v'shalom, it would still be worth covering the hair. This is most assuredly so, as the words of the Zohar – as part of our Torah of Truth – are completely true, perpetual and everlasting in all places and all times.<sup>74</sup>

## Covering All of Your Hair: A Great Merit for Your Children

By the late 1960s, the Rebbe's ardent promotion of *sheitlach* had made wearing a *sheitel* the norm in most *frum* circles. But the Rebbe did not rest. He continued to teach the importance of a woman carefully covering all of her hair, even in the privacy of her home, in accordance with various *piskei halacha*, and specifically, the ruling of the Tzemach Tzedek. The Rebbe often referenced the scrupulous behavior modeled by Kimchit and other women of her generation: As cited in the Gemara, the walls of these women's homes never saw their hair, which means that their hair was never exposed.

On Chai Elul 5742, September 6, 1982, during a *farbrengen*, the Rebbe delivered the following impassioned words:

**Torah, the “Torah of Truth,” declares that as soon as a baby is born it is affected by all that transpires around it. Surely, the**

<sup>74</sup> *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 13, pp. 102–103, dated 25 Iyar, 1956.



conduct of the infant's parents has a profound impact on the child, even when it is extremely young.

Moreover, even the conduct of the parents during the nine months that precede the infant's birth have a profound influence on the child.

Thus the Gemara<sup>75</sup> relates that "Kimchit had seven sons, all of whom merited to serve as Kohanim Gedolim, High Priests. The Sages asked her, 'What have you done to merit this?' She answered them: 'The rafters of my house have never seen the plaits of my hair.'"

In other words, her profound conduct of tzniut – to the extent that even when she was alone in the house "the rafters of her house never saw the plaits of her hair" – affected her sons to such an extent that they all merited to become Kohanim Gedolim.

Her behavior thus had an effect many, many years after she conducted herself in this manner – after her children had already become bar mitzvah and after they had reached the age of twenty, when they became fit to become Kohanim Gedolim.

Moreover, her conduct also had an influence on her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, for the son of a Kohen Gadol inherits his father's position.

At a *farbrengen* twenty five years earlier, the Rebbe had already replied to a question that might arise in women's minds:<sup>76</sup>

**One should not think: Must I act with such a tremendous degree of tzniut that my children will become Kohanim Gedolim? Why should I care if my children grow up to be only regular priests? Furthermore, all Jews are intrinsically holy!**

**Herein is the lesson from the lighting of the menorah, which was to be done specifically in the Beit Hamikdash. This teaches us that, if at all possible, we are to increase the amount of illumination even in those places that are already most holy.**

75 *Yoma* 47a. If the high priesthood is inherited through death, how is it considered a merit that Kimchit had seven sons, each of whom served in that capacity? Her son, Rabbi Yishmael, the regular High Priest, was temporarily ineligible to serve due to ritual impurity. Over time, each of his brothers had the opportunity to substitute him as High Priest. She did not, G-d forbid, bury her sons (*Tosafot Yesbanim*, ad loc.).

76 *Sichot Kodesh* 5717, pp. 337-338. *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 2, pp. 319-320.

**Here as well: If a woman is granted the ability to train her sons that they grow into Kohanim Gedolim, [i.e., that they achieve the maximum of their spiritual potential,] it indicates that this is her task; should she not do this, she is not carrying out her obligation and is not fulfilling G-d's desire.**

In effect, the Rebbe asked: Which mother would consciously deny her child every possible advantage in life, especially if it hinges on her choice?

It is indeed fascinating that while *kehunah* always passes via the patrilineal line, *kehunah gedolah*, perhaps the most exclusive privilege of all, was affected by the mother and specifically, through her degree of care in the mitzvah of *kisui rosh*.

The Rebbe went on to underscore the impact of a mother's *kisui rosh* on her children's spiritual success via analysis of a seemingly puzzling *passuk*. As the Rebbe asks, why does the Torah state, *דבר אל אהרן... בהעלותך את הנרות*?<sup>77</sup> Why was the directive concerning lighting the *menorah* in the *Beit Hamikdash* given specifically to Aharon, the *Kohen Gadol*, when a *Kohen Hedyot*, a "regular" *Kohen*, could do this service and, in actuality, did so most of the time?<sup>78</sup> The Rebbe's answer to this question hinges on the *Kohen Gadol's* unique connection to the Torah and draws on a chassidic teaching that symbolically equates lighting the *menorah* with sparking the Divine light in another Jew's soul.

While, indeed, the *avodah* of lighting the literal *menorah* in the *Mikdash* was usually carried out by *Kohanim Hedyotim*, the mitzvah's symbolic implication of igniting the *neshamah* of another Jew is work so delicate that it must be done by the *Kohen Gadol*, the one person in the world to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim*.<sup>79</sup> Significantly, only the *Kohen Gadol* beheld the *aron Hashem*, which housed the *luchot*, upon which were engraved the *Aseret Hadibrot*. The superlative advantage of *otiyot chakikah*, engraved letters, the Rebbe reminded us, is that they cannot be separated from the stone, unlike ink, which can be rubbed off of parchment and, even at the outset, is merely superimposed. Thus, the engraved letters symbolize the *Kohen Gadol's* immutable oneness with the Torah. And it is only with this type of passionate attachment to Torah, the Rebbe taught, that each one of us, as figurative *Kohanim Gedolim*, can "light the *menorah*" of our own

77 *Bamidbar* 8:2.

78 If the *menorah* was brought outside, even a non-Kohen could light it. As the Rambam writes, *Hadlakah kesheirah bezar* (Rambam, *Beit Hamikdash* 9:7).

79 *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 2, p. 314. The seven lamps of the *menorah* represent the seven soul types, each one rooted in one of the seven emotional attributes. In addition, as Shlomo Hamelech writes, *נר ה' נשמת אדם*, The soul of man is the candle of Hashem (*Mishlei* 20:27).

*neshamah* and the *neshamot* of those we encounter. It takes inspired oneness with the Torah on our part to inspire another.

The Rebbe then proclaimed that women, in particular, who raise children and set the tone of their homes, are called upon by Hashem to serve as the primary lamplighters of their children's souls. And to successfully kindle her children's *neshamot*, a mother must embody this *chakikah* fervor, the *Kohen Gadol's* single-minded devotion to and fiery oneness with the Torah. Our commitment to this holy work directly shapes the spiritual experiences of our children. And remarkably, the Rebbe emphasized, just like Kimchit who was scrupulous with her hair covering and merited to see seven sons as *Kohanim Gedolim*, so too we can pass down to our children an immutable attachment to the Torah as personified by the *Kohen Gadol*.

The Rebbe completed this talk with a reminder that a mother's care and precision in her *tzniut* in general, and her *kisui rosh* in particular, mitigates difficulties in the lives of her children and draws blessings of children, good health and abundance in *parnassah* into her life and those of her household, in a literal way.<sup>80</sup>

## The Gift that Keeps Giving

Often, people doubt the premise of reward and punishment in light of their own or others' seemingly unwarranted difficulties and/or successes.

During a *farbrengen* on Rosh Chodesh Elul, 1954, the Rebbe stated:<sup>81</sup>

**Wearing a sheitel has a beneficial impact on children and grandchildren, livelihood and health, as the Zohar states.<sup>82</sup>**

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

**First of all, we do not know what transpires in the life of another, what types of travails he or she is undergoing; no one tells the other about all that takes place in one's life. Second of all, we are not to look at what is transpiring in others' [lives]; we are to do that which G-d commanded us to do.**

80 *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 2, *Parshas Behaalotcha, ot bei* and onward.

81 *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 13, p. 188.

82 *Zohar* III, 126a.

**We are a minority among the nations. Should we also draw the corollary that since there are more gentiles than Jews in the world, and things are going well for them, 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...**

**Additionally, we must acknowledge the limited scope of our vision. Our Rebbeim taught: חזקה לתעמולה שאינה חוזרת ריקם, a positive overture will always yield a positive result.<sup>83</sup> The Friediker Rebbe added, דער אויבערשטער בלייבט ניט קיין בעל חוב, Hashem never remains indebted.<sup>84</sup>**

We may not perceive the *brachot* that flow into our lives as a result of careful observance of the mitzvah of *kisui rosh*. These blessings may come to fruition only a generation later or even after our own sojourn in this world, taking the form of a *bracha* enjoyed by our offspring down the line. That itself is a remarkable testament to the ripple effects of this mitzvah. As noted, Kimchit's care in covering her hair caused her sons to be *Kohanim Gedolim*, which also put her grandchildren, the subsequent generation, on the inner track to inherit the High Priesthood, should they prove worthy. In any case, Hashem will not remain in debt. The *brachot* will most certainly come to fruition.

The Rebbe Maharash revealed one particularly powerful example of a *bracha* that stemmed from *kisui rosh* which also manifested at a later time. In 1854, Czar Nicholas I of Russia instituted a decree against women covering their heads with a type of hat referred to as a "*knofin*." The despot famous for his anti-semitic laws clearly aimed this ban at Jewish women given to wearing this type of covering in fulfillment of the mitzvah of *kisui rosh*. Some defied Czar Nicholas and continued to cover their heads properly at great personal risk. Nearly twenty years later, all young Jewish men were ordered to conscript into the Soviet army. The Rebbe Maharash stated that despite this all-inclusive decree, miraculously, none of the sons of the women who had stood firm against the *gezeirah* of *knofin* were drafted. The sons of these women were spared that plight and pain in the *zechut* of their mothers' *mesirat nefesh* for the mitzvah of *kisui rosh*.<sup>85</sup>

83 *Hayom Yom*, entry for 12 Tishrei.

84 *Hayom Yom*, entry for 28 Elul.

85 *Shmuot V'sippurim*, vol. 1, p. 74.

Seldom, throughout the years of his leadership, did the Rebbe veer from his positive focus on the wonderful effects of this mitzvah. In the letter cited below, however, one senses the Rebbe's exasperation with a man who could not find it in himself to allow his wife to cover her hair in accordance with *halacha* and seemed oblivious to the harm this could portend for his family.

**Should one say that it is impossible for him to give in that his wife should observe *kisui harosh* with a kerchief or a sheitel (wig), and it makes no difference to him that by doing so he is placing in jeopardy his fortune and the fortune of his partner in a life partnership of many decades, then this person lacks any feeling of responsibility, duty and obligation.**

**Nor does this person possess the proper measure and knowledge of the meaning of a shared life, and how much it is worthwhile foregoing even more important matters, as long as it leads to a united, fortunate and happy life.**

**And as stated above, such a life is impossible to achieve for a Jewish man and woman unless it is lived in accordance with the Torah and mitzvot.<sup>86</sup>**

In the final analysis, it is hair covering as a *segulah*, a source of *bracha*, that was the hallmark of the Rebbe's approach. In each of the aforementioned examples, and in numerous instances not cited here, the Rebbe underscored the unique way this particular mitzvah channels Hashem's blessings into one's home and family.

The Rebbe never tired of quoting the words of the *Zohar*, words most of us might never have otherwise seen or heard! It was as if the Rebbe was presenting us with keys that unlocked a vault filled with treasures that he desperately wanted each Jewish woman to share with her family.

May we recognize and cherish our great merit to serve as conduits for these *brachot* and open ourselves up to receive this outpouring of goodness into our lives, the lives of our husbands, and the lives of all our offspring until the end of time.

86 Excerpt from *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 9, p. 112.