

# THE PEAK OF BEAUTY

To you, my dear sisters, who truly desire to serve Hashem. Together, let all of us try to clarify and acquire a deeper understanding of a topic of paramount importance to us. May we merit, with Hashem's help, to gain a proper outlook toward the *mitzvah* of *tznius*, and more particularly what is a preferable head covering.

1. Some Poskim approve?

Argument: "According to some Poskim a sheitl is permissible."

Response:

- \* The *heter* (allowance) does not include all sheitlach. It only applies to specific sheitlach, which are rarely available today. "Lately it has become common for married women to wear sheitlach that very closely resemble hair. ... Our holy Torah forbids this. Even places that customarily permitted sheitlach never allowed them ... where one cannot distinguish between married and single women ... and in such cases there is absolutely no heter. ... Wearing a long sheitl is worse than doing not nice things which technically follow Torah guidelines." [from "A Heartfelt Plea to Jewish Daughters" (Elul, 5735) signed by HaGaon Rav Y. Alter the Gerrer Rebbe ztz"l, the Bialer Rebbe ztz"l, the Lelover Rebbe ztz"l, the Sfinker Rebbe ztz"l, (and in contrast for long life) HaGaon Rav Y.M. Hager Shlita, the Viznitzer Rebbe, HaGaon Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner Shlita and his Beis Din, HaGaon Rav Y. Sofer Shlita Av Beis Din of Erlai, HaGaon Rav Y. Adler Shlita Av Beis Din of Torda]
- \* Does a woman wearing a sheitl look like a married woman or a young lady? Ask a three year old! This test can clarify if the sheitl serves the function of being "a sign of recognition" of a married woman. Think to yourself, the Torah wants me to cover my hair. When I cover my hair I show that I want to do the desire of my Father in Heaven and that I'm connected to those about whom it is said "All who see them recognize that they are worthy offspring blessed by Hashem." What a shame to forgo this great honor by covering one's hair in such a way that it looks uncovered.
- \* The main part of a mitzvah is our kavonah (innermost intention). The reason for the mitzvah of covering one's hair is so we should neither adorn ourselves, nor make ourselves pleasing before other men (from Chessed L'Avraham). Ask yourself - what's my true intent when buying a new sheitl?
- \* Let's compare a tichel to a sheitl - which is more *tzniusdik*? We are commanded to "sanctify and make yourself holy with that which is permissible." HaGaon Rav Chaim Kanievsky Shlita said: "A woman who wears a tichel increases kedusha."

2. Just to keep the Jewish Law?

Argument: "If only women would observe the Jewish Law."

"I try to keep the Jewish Law and fulfill my obligation; I don't look for strict interpretations of the law or additional enhancements."

Response:

- \* All Poskim agree that certain sheitlach are forbidden according to Jewish Law. Some Poskim permit some sheitlach by leniently interpreting the law. Nevertheless, all Poskim agree that it's praiseworthy to enhance the mitzvah by accepting a stricter view. This is because a fence against immodesty increases Kedusha. (See Rashi on Kedoshim Tihiyu, that each improvement in modesty is a mitzvah from the Torah.)

- \* Tznius is a character trait. Thus it is incumbent upon us to work on reaching higher levels of tznius, rather than just literally fulfilling an obligation. And like any other character trait, there's no limit to how much we can improve.
- \* Would we like Hashem Yisborach, so to speak, to just fulfill His obligation towards us and only do what He *has* to?! We would prefer Hashem to give us more than we deserve, to shower us with lots of blessings without measuring or calculating. Our going "above and beyond" warrants such favor and kindness from Hashem.

3. Should I be better than my mother?

Argument: "If it was good enough for my mother and grandmother, it's good enough for me."  
 "You have to be a bigger tzadekes than your mother and grandmother?! The spiritual level they reached isn't enough for you?!"  
 "You've already reached the spiritual level of your grandmother? Now you're trying to be holier than her?!"

Response:

- \* If your father who was living in the diaspora wasn't able to have "his Torah learning be his trade", would that be a good enough reason to limit your husband's or children's growth in Torah? The greatest way to honor one's parents is to ensure that the generations that follow excel in Torah and mitzvos as much as possible.
- \* Should your husband forego the privilege of using a more beautiful esrog than either his father or grandfather were able to acquire?!
- \* The innovation of wearing a sheitl came about in a tragic way. Russia, Poland and other countries made decrees forbidding Jewish women to wear a tichel or other such head covering in public. As an emergency solution, women started to wear sheitlach. Unfortunately, after becoming accustomed to sheitlach, even when the decrees were revoked, women continued to wear them.
- \* If we're concerned about emulating those who preceded us, the type of sheitlach worn today are not at all comparable to those our mothers and grandmothers wore.
- \* It's wise to consider how the generations are continually becoming weaker. How might your daughter's and granddaughter's sheitl look even a few years from now? Noting how sheitlach have changed over the past two generations shows us the need to enhance the observance of this mitzvah.

4. So men shouldn't look?

Argument: "This does not disturb men. And even if it would, they don't have to look."

Response:

- \* According to this reasoning, could women go around with *uncovered hair*?
- \* We are told "observe mitzvas with pure simplicity before Hashem." We must not cause men to stumble as a result of our appearance. When the Rabbonim say that a lack of modesty is detrimental to men, we dare not try to be too clever.
- \* We are commanded to cover our hair, thereby not making ourselves pleasing before other men. Therefore, to say *men shouldn't look* treats the *forbidden* as though it's *permitted*.
- \* Experience shows that sheitlach do disturb men. Rav Don Segel Shlita testifies that many men have bitterly complained to him that the tests and spiritual difficulties from from women are the most difficult.

4. Rabbonim don't completely forbid sheitlach?

Argument: *"If there were really a problem with sheitlach, the Rabbonim would forbid them."  
"My Rav allows me to wear a sheitl."*

Response:

- \* It is known that in heaven they adhere to the decisions of Jewish Law made here in this world. Therefore, the Rabbonim know that even if they forbid sheitlach, some women would persist on using them, thus creating harsh judgments. The Rabbonim therefore do not completely forbid them. (See the Appendix which quotes many of their opinions.)
- \* A lot depends on how one asks. Does one ask: "Is it OK?" or "What's preferable?" or "My husband and I really want to do what's best, what is the best possible thing to do?"
- \* Leading Poskim from Jerusalem and Bnai Brak declared in a Letter of Improvement for Tznius - Elul 5761: "Since there are many questions in Jewish Law regarding a sheitl, someone with fear of heaven changes from a sheitl to a tichel." Shouldn't our decisions be based on fear of heaven?
- \* The Zohar HaKadosh states "Be even stricter about avoiding danger than avoiding prohibitions." It also quotes Rebbe Chizkiya: "Cursed is one who lets his wife purposely show any of her hair." Therefore, it makes sense to be very careful and prevent anything that looks like hair from being seen.
- \* Our sages explain why we are commanded to modestly cover the hair - to *quietly hide* that which normally greatly beautifies a woman. (See "Raiment of Gold", Chapter 23 *Reason for the Mitzvah of Covering One's Head*).

5. Finding favor in my husband's eyes?

Argument: *"My desire is to find favor with my husband and this is his preference."  
"A woman doesn't have to be the "Rebbetzin" of the family. Boruch Hashem in our home, my husband leads."*

Response:

- \* "The ways of Hashem are perfect," and it's a mitzva to find favor in a husband's eyes. But if our appearance is eye-catching, causing other men to stumble and sin, that *can't be Hashem's will*. However, by being careful not to distract another woman's husband, we'll merit to be even more beloved to our husband and will find grace in his eyes.
- \* A very high level of tznius is to be a "kosher woman who follows her husband's will" But dressing in a manner that lacks tznius (even within the home) lessens and reduces her husband's ability to rise in Torah and fear of heaven against his will and beyond his control. How could such conduct be "kosher"?!

6. Being close to my daughters?

Argument: *"I'll cause my daughter embarrassment, and maybe even dissent in the family."*

Response:

- \* Instead of giving up, pray for Hashem's help. Concurrently try to implant within your daughters a love, appreciation, warmth and understanding for tznius.
- \* A father once complained to Rav Eliyahu Lopian ztz"l that his daughters didn't listen to his requests to improve their tznius. The Rav responded: "Did you ever faint while rebuking them? Your daughters have to understand that this is important to you and that your life depends on it!" We should educate our daughters (and ourselves) to feel great intensity and longing to be tznius to the very best of our ability.

- \* "And Rachel took the idols, placed them in the pouch of the camels, and sat on them (Beraishis 31:34)." The Zohar HaKadosh explains that Rachel Imadnu sat on the idols to disgrace and degrade them, thus subjugating their impurity and nullifying their strength. Similarly when we educate and influence our daughters, we should downgrade and make undesirable anything not in sync with the Torah, and which veers away even slightly from our highest principles of tznius.
- \* Tznius never destroys but rather has the strength to build up our homes. Tznius is a merit that brings the holy Shechina into our homes. And once the Shechina is in our home, all the blessings and good enter as well. This being the case, why should we hold back these blessings and assistance from heaven from our families?!

### 8. My husband does not involve himself with matters of tznius?

Argument: "My husband does not interfere in the way I or my daughters dress. Whatever we wear is perfectly OK with him."

Response:

- \* "One should be strict with his wife, children and household members, constantly watching over and admonishing them until he is sure that they are perfectly sinless. Otherwise, he is guilty." (Rambam, Laws of the Sota)
- \* Compare this to a woman who squanders her husband's money. Surely he doesn't sit back quietly, but rebukes her - at first softly and then more strongly until she listens. (From the Chofetz Chaim)
- \* "Extend yourself to ensure tznius among the members of your home, because without a doubt *all of our troubles* come as a result of the pitzus (lack of modesty) of the generation, due to our many sins." (Shomer Emunim in his will)
- \* "A woman must know that a lack of modesty causes men to stumble into sin. This will surely cause women who have fear of Heaven to be very careful about every detail of both their dress and their conduct." (sefer Malbushet Kovod, introduction)

### 9. Isn't it important to look pretty and respectful?

Argument: "If I don't dress beautifully, I won't feel good about myself."  
"I like to make a good impression and be accepted by friends, neighbors and fellow employees."

Response:

- \* Do you also want to find favor in the eyes of Hashem?!
- \* What's true beauty? Do you believe the words of our sages? Or, heaven forbid, what the street says? The truth is according to our sages: "Nothing is more beautiful than tznius."
- \* "Charm is deceptive and beauty is vain", but our fear of heaven, that is "to be praised".
- \* Hashem commanded us to cover the hair of our head. Hair that is covered is tzniusdik. This is true beauty. But a head covering which looks like real hair is not true beauty. It is a counterfeit and false beauty resembling foreign cultures that are also fake and false.
- \* A woman's true respect is from being modest. As it says: (Tehilim 45) "The honor of a Jewish woman is when she is tznius."

### 10. It's hard for me?

Argument: "It's difficult and unpleasant and I'll be embarrassed before my friends."

Response:

- \* Decide who your true friends are, and in front of *Whom* you should really be embarrassed. Have Jewish pride and work on fending favor in Hashem's eyes. Neighbors and friends will admire your courage.
- \* Learn and appreciate the truly wonderful style of life that this mitzvah provides. Fulfill it with deep joy like a good daughter feels when she merits to give her parents pleasure.

11. It's not me?

Argument: *"I'm not being myself - it's an act."  
"I won't be happy and I won't feel good about myself."*

Response:

- \* "Doing mitzvas not for the sake of Heaven leads to doing them for the sake of Heaven." Since our actions affect our inner feelings, this is the best way to change how we feel.
- \* Work on your emotions. Imagine the great blessings and good fortune that you'll be bringing to yourself, your family, and all Jewish people. Feel the joy of the mitzvah.

12. I rely on the Rebbetzin?

Argument: *"My Rebbetzin wears a sheitl. Therefore, at least for me it's perfectly acceptable."  
"I certainly don't want to seem like I'm on a higher level than the Rebbetzin."*

Response:

- \* The evil inclination is called an "old and foolish king". It's hard for him to go to each woman and convince her to do what he wants. But he doesn't give up. In his tricky way he approaches influential women and convinces them. Then they do his work for him. Thus, the female masses are influenced by these women and copy their behavior.
- \* The evil inclination changed the Jewish woman's head covering from being an item of modesty. It has instead become an object that attracts man's eyes and heart. (booklet "Lvush L'ohr HaHalocha")
- \* Many women allow themselves to wear a sheitl because they "rely" on what the Rebbetzin does. If the Rebbetzin would show her Rav sample wigs from women who think they're emulating her, quite possibly the Rav would not permit them.
- \* The rebbitzin excels in numerous things. Doesn't she want others to grow and even be more meticulous in some mitzvas than she is?

13. There are other mitzvos in the Torah?

Argument: *Boruch Hashem our level of tznius is quite adequate - women should rather put their efforts in improving in other areas."*

*"In our neighborhood we place special emphasis on chesed and helping one another. In regard to tznius, Boruch Hashem, we do dress according to Jewish Law."*

Response:

- \* The 248 positive mitzvos in the Torah are opposite the 248 limbs in the body. If even one limb hurts, a person suffers. He doesn't say "at least all the other limbs are healthy".
- \* At a fundraising meeting for the hospital in Radin, a wealthy man donated twenty beds. He then turned to some Yeshiva students and asked "how many beds are you giving"? The Chofetz Chaim was present, and answered for them "fifty beds," explaining that "the merit of their Torah learning saves fifty people from getting sick." Therefore, surely it is a wondrous chesed to cause the Shechina to reside within our midst in the merit of our tznius, thus resulting in fewer sick people and fewer poor people.

- \* The Vilna Gaon clarified the level of importance of tznius by equating it with Torah learning for men. We fix and elevate our neshamos through tznius.
- \* Rav Shach ztz"l said: "tznius encompasses all of Judaism".

#### 14. Additional need for tznius in Eretz Yisroel?

Argument: *"This is what we did in the old country. We should follow the same customs here."*

Response:

- \* We should constantly be upgrading our level of tznius even in the diaspora, all the more so when we are in the Holy Land.
- \* One who merits to live in Eretz Yisroel should really enhance this mitzvah. Eretz Yisroel is a land of kedusha, thus holiness is more easily acquired there. Since we are taught that kedusha and tznius go hand in hand, we are expected to be more tznius there.
- \* "From Zion comes forth light" - the whole world turns to us as the true "fashion setters". Whatever headway and improvement we make in tznius in Eretz Yisroel, has a snowball effect throughout the whole world.
- \* "One shouldn't refrain from performing a mitzvah either because he hadn't accepted it from his teachers, or because he wasn't used to doing it. One should be willing to take upon himself something new." (Rabainu Yonah - Igeres Hakodesh) "Therefore, when women who were comfortable with their level of tznius in the diaspora come to the Holy Land, the palace of the King, they must be even more careful and upgrade their level of tznius. Those who improve are worthy of praise." (HaGaon Rav Menashe Klein Shlita in "Malbushei Kovod")

#### 15. I feel too insignificant to have influence over others?

Argument: *"How can I influence world Jewry - I'm so simple."*

*"How can my tznius possibly make a difference in my son's learning?!"*

Response:

- \* Our tznius causes the Shechina to be close to us. When the Shechina is with us we attain all blessings, both material and spiritual. Special blessings come into our home. So each woman by her tznius accomplishes a great deal for herself, her home and Kial Yisroel.
- \* Improving and being more meticulous in tznius is a wonderful way to help to merit that our sons will be pure, with minds that are open to learn and understand the holy Torah. On the other hand, we should be careful not to destroy, G-d forbid, with a lack of tznius, the fulfillment of our dearest wish of having sons who are Torah Scholars.
- \* Improved tznius both hastens the final redemption and brings individual salvations. This is especially true for the mitzvah of covering the head, as the saying goes: *everything goes after the head*. Thus, even if we feel small in our own eyes, our influence is great.
- \* Leading Poskim from Jerusalem and Bnei Brak (in a Letter of Improvement for Tznius - Ehl 5761) bless all those who take upon themselves to upgrade their tznius and change from a sheiti to a tichei. Let us take advantage of their blessings, and in so doing bring good to ourselves, our families, and to all of the Jewish people.
- \* When we do something for Hashem that goes against our nature, Hashem Yisborach helps us in ways that are also above nature. Hashem not only helps us, but helps others too, in miraculous ways. Therefore, extending ourselves with tznius, like switching to a tichei, is extremely effective in providing merit, both for ourselves and for others.

My dear sister, let's ask Hashem to help us fulfill what we learned:

Hashem, please show us the right way and give us good advice to clarify what is the real truth regarding head coverings. We rejoice in being fortunate to have this precious, beloved mitzvah of covering our heads. Please help us realize that this is the crowning glory of tznius for a married Jewish woman.

Hashem, please help us understand that the mitzvah of tznius in dress does not just mean to properly cover one's self. It is also to hide, play down and low key one's attractiveness. It is to avoid being eye-catching and conspicuous. It is not wearing clothing that is loud, skin colored, transparent, tight-fitting, or gaudy. Help us never to give any impression, even momentarily, of a lack of tznius.

Similarly, help us that our head coverings not only cover but also hide and downplay and low key our attractiveness. By no means should our head coverings make us stand out or attract attention. Instead, Hashem please give us Jewish grace, splendor, and true and pure beauty.

Help us merit to fulfill Your intentions and desires behind this mitzvah, not only that which is explicitly stated. We only want to do what You want. So, please give us the strength to wear a head covering that is quiet and refined and not, Heaven forbid, loud or obtrusive. It should hide (from the word tznius) our hairs' attractiveness and not accentuate it. With Your help, this would be a great improvement for us.

"Those who are modest are truly wise." Help us to be wise women who "anticipate the future." We should be able to see into the future by understanding that by being scrupulous with our head coverings we will have a tremendous impact on our future generations.

Help us to fulfill Your holy will to increase holiness and tznius amongst the Jewish Nation. May we merit salvations and all the help we need, individually, for the Jewish people as a whole, and for the final redemption speedily and in our days, Amen.

## APPENDIX

### Quotations from Rabbonim Regarding Modest Head Coverings

1. "We rejoice in our hearts with the recent news that many women have become meticulous with tznius. They have taken upon themselves an old custom of K'hal Yisroel to cover their head with a tichel and not a sheitl. This fulfills the Jewish Law according to all of the Poskim.

This is wonderful and marvelous, and causes much purity and holiness. Surely their merit is very great. . . We want to strengthen and encourage those women of heroic spirit who have aroused themselves to switch from a sheitl to a tichel. We bless them from the depths of our hearts that they should have good children, long life, abundant livelihood, good health and everything good."

HaGaon Rebbe Shmuel HaLevi Vosner Shlita  
HaGaon Rebbe Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz Shlita  
HaGaon Rebbe Noson Qeshetetner Shlita  
The Rebbe from Vishnitz Shlita  
HaGaon Rebbe Nissim Karelitz Shlita

2. ". . . I bear testimony that the opinion and desire of my illustrious father HaRav HaGaon Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ztz"l was that the proper head covering for a Jewish woman is a tichel. I also witnessed the aggravation caused to my father by the sheitl becoming popular amongst even those faithful to Hashem, may G-d have mercy.

Thus I too participate in strengthening and encouraging those women of heroic spirit who have aroused themselves to switch from a sheitl to a tichel. I bless them with Torah blessings from the depths of my heart with good children, long life, livelihood, good health, and everything good."

HaGaon Rebbe Shmuel Auerbach Shlita

3. "A woman who asks "What is preferable; a tichel or a sheitl?" When her husband is not against, we answer that a tichel is preferable. This is due to the opposing views as to whether or not a woman who wears a sheitl fulfills the requirement to cover her hair. All agree that a tichel is okay.

In his words: "A tichel is glatt" (good according to everyone). Today's sheitlach are worse than those of the past, particularly the long ones, the unkempt ones, and those that spread out to the sides - they are not to be worn, and this has already been publicized."

From the Gaon Rav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv Shlita, excerpted from a letter from his faithful student Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp Shlita

4. "The vast majority of today's sheitlach are not allowed according to the Poskim, since sheitlach which look like natural hair cause men to have sinful thoughts. Since these thoughts are worse than the sin itself, there's no room for debate amongst the Poskim. Surely the Rabbonim of this generation should forbid them. A woman who is careful to wear a tichel adds kedushah - and everyone agrees that this is preferable."

HaGaon Rebbe Chaim Kanievsky Shlita

5. "Regarding a sheitl, it is known that those who came from the Sefardic countries were not at all accustomed to this. They covered their heads with a tichel or a hat. Wearing a sheitl was a new style coming from the European countries. It is not looked favorably upon by the Rabbonim."

HaGaon Rebbe Yehuda Tzedaka ztz"l in a letter in "Ohr Torah" Tishrei 5752

6. "Wearing a tichel and not a sheitl in public is a true and appropriate level of modesty for a woman, particularly in the non-tznius immoral generation of our days due to our many sins."

HaGaon A.Y.L. Shteinman Shlita

7. "Due to our many sins it has become common in our generation for married women to wear sheitlach that very closely resemble hair in ways that our former leaders never imagined. These women appear as if their hair is uncovered, G-d forbid. Our holy Torah forbids this. Even places that customarily permitted sheitlach, never allowed such sheitlach that imitate a low lifestyle, G-d forbid, where one cannot distinguish between married and single women. And one sin drags along another sin with it, and in such cases there is absolutely no heter ..."

HaGaon Binyomin Yehoshua Zilber Bnai Brak

HaGaon Yochanon ben HaGaon Morenu HoRav Moshe Sofer Av Beis Din Erlay

HaGaon Yitzchok Tzvi ben Reb Sh. Y. Brenfeld Av Beis Din Chug Chasam Sofer

HaGaon Yisroel Alter The Gerrer Rebbe

HaGaon HaKodosh Moshe Mordechai Biderman The Leiver Rebbe

HaGaon Nossen Geshtetner Av Beis Din and Rosh Measifa Ponim Meiros Bnai Brak

HaGaon Yoel Adler Av Beis Din Torda

HaGaon Yechiel Yehoshua the son of the Biala Rebbe ztz"l

HaGaon Yitzchok Shlomo Unger Av Beis Din Chug Chasam Sofer

HaGaon HaKodosh Moshe Yehoshua the son of the Vishnitzer Rebbe ztz"l

HaGaon HaKodosh Nachman Kahana the Sflaka Rebbe

HaGaon Shmuel HaLevi Vosner Av Beis Din Zichron Meir Bnai Brak

*For a merit for a Refuah Shleima for Chalka bas Gitla Pasha and all who need one*