



Ask The Rabbi...

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This edition contains: 1. A Modest Question about Sheitles

Sheli Berger <berger@sleepy.softconn.co.za> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I understand the reason for married women covering their hair is modesty, yet today a lot of the sheitles (wigs) woman wear are nicer than their real hair. I think the wearing of make-up can be viewed in the same manner. It improves the person's appearance — doesn't this contradict the laws of modesty?

Dear Sheli Berger,

The Halachot of *Tzniut* — modesty — can be divided into two categories: **relative** and **absolute**.

The Halachot of *Tzniut* which are **absolute** are the minimal Torah standard. For example, the Talmud states that it is immodest for a man to listen to a woman sing. Similarly, a married woman should cover her hair, and all women should cover the thigh and upper arm. This means covering the elbow and knee — even when sitting.

The other aspect of *Tzniut* is the **relative** aspect, which changes based on societal standards. For example, in a place where the accepted style is to wear skirts down to the ankles — as was the style at the turn of the century — a mid-calf skirt would violate the laws of *Tzniut*.

This relative aspect of *Tzniut* applies only when the societal standard is **more** demanding than the Torah's minimal standard, like in the case of the long skirts. But if, for instance, mini-skirts are in vogue, the Torah standard would nevertheless require a woman to cover her knees.

What about wigs? Actually, there are *Poskim* who forbid wigs. Most people today however follow the opinion that wigs do indeed fulfill the Torah's requirement for a married woman to cover her hair. After all, her hair is covered, and if her wig is in keeping with the societal standards of modesty, then it is OK for her to wear it.

Certainly one reason for modesty is in order not to act in a way that is suggestive or alluring. But **any** behavior

which stands out, as if to say "Look at me" is a lack of modesty. For instance, if mid-calf skirts are in style, someone who wears a floor length skirt, thinking she's being "more" modest, might actually be doing the opposite. By being different from everyone else, she actually calls attention to herself! Perhaps she wants to be noted for her pious behavior, but the result is a lack of *Tzniut*.

Tzniut is far more than a dress code. A person's attitude towards *Tzniut* reflects directly on his entire outlook, attitude, and approach to life. Is he interested in externals and what others think of him; or is he striving on an internal level, wondering what G-d thinks of him? If a person's main concern is to do what's right in G-d's eyes, he won't look at life as though it's one big fashion show, and he won't be crushed if he's not listed as one of *People Magazine's* "ten best dressed."

If a person chooses a wig called "Fantasma" or "Black Magic" this will be easily discernible in her general appearance and the way she carries herself. The cut, color and the way the wig is worn project an image. A modest style projects modesty; a flashy one, flash.

That having been said, it should be noted that *Tzniut* doesn't require a person to look like "Charlie Brown on Halloween." When the Talmudic Sage Abba Chilkiya would return to the city, his wife used to come out to greet him wearing nice clothes and jewelry. Her intentions were to look attractive for her husband. A person can, and should, always try to look presentable. The main thing is to keep in mind the verse "...what is it that Hashem asks of you, but to act justly, love kindness and to walk with *Tzniut* with Hashem your G-d."

Sources:

- Tractate *Berachot* 24a.
- *Mishna Berura* 75.
- *Micah* 6:8.

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