

*Thursday 9:00 a.m. / 5:00 p.m.*

# **BEYOND THE SNOOD, THE SCARF, AND THE WIG: WOMEN'S HEAD COVERING IN JEWISH LAW**

Empire Ballroom ☞ Mrs. Rivkah Slonim

To truly understand the do's and don't's of anything in Jewish life, we need to study primary texts and see the greater picture. This text based workshop allows us to encounter the underpinnings and nuances of the laws surrounding a married woman's head covering.



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## 1. **TALMUD, KETUBOT 72A**

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*Mishnah: These are to be divorced without receiving their ketubah: a wife who transgresses Dat Moshe or [one who transgresses] Dat Yehudit. And what is [regarded as a wife's transgression against] Dat Moshe? Feeding her husband with untithed food, having intercourse with him during the period of her menstruation, not setting apart her dough offering, or making vows and not fulfilling them. And what [is deemed to be a wife's transgression against] Dat Yehudit? Going out with uncovered head, spinning in the street or conversing with every man. Abba Saul said: [such transgressions include] also that of a wife who curses her husband's parents in his presence. R. Tarfon said: also one who is a loud voiced woman. And who is regarded a loud voiced woman? A woman whose voice can be heard by her neighbors when she speaks inside her house.*

## 2. **RAMBAM, ISHUT 24:12**

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*What is Dat Yehudit? It is the modesty customary among Jewish women.*

## 3. **TALMUD, KETUBOT 72A**

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*Mishnah: what is Dat Yehudit? it means a woman going out with her hair uncovered.*

*Talmud: Is this not mandated by the Torah? as is written, "The Kohen shall uncover the woman's hair" (Num. 5:18), and the school of R. Yishmael comments, "This is a warning to Jewish women no to go out with hair uncovered."*

*Rather, from the Torah's standpoint, a basket suffices as head covering, but for Dat Yehudit, that is insufficient.*

4. **SHILTEI GIBORIM ON RIF, AD LOC**

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*Unless she has at least a small basket on her head, the Torah forbids [her going out]: "the Kohen shall uncover the woman's hair"*

5. **RAMBAM, ISUREI BIAH 21:17**

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*Jewish women should not walk in the marketplace with uncovered hair.*

6. **RAMBAM, ISHUT 24:11**

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*The following are the actions for which a woman is considered to have "violated the faith of Moses":*

- a) going out to the marketplace with her hair uncovered;*
- b) taking vows or oaths that she does not keep;*
- c) engaging in sexual relations [with her husband] while in the niddah state;*
- d) failing to separate challah or feeding her husband food that is forbidden to eat - needless to say, this applies to forbidden crawling animals and animals that were not ritually slaughtered; it applies even to produce that was not tithed.*

*How can the latter [two] matters be known? For example, she said: "So and so, the priest, [separated tithes] from this produce for me," "So and so separated challah [from this dough]," "So and so, the Sage, said this stain does not render me a niddah" - and after eating the food or engaging in sexual relations with her, the husband asked the person whose name was mentioned and he denied the occurrence of the incident. Another example: a woman's [conduct caused] it to be established in her neighborhood that she was in the*



niddah state, but she told her husband that she was ritually pure. He engaged in relations with her [and afterwards discovered the truth].

**7. SHULCHAN ARUCH, EVEN HA-EZER 21:1**

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*It is forbidden to gaze upon a woman's beauty... or to stare at women washing clothes... One may not hear them sing or see their hair.*

**8. IBID., 21:2**

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*Jewish women may not go with uncovered head in the marketplace.*

**9. IBID., 115:4:**

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*These are the acts that violate dat yehudit: going into the marketplace, an open thoroughfare or a crowded square bareheaded, without a scarf such as all other women wear, even if her hair is covered by a kerchief.*

**10. SHULCHAN ARUCH HARAV, ORACH CHAIM 75:**

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*[Exposed] hair that a woman customarily covers is considered as nakedness because it arouses erotic thoughts, and and it is forbidden to recite the Shema and Shemoneh Esreh in view of it, as was explained. [This applies] even with regard to one's wife.*

*By contrast, it is permitted to recite the Shema in view of unmarried women who customarily go about with their hair uncovered, or the hair of women that extends outside their snood as is the practice in certain countries. Since*



one is habituated to such exposure, it will not arouse erotic thoughts.

it is permitted to recite [the Shema] in view of [a woman wearing] a wig, even if she is accustomed to cover it. Moreover, it is permitted to uncover [the wig]. [Wearing a wig] is not included in the category of “[going] out with her head uncovered,” which is forbidden for a married woman according to Scriptural Law.

## **HAIR COVERING FOR UNMARRIED WOMEN**

### **11. SHULCHAN ARUCH, EVEN HAEZER 21:2**

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*Jewish women may not go with uncovered head in the marketplace, whether married or not.*

### **12. BAYIT CHADASH ON TUR, AD LOC**

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*This is based on a statement by the school of r. Yishmael: “Jewish women are warned not to go out with hair uncovered.” As the warning is addressed to “Jewish women” and not “married” ones, it presumably applies to all, married or not.*

*Ravia, however, wrote, “One need not be wary regarding a virgin who customarily exposes her hair, for it will not lead to erotic thought.” Neither should we think that a virgin is forbidden to go out bareheaded into the marketplace for we learned in Ketubot: “If witnesses saw her go out in a hinuma with her hair uncovered, her Ketubah is 200.” This presumably applies even if she went via the marketplace, and such has been the custom. Thus the “unmarried woman” referred to by the Shulhan Arukh must not be a virgin, virgins being exempted from the prohibition.*

**13. BET SHEMUEL, AD LOC**

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*This refers to a widow or divorcee, but a virgin may do so.*

**14. TALMUD YERUSHALMI, KETUBOT 2:1**

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*“If witnesses saw her go out in a hinuma with her hair uncovered, her Ketubah is 200.” Might not she have had a first husband who died immediately following the wedding ceremony? It must be that even such a woman may not go out without her hair uncovered.”*

**15. IGROT MOSHE, EVEN HA-EZER VOL. 1, 57**

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*I was asked regarding the permissibility of a widow who must support her children, leaving her hair uncovered at work, if she cannot otherwise find a satisfactory position. Clearly, the prohibition applying to the widow is only because of Day Yehudit, as the Torah mentions only the wife. We may therefore be lenient. Where there is a loss involved, we do not find the custom practiced.*

**HAIR COVERING AT HOME**

**16. TALMUD, KETUBOT 72B**

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*R. Yossi said in the name of R. Yohanan, “Wearing a basket does not amount to leaving the hair uncovered.” R. Zerah pondered this: “Where is the woman in question? If in the marketplace, Dat Yehudit precludes it. If in her own courtyard, you have left none of Avraham’s daughters married to their husbands” Abaye said, “She is in an alleyway between courtyards.”*

**17. TOSAFOT, AD LOC**

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*In her courtyard, even without a basket on her head she does not violate the prohibition against exposing her hair.*

**18. TALMUD, YOMA 47A**

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*The rabbis learned: Kimhit had seven sons and all served as high priests. The sages asked her how she merited this, and she answered, "The walls of my house have never seen the hairs of my head." They said to her, "Many have done so without benefitting."*

**19. DARKEI MOSHE, EVEN HAEZER 115, LETTER 4**

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*Only in the marketplace is going bareheaded forbidden. Yet it is considered modest for a woman never to reveal her hair even at home, as we find regarding Kimhit, who was rewarded for this.*

**20. BAYYIT CHADASH, AD LOC**

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*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.*

**21. 21. CHTAM SOFER, ORACH CHAIM 36**

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*Since the Poskim were divided, and the strict view became customary, it is considered outright law, having been adopted long ago by our ancestors throughout the Jewish diaspora... As a result, a wife requires a kerchief even*



in her own room, and a hat, as well, in a marketplace or public square.

**22. TZEMACH TZEDEK, EVEN HOEZER, 139, Y.D. 93:10**

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*“Hair protruding beyond the kerchief is Halachikly identical with erva, nakedness.... Regarding the ‘custom’ to do so, it is written minhag is comprised of the same letters at Gehinnom....*

**23. IGROT MOSHE, EVEN HOEZER VOL 1, 58**

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*We see that Hattam Sofer, because of Dat Yehudit, required women to wear kerchiefs even in their own room, and he quoted Bah. Yet Bah referred to a “courtyard,” an open area one normally enters without permission, where, as he mentions, “members of her household” can be found. Hattam Sofer’s extending this to “her room” is something we have not encountered. Quite the contrary, all later authorities seem to take the lenient view.*

*Coming from so great a scholar as Hattam Sofer, the strict practice of covering the hair at home is a worthy one to follow, especially as it achieves the modesty of Kimhit, mentioned by Darkei Moshe. Even so, it is clear that those who wish to be lenient should not be considered to violate Dat Yehudit, G-d forbid. Even a pious Torah scholar should not avoid marrying such a woman, if she is herself G-d-fearing scrupulously observant, and of good character.*

## **CONTROVERSY REGARDING WIGS**

### **24. SILTEI GIBORIM ON RIF, SHABBAT 375**

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Mishnah: A woman may go out ... to her courtyard in a wig. *These words seem fitting support for those wives who leave their homes in natural wigs rather than other head-coverings. We know married women are being referred to, because the Mishnah's point in explicitly allowing wigs on the Sabbath, is to enable wives to be attractive to their husbands.*

*The principle that the sight of a woman's hair constitutes an erotic stimulus applies only to the hair visibly connected to her scalp, but not to natural wigs. Neither does use of such wigs constitute leaving the hair uncovered.*

*It seems to make no difference whether the wig is from 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. Although the wig is an adornment creating the impression of uncovered hair, this poses no problem.*

### **25. ARTZEI ARATZIM EVEN HOEZER 21:2**

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*With this, sheltie Giborim made a grave error...The Mishnah in Shabbat is no proof, for it might be referring to unmarried women who customarily go bareheaded. It seems clear to me that a married woman is forbidden to adorn herself with a wig, and those who permit it are destined to give account.*

**26. PRI MEGADIM, ORACH CHAIM 75,  
ESHEL AVRAHAM 6**

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*In those countries where women go out in uncovered wigs, they may rely upon the lenient view.*

**27. IGROT MOSHE, EVEN HOEZER VOL 2, 12**

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*Although some sages forbid the use of wigs, most allow it, including our chief halakhic authorities. Since we find no prohibition in the Talmud, we cannot learn from other sources that forbid it because of Mar'it Ayin, possible suspicion on the part of others.*

*One can usually discern that a woman is wearing a wig, and even if a man cannot tell, in the vast majority of cases a woman can. Those few instances in which women cannot tell provide the rabbis with insufficient cause to forbid it. Another main reason not to apply Mar'it Ayin: Everyone knows that a woman may be wearing a wig, and will assume her to be reputable.*

*You cannot Halachikally prevent your esteemed Rebbetzin from wearing a wig. Even if you wish to strict, you may not force your own strictures upon her, for this is exclusively her realm. She is behaving lawfully, following the majority view, the one that seems right, and you cannot be strict with her even if she does not cover the wig at all.*

**28. KAF HACHAIM, ORACH CHAIM 75:19**

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*The consensus among Aharonim is to allow wigs, as did Rema.*



**29. YASKIL AVDI PART 7, EVEN HOEZER 16**

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*Be'er Sheva who forbade it did not sufficiently fathom the rationale and principle behind the matter. The rabbis hold that man is tempted only by things attached directly to the body of a woman herself, for those things have life. Once something is separated from her, it ceases to be forbidden, for it becomes like a corpse, which poses no temptation.*

*Our eyes see that such was the custom of the wives of great rabbis and Haddidic figures and no one protested.*

**30. SDEI CHEMED, ASEFET DINIM 4:3**

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*It has been clearly proven that the wig should not be permitted to married women ... and this in accordance with the law. For us in the diaspora, all the exiles we have experienced until today in France, Spain, Portugal, etc., have been due to the envy aroused against us by the lack of a discernible difference between Jew and nobleman. Even if there is no outright prohibition, it is still improper for married Jewish women to wear wigs in our region. It is immodest, and not for the sake of such women were we redeemed from Egypt.*

*Here, where the custom has not spread and the strict view has taken hold, it is obviously forbidden to breach it. Our women do not wear wigs, and those few women from cities in which the custom is breached are an inconsequential minority. Heaven forbid that we should learn from their corruption.*

**31. YABIA OMER VOL 5, EVEN HOEZER 5**

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*We need not be so impressed by wives of rabbis and Hasidic leaders wearing wigs, for it runs counter to our sages' will. The law chiefly follows the majority of Aharonim who*

*forbid the use of wigs, and it is a great mitzvah to publicize the prohibition before the masses. This refers particularly to those Sephardic women who from time immemorial have treated it as forbidden, and only now have begun to learn from those women who treat our sages' will lightly.*

*The Poskim vigorously prohibited a woman to leave her home without a hat or scarf that covers the entire head. Any woman who undertakes to preserve and practice our sages' rulings, will reap all the Torah's blessings, and will merit holy offspring, children who wax great in Torah and the pristine fear of G-d.*

### **MINIMUM HAIR COVERAGE**

#### **32. RASHBO, BERACHOT 24A**

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*Ra'avad explains that the Talmudic pronouncement "The sight of an exposed tefah (hand-breath) is an erotic stimulus," refers specifically to the modest parts of the woman's body. Yet her face, feet and "the hair outside her tresses that cannot be covered," need not be worried about.*

#### **33. MAGEN AVRAHAM, ORACH CHAIM 75:2**

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*The Zohar insisted quite strictly that none of a woman's hair be visible, and such is the appropriate custom.*

#### **34. CHESAM SOFER, ORACH CHAIM 36**

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*In our region, non-Jewish women do not cover their hair, but Jewish women scrupulously heeding the words of the Zohar, are quite cautious on this point. Were contemporary authorities to gather for a vote, they might declare, in accordance with the Talmud, that the hair outside the tresses*

need not be covered. Nonetheless, since the practice in the Zohar has caught on, it supplants the law, becoming established in its stead. It is thus forbidden outright to expose this hair, and whoever desired G-d's blessing will be careful in this regard.

### 35. IGROS MOSHE EVEN HAEZER VOL 1, 58

The Talmud expresses the actual prohibition by saying, "Jewish women are warned not to go out with hair unkempt." At issue is the hair's being unkempt, not merely uncovered. As these few disheveled strands cannot render all her hair 'unkempt,' their exposure poses no problem.

Obviously, the prohibition's scope must be limited by the extent to which the hair of the suspected adulteress has to be exposed... A small exposure surely did not suffice. Rather, the Kohen uncovered a section of her hair much larger than a tefah. For a woman to violate the prohibition, she must expose an equal amount.

One can derive that a woman's entire head to be among that covered parts of the body, yes the strands outside her tresses will still be exempt, since regarding those parts, up to a tefah may be seen unintentionally. We need not be stricter regarding the hair than the rest of her body, since the former derives its laws from the latter. As for the possibility that others will have intentionally, the same liability exists regarding the face and hands, yet these areas need not be covered...Therefore, even those who differ with Rashba might rule that no prohibition applies to less than a tefah.

Coming from so great a scholar as Hattam Sofer, the stricter approach to the hair-covering is a worthy one to adopt. Even so, it is clear that those who wish to be lenient should not be considered to violate Dat Yehudit, G-d for-



bid. Even a Torah scholar should not avoid marrying such a woman if she is G-d-fearing and has good attributes. Yet only about two fingers worth on either side may be exposed. Since the face is approximately two tefachim wide, the two exposures will combine for slightly less than a square tefah. More than that is forbidden.

**36. RIVKA SLONIM IN HIDE AND SEEK: JEWISH WOMEN AND HAIR COVERING (PP. 164-177)**

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*In her definitive study of Orthodoxy in America between the years of 1880 and 1945, Jenna Weissman Joselit notes:*

*What animated and sustained that experience was not a lasting preoccupation with Jewish law (Halachah) 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 [p. 20].... 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." The absence of distinctive dress was a hallmark of that era. [p. 21]*

*In the same book, in her chapter on women, "The Jewish Priestess and Ritual: The Sacred Life of American Orthodox Women," the issue of hair covering for the married woman, is not even mentioned.*

*It was against this backdrop that the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, assumed the mantle of leadership in 1950. By the*

*time of the Second World War, the Lubavitch presence in America was relatively small and depleted, like so many other Chassidic groups. Since there were hardly any young women within the Lubavitch movement in those days, many of the young Chassidim married women from "American" Orthodox homes where the tenets of hair covering were honored more in breach than in observance. Even the young women who came with their Chassidic families from Russia were not all committed to this observance, which had declined under the Communist regime.*

*Through the Rebbe's own words – his correspondences and public addresses – one can trace his systematic campaign to promote and restore the mitzvah of hair covering as de rigueur for observant, married women. It is important to remember that the Rebbe was not the spiritual leader of a select group alone, namely, those that considered themselves Lubavitcher Chassidim. From the published volumes of his correspondence, one can see that from the earliest days of his leadership, the Rebbe's influence extended over the widest cross-section of world Jewry.*

*During this early period, he sought to establish that hair covering was Jewish law and not an obscure custom that belonged to another age. The Rebbe asserted that Jewish law demanded that all – and not just part – of a married woman's hair be covered. He wanted to supplant the widespread aversion to appearing different and "too Jewish" with a strong sense of identity and pride; still, he was sensitive to a woman's concern with her appearance. For this reason, the Rebbe advocated the wearing of wigs as opposed to scarves, which he recognized as an unattractive, even untenable, option for most Jewish young women in America. The Rebbe worried that most women, even the more pious, would not wear scarves consistently and in a*

manner that covered all of their hair. It appears that even then, the Rebbe was concerned for the eventual swell of observant women, whose professional and social involvements would preclude covering hair with scarves or hats. Without the option of a wig, many women would not consider hair covering. The Rebbe's encouragement of the wig is an early illustration of how he would characteristically channel the latest modern-day advancements for the purpose of Torah and mitzvahs.

At first, the Rebbe's stance was not popular. Many women simply did not want to cover their hair while others found the notion of a wig utterly foreign and associated it with the most homely of appearances. 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 wearing one as the norm in most Orthodox circles.

An early example of the Rebbe's approach is seen in the following excerpts from a public address he gave, better known as a farbrengen, on Rosh Chodesh Elul 1954:

*Wearing a wig has a beneficial impact on children and grandchildren, livelihood and health, as the Zohar states...*

*...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 transpir-*



ing in others; we are to do that which G-d commanded us to do.

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.

When a Jewish woman walks in the street without a hair covering, there is not a discernible difference between her and others. However, when she wears a wig, one can tell that here is a Jewish religious woman.

It is not necessary to go in the streets loudly proclaiming, "I am religious"—but... of whom is one embarrassed? One's friend? Were they to [point to her] and say that this is a religious Jew—what is the shame in this matter?

Does such conduct require much self-sacrifice? If, heaven forbid, there is a lack of food to eat, the children are hungry, and it is necessary to keep Shabbat in one's labor and business—this requires great self-sacrifice. And still, without a doubt, Shabbat is kept...

...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 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. This is not so with a kerchief which can easily be removed...

...In the past, the custom was to completely cut off or shave the hair [and cover it with a kerchief]. Later on, the wearing of wigs became widespread custom—especially today, when one can buy wigs in many colors, which may look even nicer than one's own hair.

*Let the woman ponder this matter. It doesn't take an hour or even a half hour of contemplation. Why doesn't she really want to wear a 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."*

*Clearly, the Rebbe wished to inspire women to wear wigs and to stand firm in this observance in the face of social pressures. A more careful reading, however, uncovers additional nuances worthy of mention. First is the Rebbe's attentiveness to how profoundly a woman's identity is linked up with her appearance. He understood how critical a factor this was in a woman's decision regarding hair covering. The Rebbe's farbrengens were serious affairs, in which he discussed, for many hours, facets of Torah and shared profound insights. Attending the aforementioned gathering were hundreds of men and very few women, yet the Rebbe did not seek to obfuscate this important issue in halachic or philosophic polemic.*

*The Rebbe went so far as to state that wigs might even be more attractive than one's own hair. At the time, it was meant to encourage and educate women who were of the opinion that all wigs were aesthetically lacking. In comparison to what women might have worn in earlier generations, the new wigs, the Rebbe said, were attractive.*

Today, when the highly sophisticated, proliferating wig industry offers truly beautiful options in synthetic and human hair alike, it is instructive that the Rebbe had no objection at all to wigs that enhanced a woman's appearance; on the contrary, he encouraged women to take advantage of their availability. Even today, there lingers in many minds the erroneous notion that hair covering is meant to detract from a married woman's attractiveness (which leads to the ubiquitous question as to why covering one's hair with an attractive wig is helpful). The Rebbe's words shed light on the appropriate approach to this mitzvah.

The Rebbe received a legendarily heavy volume of mail every day, among which were letters from women and men regarding their apprehensions about this observance. In other cases, the Rebbe raised the issue himself. Either way, his words on the subject were filled with a sense of import and urgency as seen in the sample below:

Because your wife has resolved to wear a wig, and to do so gladly, and will not be bothered by those who may scoff at her observance, her merit will be great, specifically as she is of the first in her neighborhood to return to this custom of modest Jewish women and 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 G-d grant you success.*

*As was his way, the Rebbe urged those who were committed to the observance of this practice to likewise encourage their peers: "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 nachas from children. And G-d should help that you report good tidings in this respect to me."*

*From the following letter, it is evident that resistance to hair covering took many forms. For this correspondent, the problem is less pragmatic and more theological in nature. Interestingly, the Rebbe did not respond to her challenge by providing philosophical or mystical reasons for the mitzvah. For many women (and men), no reason will ever be compelling enough. Rather, the Rebbe stressed that observance of all mitzvot (including hair covering) is first and foremost predicated on one's subservience to G-d's will:*

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

*It is self-understood and plain that man's belief in G-d forces him to intellectually accept G-d'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 G-d, 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, G-d forbid, 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.

In 1957, at a farbrengen held on the holiday of Shavuot, the Rebbe took this discussion in a new direction:

One of the most essential aspects of a Jewish woman's comportment that has a profound effect on her sons and daughters is her modesty... "The entire glory of the king's daughter is within" (Psalms 45:14). Thus, we find in the Talmud (Yoma 47a) concerning the exceptional modesty of Kimchit: Kimchit had seven sons, all of whom merited to serve as 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."

One should not think: Must I act with such a tremendous degree of modesty that my children will become High Priests? It is enough for me if my children grow up to be only regular priests. Does it not say that all Jews are holy!

But if a woman is granted the ability to train her children to become High Priests (i.e., that they achieve the maximum of their spiritual potential), it indicates that this is her responsibility.

*The Rebbe underscored the profound effect of a woman's modesty upon her children—in effect, he spoke directly to the maternal instinct; even a woman who was adamantly opposed to this practice might give it new consideration in light of the great spiritual benefits to her children.*

*While the Rebbe's position was seen as stringent by many, there were those who considered his stance lenient. There are communities where 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.*

*The Rebbe received queries from women who came from families or communities with long-standing traditions of completely covering hair with tight kerchiefs and/or wearing a double covering (i.e., a hat over a wig). In each case, the Rebbe patiently explained his position while encouraging them to continue in their family or community custom. In the letter below, we can see the twin tensions at work in the Rebbe's response:*

*I have already stated my opinion that in present times, covering one's hair with a kerchief will not endure [and eventually the person will cease covering her hair]. The reason for this is that when wearing a kerchief, the woman is constantly put to the test—whether to cover all her hair or just part of it, etc., so that she not be embarrassed by those who scoff at her (although quite often this feeling may merely be a figment of imagination).*

*This is not at all the case with a wig; it is impossible to remove the wig [easily].... 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.

In 1960, the Rebbe replied to a woman who wrote to him, concerning her difficulties in covering her hair with a wig while the other women in her community did not. In his response, the Rebbe pointed out that the homogeneity of the American landscape was giving way to a new appreciation of, and pride in, diverse religions and ethnic cultures. Aside from his message concerning the importance of "fear of heaven," he urged her to take heart from shifting societal winds:

In response to your letter where you write about a wig—that in the religious community where you now live this is not the custom. Consequently, you are embarrassed that they may laugh at you if you wear a wig:

We readily observe that wearing a hat or even a kerchief leaves part of the hair uncovered, at least for a short while, causing one to transgress a major prohibition.... The importance of having one's hair covered at all times is also understood from the reward that results from fulfilling this command in the manner commanded. In the words of the holy Zohar, it causes us to be "blessed with all blessings, blessings of above and blessings of below, with wealth, with children and grandchildren."

As regards to your writing that they may laugh at you and you will be embarrassed: Recently, even American youth have begun to honor and respect specifically those who stand firm in their faith. They do not feel embarrassed by those who scoff at them and their world

headache:  
Cut hair  
Short.  
Yetzer  
Havah

*outlook. To the contrary, they respond with scorn and derision to those who simply follow the majority without having any principles of their own.*

*Surely you are aware that the entire four-part Code of Jewish Law opens with the statement that one should not be embarrassed by those people who scoff at one's service of G-d. Moreover—and this, too, is quite simple and understandable: "G-d fills heaven and earth" and man finds himself in His presence in all places and at all times. This is not so with regard to people; even those who live in close proximity are not always nearby. How can one not be embarrassed, Heaven forbid, before G-d, and be embarrassed by mere mortals?!*

*Another way in which the Rebbe championed this cause was in conversations with brides and grooms, their parents, and others who would come to him for private audiences. According to numerous accounts, the Rebbe urged young couples to make buying a wig a high priority in pre-wedding planning. The Rebbe made a point of reminding the bride to buy the most beautiful wig she could find and to some, he specifically stressed the need for two, so that if one were being washed, the other would be available. In some cases, the Rebbe even made the groom responsible for this purchase. The Rebbe himself offered numerous couples financial assistance for wig-buying, and on at least two occasions, he gave an outright gift of the entire cost of the wig to individual women.*

*During the first decade of his leadership (1950–60), the Rebbe served as the officiating rabbi at numerous weddings. Among the conditions he set for officiating was a commitment by the bride that she wear a wig after marriage. It was a great honor to have the Rebbe lead the ceremony, and*

*from such an honor, many young women found the inspiration to start wearing wigs.*

*It is hair covering as a segulah, a source of blessing, that was the hallmark of the Rebbe's approach. In each of the aforementioned examples, and in hundreds of instances not cited, the Rebbe underscored the unique way in which this particular mitzvah serves as a conduit for bringing blessing to one's home and family, specifically the blessings of children and prosperity. The Rebbe never tired of quoting the words of the Zohar; it was, after all, his life's mission to bring blessings from below (material) and blessings from above (spiritual) into the lives of Jews. May we be so blessed always.*