

WIGS, MAKEUP, AND MODESTY

by Rabbi Ephraim D. Becker, Ph.D.

Question: *My understanding is that the reason for women covering their hair is modesty. So why are wigs permitted? I know a religious woman who got married recently and now wears a wig that is exactly like her natural hair. I am sure that most people don't realize that her hair is covered. How can that be permitted? Also does modesty permit a woman to put make-up on her face and wear jewelry? If so, why?*

Answer: As a (very talented) wig stylist, my wife gets asked this question all the time. She usually responds that regardless of how realistic a wig may appear, it certainly does not feel natural. A woman who wears a wig feels different, and this serves as a reminder to her that her interactions should be consistent with her status as a married woman. There is a subtle message in a wig-wearing-woman's appearance that conveys that she is committed to a relationship, and certain things are off limits to everybody, save her own husband. That goes a long way in putting all her other relationships in context and is a safeguard against improper behavior. Additionally, most of us are accustomed to the "wig look", and can tell if it's a hairpiece or actual hair.

Modesty, contrary to what you might think, is not about making one's self unappealing; rather it is about not calling attention to oneself. While there is nothing wrong with appearing presentable, there is something wrong dressing in a way that is provocative or alluring. While there are certain rules and guidelines, it is certainly possible to conform to the strict letter of the law while flaunting the spirit of the law. Modesty is as much about attitude and conduct as it is about regulations. Clothing that does not breach the rules of modesty, but is suggestive or evocative, definitely infringes on the concept of modesty. So, if indeed, a wig brings undue attention to a woman, it is no different from any other article of clothing that attracts interest, and while it technically may not violate anything, it contravenes the concept of modesty. However, if the wig merely enables the woman to maintain her appearance, it is perfectly acceptable (according to most opinions). By the way, if you know of anyone looking for a nice wig, send them our way!

All the Best,
Shlomo Soroka