

PUTTING ON A HAT

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

In the past it was almost universally accepted that a hat was worn on important occasions to indicate respectability. Since a person should be dressed for prayer in a dignified manner, the halachah required one to wear a hat for tefillah (Mishnah Berurah 91,12). This halachah is extended to reciting Birkas Hamazon, Kiddush and other important tefillos as well (Mishnah Berurah 183,11).

During the twentieth century, society shed many previously accepted traditions, and today wearing hats is no longer universally accepted. Nonetheless, many Jews still maintain the custom to wear a hat for tefillah, when their heads are not covered with a tallis. Someone who generally wears a hat for tefillah should not pray without it, unless he will not be able to pray with a minyan at a later time (Igros Moshe 3,68, and Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach as cited in Halichos Shlomo 2,15).

Some halachic authorities maintain that since wearing a hat is no longer common practice, one isn't required to wear one for tefillah. In places where it isn't customary to wear a hat, men should instead have a special kippah for tefillah that covers the greater part of one's crown. Each person should make a special effort to honor Hashem with his garments as much as possible (Responsa Tzitz Eliezer 13,13).

Partitioning One's Heart Tefillah is called the service of the heart, and during prayer we elevate our hearts to the highest level possible. One of the ways we do this is by ensuring that "one's heart should not see one's genitals." We accomplish this by making a separation during prayer, between the upper part of one's body and the lower half (Shulchan Aruch 74,1).

A man who wears a belt for prayer has fulfilled the aforementioned obligation. Even if he does not wear a belt, underwear that has elastic or even one's regular pants are sufficient to fulfill this obligation. If a man recited Shemoneh Esrei without a partition, he does not repeat his tefillah (Biur Halachah 74,1).

According to the Shulchan Aruch, women are not obligated to create a partition (Shulchan Aruch 74,4). However, some authorities write that women are also included in this halachah (Bach 74). Therefore, if possible, they should try to have a partition between the upper and lower halves of their body during tefillah (Taz Yoreh De'ah 200,3).

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