

WOMEN AND HEAD COVERINGS II

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

In the previous section, we noted that some authorities obligate men to wear a head covering today, in order to avoid imitating the ways of non-Jews who uncover their heads for religious practices. If in fact it is a religious custom for Christians to remove their head coverings for prayer, seemingly girls should be obligated to cover their heads as well in order to avoid this prohibition. Why is the halachah lenient with respect to unmarried women?

The Chasam Sofer clarifies that while it is the custom of Christian men to uncover their heads as a religious practice, the women do the exact opposite, making sure to keep their heads covered while they are involved with their religious ceremonies. For this reason, a single girl is not obligated to cover her hair for tefillah or any other time (Chasam Sofer, Nedarim 30b).

Today, the practice amongst Christians has changed, and hats are rarely worn. Therefore, going bareheaded may no longer constitute a Torah prohibition for a man, and in extenuating circumstances, (e.g., one will definitely lose his job), one may be lenient. One should consult a rav regarding the application of this halachah (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 4,2).

Praying with a Kippah

In regard to tefillah, a man is obligated to cover his head. In this vein, the Shulchan Aruch writes: "It is forbidden to mention the Name of Hashem while bareheaded. One should not enter a shul with his head uncovered" (Shulchan Aruch 98,3).

As explained in the previous section, halachic authorities have ruled that praying bareheaded is prohibited due to the stringent Christian custom of removing one's hat during prayer. Praying without a head covering is likened to the sacrifice of an evil person, and is considered repulsive to Hashem. Therefore, some authorities say that a man who prays Shemoneh Esrei without a head covering must repeat Shemoneh Esrei, even if it was an oversight (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 4,40,14).

Because it is forbidden to recite Shemoneh Esrei without a head covering, if one's kippah falls off during the recitation, he may stop and pick it up. If his head is already covered with a tallis, but the fallen kippah disturbs his concentration, he is permitted to pick up the kippah. The same halachah applies if one's siddur falls on the floor (Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach as cited in Halichos Shlomo 2[27]).

Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Daniel Travis and **Torah.org**