Do Blondes Still Have More Fun?

Contributed by Rabbi David Samson
Friday, 13 April 2007
Last Updated Friday, 13 April 2007

Question:

I'm about to get married and have a question. I have curly blonde hair which is like a part of my personality. Everyone knows me by my curly blonde hair, which has always been an eye-grabber for an Orthodox Jewish girl like me. Needless to say, my fiancé likes it too. Is there any leniency I can rely on so that I don't have to cover my head after we get married?

Answer:

In order to understand the underlying principles of the law requiring a married woman to cover her hair, we have to first explain the reason for the laws of modesty in general. These laws come, not to detract from physical beauty and natural love, but to turn physical beauty and love into something that has lasting meaning, rather than mere momentary desire. The laws of modesty teach us to place the emphasis on the spiritual aspect of our marriage partners, and as a result, their natural beauty is enhanced.

Marriage should not be seen as the end of the road to love, but rather as its beginning. Therefore it is incumbent upon a married woman to be meticulous about her modesty in order to guard her beauty for her husband, for the sake of deepening the connection between them. This deeper, intimate connection, shared only by themselves, enables them to achieve ever-growing vistas of love. (1)

A Jewish wedding service is consummated by the man stating, "You are sanctified to me by the laws of Moshe and the Jewish People." This means that the wife is exclusively given over to the husband. (2) This chastity is the foundation of a Jewish home. Ignoring the laws of modesty can lead to the destruction of the family. Even seemingly slight infractions of modesty impinge on the holiness of the family unit.

A woman's attractiveness should be extended only to her soul mate, for only with him can her love be manifested in its entirety. When a woman tries to appear attractive in the eyes of other men, this breach of the nuptial bond weakens the love in the home, by blemishing the unique holy bond between husband and wife. It also blemishes the children's education as well. A woman who attempts to be provocative is certainly not consecrating herself to her husband and will never reach the zeniths of love. On the other hand, if she will uphold the tenets of modesty, she will radiate all of her love to its natural place, her consecrated mate.

As far as covering the hair is concerned, this is often a difficult challenge. During her unmarried life, a woman is perfectly free to go about with her hair uncovered. Suddenly, with her wedding, a Jewish woman is called upon to cover her hair. This new image and new self-identity is not always easily accepted, especially in the modern, permissive society we live in, with its focus on esthetic, physical aspects of life.

The Talmud describes how the kohen would unloosen the hair covering of a woman suspected of adultery. (3) From this we learn that women wore head coverings since Biblical days. During the siege of the city of Lachish by Sancherev, the Assyrian King, a fresco engraving was made which shows all of the Jewish women adorned with head coverings. One of

the interesting finds of the archeologist Yigal Yadin at the Nothern Palace of Masada was the skull of a woman with hair and a scarf still covering her head.

The Mishna Berurah states that even in a society where women do not cover their hair, a Jewish woman must be stringent in covering hers. "Know that even if the women of the place walk about the marketplace with their hair uncovered, it s forbidden to do so, because it is like walking with the thigh uncovered, which is always prohibited. Hair must be covered by the law of the Torah, as it says in the verse, "The kohen will uncover the woman's hair." (4) And also, all of the G-d fearing women of Israel have been careful in this from ancient days until today." (5)

Rashi on this Torah verse states that "The kohen undoes the braids of the woman's hair in order to embarrass her. We learn from this that uncovering the hair of a Jewish woman is a disgrace." (6)

It is taught in the Talmud, tractate Ketubot, that if a woman goes with her hair uncovered, her husband is allowed to divorce her without having to pay her dowry money (the Ketubah.) (3)

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that it best for a married woman to strictly adhere to the law of covering her hair. Nonetheless, he rules that she can expose up to a "tefach" which is approximately 64 square centimeters. (7)

According to this, curly blond hair could still see the light of day, approximately the width of two fingers across the front of the head.

Therefore, mazel tov on your wedding! By following these guidelines, you will be blessed with a holy, happy marriage, and holy, G-d fearing children.

Footnotes:

- (1) See "Pininei Halacha," Vol. 2, Pg. 29, by Rabbi Eleazar Melamed.
- (2) Tosephot, Kiddushin 2B.
- (3) Ketubot 72A.
- (4) Numbers, 5:18.
- (5) Mishna Berurah, 75:10.
- (6) Rashi, Numbers, 5:18.
- (7) Igres Moshe, Orach Haim, Vol.4, Response 112, Section 4.