

Little Red Riding Hood

Contributed by Tzvi Fishman
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Question:

According to Jewish Law, what's the problem with a woman wearing red clothing?

Answer:

It could be that if Little Red Riding Hood had been more modest and walked in the woods in less flashy colors, she never would have attracted the attention of the wolf.

The halachah states that a woman should not wear red clothing because this is the practice of the gentiles (Yoreh Deah, 178, see the Beit Yosef and the Rama). The Maharik explains that following a practice of the gentiles doesn't necessarily violate the prohibition, "You shall not walk in their ways," unless it involves idol worship or immodesty. Amongst the gentiles, the color red is associated with immodesty, due to the fact that it is the color of blood, and thus the color of the body's innermost organs and a woman's most intimate parts. In addition red is associated with pride since it draws attention by its very nature. In choosing to wear red attire, a woman is choosing to stand out and boldly attract attention, particularly to the more intimate side of womanhood which is normally hidden and covered (See "P'ninai Halachah," Vol.2, by Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, P23.)

However, there are later Torah authorities who state that since the gentiles don't make a point today of dressing in red more than any other color, there no longer is a prohibition against wearing red.

Nonetheless, the majority of Torah authorities rule that even today it is prohibited for a woman to wear red clothing. This is the case when most of the article of apparel is red, but if only a small part of the article is red, then it is permitted to wear it. Also if the article of clothing is not true red, but a shade that resembles red, like purple, or the color of dark wine, then it is permitted. While there are opinions that allow even red today, it is best to follow the majority and follow the stricter view.