

Shayla: Should Adonaic women wear veils in worship? (1 Corinthians 11:1-16)

Midrash:

First let me show you first what Paul is NOT talking about.

Tsa'iph. Paul is NOT referring to *tsa'iph* (Hebrew; Strong's #6809). We find this term used in Genesis 24:65. In Israeli and other Asiatic cultures, women generally wore a modesty veil in public. In Genesis 24:64-65 we see that for comfort Rebekah removed her veil as she was traveling through the desert. However, as soon as she determined that she was about to meet the man who was to become her husband, she covered herself with a veil, indicating she was a godly and modest woman.

Thus, the idea of shame associated with the woman's hair being exposed came to also be associated with a widow's grief. Because they were grieving and ashamed, widows would wear identifying clothing and also go without a veil in public. In Genesis 38 we read an interesting (and to the western mindset confusing) story about Tamar. Without going into Levirate marriages and their unique laws, the point I'd like to make here is that in order to disguise not only her identity but also her status, Tamar changed her clothing and wore a veil.

- **Genesis 38:13-15 HCSB** Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." (14) So she took off her widow's clothes, veiled her face, covered herself, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the way to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had grown up, she had not been given to him as a wife. (15) When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.

Within the context of history we understand that Judah didn't consider her veil a sign of prostitution. The author is simply saying that because of the veil Judah didn't recognize Tamar. In regards to "covered herself" I believe that that refers back to "took off her widow's clothes." In other words, she got out of her widow clothing, put on her veil, and then put on her street clothes in that order.

- **Genesis 38:19 HCSB** She got up and left, then removed her veil and put her widow's clothes back on.

However, in relation to the question at hand, we must note that in each case of *tsa'iph* it is the face, not the head that is covered. Therefore, Paul was not referring back to the *tsa'iph*.

Macveh/Kalymma. In Exodus 34:33-35 and 2 Corinthians 3:13-18 we are told that Moses uncovered his face while speaking to God and covered it again when he went back to his people. Apparently standing in the presence of God made his face radiate in some manner that the people found unnerving and for the sake of the ministry he covered himself. However, again *macveh* (Hebrew; Strong's #4533) and *kalymma* (Greek; Strong's #2571) speak of covering one's face, rather than one's head and so for our purposes must be set aside as potential sources of enlightenment.

Micpach'ah. In Ezekiel 13:18-21 we find a strange little passage that speaks of occult practices the women of Israel had created whole-cloth out of their own inclinations. Apparently, veils and kerchiefs were granted some type of superstitious quality that would either render a person invulnerable to curses or make them susceptible to curses. These "*micpach'ah*" or kerchiefs were soundly condemned by God.

Therefore, though they are a little more closely related to what we're looking for, since the Apostle seems to be saying that women wearing head coverings in public prayer and prophesy is all right, and since the Spirit never presents contradictory messages, we must assume that Paul is not referring to *micpach'ah*.

Rady'id. This term (Hebrew; Strong's #7289) is found in two places: Song of Songs 5:7 where the Shunamite had hers removed by the night watchmen and in Isaiah 3:23 where God predicts that as punishment the elite, snobbish women of Israel would have theirs

removed by the invaders. The implication in both cases is extreme mortification and in both cases near to complete nakedness is found.

The Shunamite had gotten undressed and hesitated to answer when her Beloved knocked. She then changed her mind, threw on her *rady'id* and went to look for him. When the night watchmen found her wandering the streets with heavy perfume and nothing more than a *rady'id* on they beat her, likely thinking she was a prostitute.

When the Israeli women have their *rady'id* removed it is along with everything else!

- **Isaiah 3:18-24 HCSB** On that day the Lord will strip their finery: ankle bracelets, headbands, crescents, (19) pendants, bracelets, veils, (20) headdresses, ankle jewelry, sashes, perfume bottles, amulets, (21) signet rings, nose rings, (22) festive robes, capes, cloaks, purses, (23) garments, linen clothes, turbans, and veils. (24) Instead of perfume there will be a stench; instead of a belt, a rope; instead of beautifully styled hair, baldness; instead of fine clothes, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding.

Gesenius understands (and I agree) that a *rady'id* is some type of wide, thin female garment or cloak. Since in both instances it is recounted in association with women of high social standing, we must take it to mean some type of finery like a silk kimono or something. So, we may safely eliminate *rady'id* as a potential source of enlightenment.

So far we have eliminated four terms as possibilities:

- *Tsa'iph*: because it covered the face rather than the head.
- *Macveh/Kalymma*: because it covered the face rather than the head.
- *Micpach'ah*: because this was an occultic artifact that was strictly prohibited.
- *Rady'id*: because it seems to describe a cloak rather than simply a head covering.

If the head covering in 1 Corinthians 11 is none of these, what is it then? The closest examples of covering or uncovering the head I can find are in three places.

First, in the book of Numbers we find an example of what is to be done to a woman whose husband suspects of immorality. The cultural prohibition against a woman walking around with her head uncovered had by this time become so powerful that it was actually used in Halakhic law as part of the judgment cum punishment of a woman suspected of unfaithfulness. The tension created in the woman by having the priest let down her hair in public must have been tremendous enough to bring forth signs of guilt!¹

- **Numbers 5:18 HCSB** After the priest has the woman stand before the LORD, he is to let down her hair (*parah ishah rosh*; literally uncover her head) and place in her hands the grain offering for remembrance, which is the grain offering of jealousy. The priest is to hold the bitter water that brings a curse.

Consider the following: (1) it was a public setting; (2) it was within a religious context; (3) it involved public exposure of hair and (4) the act was considered shameful.

We can further solidify this point if we consider Isaiah's prediction of Babylon's demise.

- **Isaiah 47:1-3 HCSB** "Go down and sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter Babylon. Sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter Chaldea! For you will no longer be called pampered and spoiled. (2) Take millstones and grind meal; remove your veil, strip off your skirt, bare your thigh, wade through the streams. (3) Your nakedness will be uncovered, and your shame will be exposed. I will take vengeance; I will spare no one.

Again: (1) Even though it is figurative, it still entails the public exposure of a woman's hair; (2) it is done in a punitive manner; (3) It is deeply shaming. Notice the shame that is associated with the removal of her veil is equated with public nudity!

¹ Numbers 5:12-18

In this case, the Hebrew phrase we see in Isaiah 47:2 is *galah tsammah*. The KJV renders it “uncover thy locks”. The HCSB puts it “remove your veil”. Obviously, though the emphasis is slightly different, the result is the same: one removes one’s veil and uncovers one’s hair.

Another place where we find similar language that is however put in a positive context is found in Song of Songs. Song of Songs 4:1, 3 and 6:7 all have the phrase *b’ad tsammah*. The KJV renders it “within thy locks” and the HCSB has it as “behind your veil”. In this case, the Beloved is making compliments on his Shunamite lover’s beauty. The principle difference? It is within a private context, between a man and his wife in their own bedroom.

Here, not only do we see that the veil is there above and beyond the hair but the woman’s long hair is implied as a substitutionary, private veil and is rendered glorious within this context.

So, now we return to 1 Corinthians 11 but now we are armed with textual and historical evidence to help elucidate what Paul is saying. In the first century most of the very first believers were Jews. In fact many of them were still worshipping in the synagogues until the persecution got so bad they had to split off. All his life, Paul made a habit of starting his ministry in any town in the synagogues. In the synagogues, men and women worshipped separately. They would often be in the same room but separated by a curtain, wall, or veil of some kind. This was done out of a sense of propriety and out of a desire to not be distracted by sexual attractions during worship. Undoubtedly, a lot of poking of husbands with elbows and meaningful glances during the derashot was saved as well!

When the Christians (as they were called after Antioch²) began worshipping outside of the synagogues, the sexes were mingled. It was probably fairly distracting and (to many outsiders and Jewish friends) more than a little shocking. After all, the culture had long had a taboo against women having their heads uncovered while in public worship. The Christians knew that “there is no more male, no more female”³ but they were also to not allow themselves to become occasions of stumbling.⁴

Thus, within the context the women were to wear these “symbols of authority” (vs.10). After all, when v.5 says a woman “dishonors her head” it is not referring to her skull but to the chain of authority (cp. v.3), i.e. her father or husband. To my mind at least this is related to the “defiant act” one sees in Numbers 15:30.

- **Numbers 15:30 HCSB** "But the person who acts defiantly, whether native or foreign resident, blasphemes the LORD. That person is to be cut off from his people.

The word used there is *rum* (Strong’s #7311) which literally means to “lift one’s head high; to uncover one’s head; to take off one’s covering.” That is why Paul brought in the issue of angels in verse 10. Ever since Lucifer “lifted his head” in pride⁵ and fallen angels did not keep their appropriate place but succumbed to sexual perversion⁶ God’s holy angels have nigh on to a phobia about keeping the appropriate chains of command.⁷

The Apostle said that men should not cover (*katakalupto*; Strong’s #2619) their heads. He then contrasts that in verse 13 by asking,

- **1 Corinthians 11:13 HCSB** Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered (*akatakalupos*)?

² Acts 11:26

³ Galatians 3:28

⁴ Romans 14:21

⁵ Isaiah 14:12-15

⁶ Jude 1:6-7 cp Genesis 6:2

⁷ Exodus 34:14; Galatians 1:18; Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; 22:9 cp Acts 10:25; 14:11-18

'Uncovered' (*akatakaluptos*) is the opposite of 'to cover' (*katakalupto*). So 'men uncover, women cover.'

It's at this point that the confusion comes in. When Paul refers to a woman's natural hair covering, he uses an altogether different word:

- [1 Corinthians 11:15 HCSB](#) but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her as a covering (*peribolaion*; Strong's #4018).

Peribolaion means something thrown around (loose items like a veil, a mantle, a vesture). Hair is more like a glorious decoration given to a woman. Now if Paul had meant the naturally occurring hair covering and the headship-type covering to be one and the same, he would have used the same word for each. Instead, he contrasts the woman's natural hair covering (*peribolaion*) to this other covering (*katakalupto*) that women wear. In fact, the *katakalupto* actually **COVERS** the *peribolaion*!

In the process he also provides us with a clear argument against men wearing a kippah (or yarmulke).

- [1 Corinthians 11:4 HCSB](#) Every man who prays or prophesies with something on his head dishonors his head.
- [1 Corinthians 11:7 HCSB](#) A man, in fact, should not cover his head, because he is God's image and glory, but woman is man's glory.

Apparently, some of the men had taken to wearing a head covering while praying – Paul corrected that practice:

- There is no scriptural injunction for it and;
- It apparently goes against the ingrained truth (“doesn’t nature tell you”) God has implanted in us (Romans 1:18-19) and;
- We can boldly approach God’s throne in prayer (Hebrews 4:16).

However, Paul reiterates that outside of public worship (prayer/prophesying) a woman’s hair serves the purpose nicely and she doesn’t need the extra kerchief all the time, as some Orthodox Jews demand to this very day.

To support that view, allow me to pursue a short rabbit trail. Some who would argue that a woman **MUST ALWAYS** wear a headcovering argue that it is an issue of modesty. Somehow, they believe that a woman’s hair is such a potent sexual stimulus that men simply cannot resist. Like all the best errors, there is an element of truth here but it is carried too far. Notice the propensity for long flowing, exposed hair in pornography? I’m not arguing that a woman can **ONLY** wear a covering in prayer and worship. If she’d like to wear it every day, that’s fine. There are practical benefits to the practice. However, she shouldn’t be judged if she doesn’t wear it every day. Let me show you why it’s not primarily about modesty.

- [John 12:3 HCSB](#) Then Mary took a pound of fragrant oil--pure and expensive nard--anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped His feet with her hair. So the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

If it was an issue of modesty, why would the Lord be allowing a woman to not only expose her hair publicly but to wipe his feet with it? That would surely have been such a phenomenally sexual act that everyone would leap to their feet in protestation. It would have left Jesus wide open to accusations by the Pharisees. However, the only protests are to the cost of the fragrant oil and the matter never comes up again – not even among the Messiah’s enemies.

Further, Paul seems to be speaking primarily to married women. If exposed hair was such a sexual enticement, wouldn’t it make more sense to prohibit it among the unmarried females?

A woman’s long, flowing hair is definitely beautiful, particularly to her husband. However, I submit that the point of this passage is not primarily about public modesty, but to formally

demonstrate within the context of public worship a woman's willing submission to her place in God's natural order. It helps to demonstrate her marital status and "removes her from the table", so to speak, in the minds of any single males interested in a relationship with a godly woman. Finally, it gives to attending angels (who serve, protect, and carry messages for us) that we are a willing and obedient people.

So, should Adonaic women wear head coverings in worship? It depends. It depends on whether or not the congregation's cultural context would indicate a potential source of stumbling or offense if a woman is worshipping with her head uncovered; say the congregation was located within an Islamic, Jewish, or Amish community.

It also depends on whether the individual Adonaic family involved wanted to more closely associate with Jewish culture. For instance, consider beards. The Bible universally promotes the wearing of beards. Every instance is positive. Every time the beard is shaved it is presented negatively or punitively. Thus, some who would more closely follow Biblical culture may choose to wear beards, contrary to modern custom. Similarly, if the woman wants to more closely follow Biblical culture, she may freely choose to wear a hat or kerchief in public worship.

The last obvious question that remains is "What kind of covering is sufficient?" Paul doesn't say. If we go by the rest of Scripture we would have to say some type of scarf or other cloth covering is the most obvious choice. Due to the lack of detail (and there is nothing left unspoken that we don't need) I have to assume that the Lord allows latitude in the matter. Anything from a scarf or hat to a full veil would be sufficient. Its primary use is symbolic after all. There would be two exceptions however. A wig would obviously run counter to the purpose of not displaying a woman's hair in public worship. Also the following two passages must be kept in mind:

- 1 Timothy 2:9-10 HCSB Also, the women are to dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense; not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel, 10 but with good works, as is proper for women who affirm that they worship God.
- 1 Peter 3:3-4 HCSB Your beauty should not consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothes; 4 instead, it should consist of the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very valuable in God's eyes.

On the other hand, don't try to be overly modest to the point where you draw stares or ridicule to the Master's name and cause. Remember:

- [Ecclesiastes 7:16 HCSB](#) Don't be excessively righteous, and don't be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself?

Because:

- The Apostle would evidently thought a woman who didn't wear a head covering while praying or prophesying might as well go bald. (1 Corinthians 11:5)
- Paul was taught by the Lord himself (Galatians 1:11-12) so the Lord undoubtedly held the same opinion.
- Paul was operating under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as he wrote (2 Timothy 3:16) so the Holy Spirit holds this opinion.
- It apparently concerns God's holy angels. (1 Corinthians 11:10)

To my mind, unless it would specifically offend someone, it would be a safer bet to wear the head covering in church. Nevertheless, this matter is shikul ha da'at; a matter that is

unclear and is left to either the individuals' or their elders' judgment. Let each one operate under the dictates of their conscience⁸ and let us not judge one another on the matter.⁹

⁸ Romans 14:23; James 4:17

⁹ Colossians 2:16-17, 20-23