

members of Christ. . . . [We] must love one another with pure heart fervently. We must bear one another's burdens. . . . We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. . . . We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So we shall keep the unity

of [God's] spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as his own people. . . . [And so we] must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world."

That's not a bad summary of Christian discipleship.

It's common today—in fact, it's too common and too easy—to see Winthrop's vivid image of a "city upon a hill" as the root of American triumphalism. But that's not what he imagined or intended. Winthrop meant that we would be watched, and judged, by how much we loved each other. Like it or not, our nation's ideals are incoherent and unsustainable without their religious grounding. And as we lose that grounding, our problems become worse. ■

## Invisibly Naked

by Viva Hammer

**W**ill you uncover your hair?" they ask when they hear I'm divorcing. I am taken aback each time; it's such a private matter.

The morning after my wedding, I tied on a scarf and walked to synagogue. My mother didn't do it, nor did hers, but my father's mother, who lived next door when I was growing up, covered her hair for eighty years, from marriage to grave.

In Jewish law, it is forbidden for a man to look at a married woman's hair, unless he is her father, grandfather, son, grandson, or husband. But the kabbalistic tradition is that even the walls of a woman's house should

not see her hair. I am not so strict; at home I am bareheaded.

When I learned the law of head-covering at a Jerusalem seminary for women, I was horrified that I would have to bind up my head upon marriage; all clothing was a concession, and I conceded as little as permissible. In the decade between seminary and marriage, I had time to talk myself into the practice, knowing from the first that I would do what the law required. I always do. I could choose only my thoughts; my actions were chosen by the rabbis.

And my thoughts danced around shades of Indian cloth shot with silver, a symbol of Jewish marital status.

The way a woman covers her hair is her identity. How much does she show? What does she cover it with? A crowd watches the bride the morning after, nods, passes judgment. When I tried on berets during our engagement, my fiancé insisted that I cover it all. I was taken aback. The Modern Orthodox camp in which I sat allowed a girl to show a bit: bangs, a pony tail, a fringe at the neck. But he sat in the Ultra-Orthodox camp and noticed (he told me) that head-coverings always slipped, so it's best to start out showing none. He did not object (he informed me) if I uncovered my hair indoors when no one was present.

I bowed to his stringency and was grateful for his leniency.

And anyway, by the time I stood under the wedding canopy I had had enough of coddling my hair. Wild and

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curly, it never behaved, and I wasn't sad to let it go. Not that I shaved it off or anything, but before I left home I'd just wrap it into whatever came to hand from the closet.

At work I wore a wig.

The American office is conservative in dress, a uniform covering all manner of diversity—celebrated as long as it's concealed. Headcovering in the office is verboten. An absurdity. A few Jewish men wear yarmulkes, but the yarmulke is only a custom and can be slipped into a pocket; a married woman's headcovering is the law.

Gentile women once covered their hair too; look at Michelangelo's *Pietàs* and Vermeer's women with scales or pearls. Then headcovering went out of fashion in Europe, and Jewish women found that financing startups or negotiating treaties in a hat was bad for business, so they lobbied their lawmakers.

Hence the wig, which conceals the woman's hair *and* conceals the concealment.

**M**y wigs were a failure at first because I had never spent a moment thinking about hair. I was an unruly curlyhead the day before my wedding and a straight bob the day after. Then I lost the bob wig and tried a permed one. But I'd never used curlers or a blow dryer, so a hairdresser had to come every week and redo the wig collection. I switched back to straight.

Pre-nuptially, I had my hair trimmed twice a year. Post-nuptially, my hair bill was in the thousands.

Wearing wigs, I had no bad hair days: The temperature, precipitation, and time of month could do no harm. On trips, I turned the wig inside out and it popped out perfect on arrival. The morning after an all-nighter in the office, I was the best-groomed woman at the table.

*Why doesn't everyone do this?* I wondered.

The first thing I did on coming home was take off the wig. I never wore one on weekends or holidays: Those were hat days. The wig meant work; scarves and hats were for leisure. More space in the closet was devoted to my head than to any other part of my body.

Underneath, my hair grayed, flattened, dried, and frizzed.

In nightmares, a woman would pull off my hat, and I would feel more naked than if she'd ripped my shirt. Like the biblical woman accused of adultery and tried by ordeal, I began to feel that loosening of the hair was the culmination of shame.

At the gym, I'd hang my wig on a hook and pull on a beret. Once I was on the yoga mat and when I put my hands behind my head, I found it was bare. I gasped and ran frantically back to the bathroom. I had been utterly alone on the mat and yet, as I dressed my head, I thought, *What if someone had seen me?*

He wouldn't have seen anything: a woman with graying hair doing yoga. My nakedness was invisible. The Emperor was naked but thought himself clothed; I was clothed and thought myself naked.

Twenty years of headcovering, and now the reason for it has come to an end. That is not quite true: Jewish law requires a divorced woman to cover her hair, although a famous rabbi recently wrote that if a divorced woman needs to bare her head for marriage or to earn a living, she may do so.

Rest assured, I will find no job and no husband by exposing the flat frizzy stuff hidden by my exquisite wig.

**A**t Jewish New Year a few months ago, I entered the women's gallery of an Orthodox synagogue. About two hundred women milled about, catching a few shofar blasts as they managed their elders and large broods. All along the pews were gigantic hats, feathered notions, and wigs of every color. I saw only one female over twenty-five with her hair uncovered. The coverings were symbols of marriage, but in Orthodoxy marriage is so universal that they have become symbols of Jewishness. I am a Jewish woman; therefore I cover my hair.

It is true that if I wear a wig I'm less likely to be picked up for a date by a Yeshiva boy, and by anyone if I wear a scarf. But I'm not expecting my first post-divorce date from a subway pickup.

"Why would you uncover your hair?" a friend asks. "Wigs are beautiful." Which is the perfect response to inquiries that come after I announce my changing status.

Beneath the hat, I have other reasons for leaving it on. Concealed, perhaps, even from myself. ■