

THE COMMON DENOMINATOR BETWEEN LONG HAIR AND A SHAVEN HEAD

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Naso

The Common Denominator Between Long Hair and A Shaven Head

This week's parsha contains the laws of Nazirus. A Nazir is a person who accepts upon himself an added level of holiness. As a result of this added kedusha, the Nazir is prohibited from consuming wine or any wine products, he is forbidden from having anything to do with dead bodies, and he also must grow his hair long.

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 374) has a far ranging discussion on the significance of letting the hair grow long. The Sefer HaChinuch writes that a human being is comprised of body and intellect, the physical and the spiritual. In truth, the soul and the spiritual side of a human being longs for pure spirituality. It really does not want to be tied down and bothered by all the physical aspects of what it means to be a human being. But, given the reality of life, it is necessary to provide for the needs of the body. Just as a valuable item placed in a house, can only be properly guarded and protected if the house is maintained (If the house is not kept up, it will eventually collapse and the treasure will be lost.) the same is true of the neshama [soul]. The neshama is inside a human body, which must be tended to. The body must be appropriately fed and nurtured.

Jews are not ascetics. We do not deny the needs of our bodies, but rather take care of our physical side as well. The "house" cannot exist without paying attention to it. The Nazir, however, wants to make a statement and tone down his physical side. He does this by neglecting - to some extent - the needs of his body. He chooses a very appropriate manner to tone down his physical side without harming that physical body in an appreciable way. He does this by abstaining from wine, because wine is not an absolute physical necessity. Along the same lines, he lets his hair grow. The Chinuch writes that one's hair can become a tremendous attraction. It is something a person might "get into". By letting his hair grow long, a person separates himself from physicality.

The Chinuch quotes the Gemara [Nedarim 9b] regarding the single Nazir that Shimon HaTzadik felt was worthy enough to eat from his sacrifice. Shimon HaTzadik inquired of a young nazir why he decided to take upon himself nazirus. The shepherd explained how he had once seen his reflection

in the water and became infatuated with his appearance. He became a Nazir -- first growing his hair long and wild and then shaving it off entirely -- to minimize his preoccupation with his physical appearance.

The Chinuch explains that both the process of growing the hair long and then the process of shaving his head entirely accomplish the same purpose. The common denominator between these two processes is that they diminish man's appearance -- they make him look like less of a "mensch". When we see someone whose hair is all wild, our reaction is "he's not a mensch". We have the same reaction when we see someone who shaves his head totally bald.

Rav Matisyahu Solomon once observed that this idea of the Sefer HaChinuch would seem to fly in the face of a commonly observed phenomenon in the modern world. If long hair or no hair is somehow a contradiction to the natural image of a human being, why is it that today we see so many people going around with either excessively long hair or a purposely shaved head? Do these people not agree with the premise of the Chinuch that such appearance "spoils the countenance of man"?

Rav Matisyahu answers that, in fact, the tables are turned today. Today's yetzer hara [evil inclination] is to say: I don't need to be a mensch [normal human being]. I don't want to act like a mensch. Today's lust is to say "I can do whatever I want!" Human dignity comes with certain responsibilities. Those responsibilities are rejected by many today and they purposely throw away human dignity, knowing full well that this dignity comes as a "package deal" with the responsibilities of being a decent human being. Today, nobody wants to be like a mensch because if you're not a mensch, you can do whatever you want.

Charity Is The Best Investment -----

Prior to the chapter of the Sotah [unfaithful wife] [Bamidbar 5:10], the Torah writes about giving the priestly gifts to the Kohen: "A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen shall be his." The concluding words "lo yiheyeh" [to him they shall be] are somewhat ambiguous. The Kohen is the antecedent (reference) of the pronoun "lo yiheyeh" [To him they shall be]. However if the intent of the pasuk [verse] is to say they will belong to the Kohen, the pasuk is constructed in both a round-about and redundant fashion.

The reading of the pasuk also tolerates the interpretation that the words "lo yiheyeh" refer not to the Kohen, but to the person who gives the gifts to the Kohen. That, however raises a logical problem, because if one gives something to the Kohen, it is not his anymore.

Rashi, in fact recognizes the problematic sentence structure and comments that there are many medrashic interpretations to the pasuk.

Rav Bezalel Zolty cites a true story that precisely explains this pasuk. Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, Rosh Yeshiva of Slabodka, came to the United States in 1924 to collect money. While he was here,

he received a telegram from the "Alter" [Elder] of Slabodka that the Lithuanian government was going to draft all the Yeshivas students into the Lithuanian army. This would have been a death sentence for all of those students, if not in a physical sense, then certainly in a spiritual sense.

The "Alter" told Rav Moshe Mordechai that he was sending 150 students from Slabodka to Palestine to start a Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael. For this massive undertaking, he needed 25,000 dollars - a huge sum in those days. Rav Epstein went to a wealthy Jew from a Manhattan banking family, named Schiff. Rav Epstein told Mr. Schiff about the situation and expected a nice donation. Mr. Schiff wrote a check for the entire sum.

In the depression (1929), Mr. Schiff lost his entire fortune. In the 1930s, Rav Moshe Mordechai was already not well and could not make the trip to America. He sent his son-in-law, Rav Chatzkel Sarna to come to New York to collect money for the Slabodka Yeshiva. Rav Sarna came to America in the early 1930s, the height of the depression. Mr. Schiff lost everything he had in the stock market and everything he had in the real estate market. Indeed, he was then living in the basement of a building he once owned.

However, Mr. Schiff came to speak at a parlor meeting held in New York on behalf of the Slabodka yeshiva. At the parlor meeting, Mr. Schiff said that of all the investments that he ever owned -- the real estate, the stocks, everything -- the only investment that he still had was the \$25,000 he gave 10 years earlier to the Slabodka yeshiva. Everything else he lost. He can only look at the Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael that had young Torah students learning and say "That is my investment; that still delivers great dividends to me and my family." He told the assembled parlor meeting that the only money that one has that is guaranteed is the money that one gives to charity.

In light of this story, we may gain new insight into the previously quoted pasuk from our parsha. "And a man who gives his offerings to the Kohen, they will be to him". Indeed although he gave them away to the Kohen, they remain to him, as a merit and as an eternal investment.

No one can ever take that investment away from him. The dot coms can get delisted and the brokerage houses can fail. One's stock portfolio can drop in value to virtually nothing. But there is one thing that a person keeps forever. The money a man gives to charity -- *lo yiheyeh* -- will remain his forever.

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