

Parshas Emor 5771

A HAIR-RAISING ANALYSIS

While the wicked Esav was known for many things, one of his most familiar characteristics involves his physical appearance. Ask almost any schoolchild to describe Esav, and the immediate response will most likely be: “He was hairy.” Right from the get-go, Esav emerged from the womb “resembling a cloak of hair” (*Bereishis 25:25*). The reason for this notable quality – as well as its relationship to Esav’s behavior – is borne out through a fascinating analysis of some of the laws of this week’s *parshah*.

NOT SO UNIQUE

The *parshah* begins with a special focus on the *kohanim* (priests), detailing numerous laws that are unique to them (in the areas of marriage, ritual purity, etc.). Amongst them, we find some that pertain to their hair:

לא יקרְחוּ קַרְחָה בְּרֵאשָׁם וּפְאֵת זָקָנָם לֹא יגַלְחוּ...

“They shall not create bald-patches on their heads, and they shall not shave the corners of their beards [with a razor] ...” (*Vayikra 21:5*).

There is something about the inclusion here of these particular laws which may leave us scratching our heads: the prohibitions of shaving and making bald patches are actually *not* unique to the *kohanim*, but are equally applicable to the rest of the Jewish nation! Speaking of the prohibitions to which every individual must adhere, the Mishnah in Makkos (3:5) states:

הַקּוֹרֵחַ קַרְחָה בְּרֵאשׁוֹ... וְהַמְשַׁחֵת פְּאֵת זָקָנוֹ... חַיֵּב.

“One who tears out a bald patch on his head... or removes

the (hair of the) corner of his beard... – is liable (for the punishment of lashes, for having violated a negative commandment).”

As these are general prohibitions (covering all Jews), why was it necessary to repeat them specifically in relation to the *kohanim*? It seems that we would have thought that *kohanim* were *not included in the ban* (which prompted the Torah to set the record straight in this week’s *parshah*). The obvious question is, why would we have thought that *kohanim* would be eligible for a special waiver when it comes to hair-removal?

R’ Yehonosan Eyebshitz (*Tiferes Yehonasan, parshas Emor*) provides an illuminating answer, which sheds much light on the underlying ideas behind these commandments. Although some of the esoteric concepts he draws from may seem a bit over our heads, his comments are nevertheless quite edifying to our subject.

In an effort to uncover the root of the matter, R’ Yehonasan provides a brief but comprehensive overview of numerous instances where hair plays a central role (in addition to the prohibitions [of beard-shaving and bald patches] that are the subject of our discussion):

A mourner refrains from haircuts during the initial thirty-day mourning period.

The process of treating and purifying a *metzora* (one afflicted with the *tzara’as* condition) entailed significant hair-removal.

Similarly, the hair of the Levites was removed as part of their initiation process.

לזכר נשמת חיים צבי בן אברהם יצחק ע"ה

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
משה בן בנימין ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives
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Esav was an extremely hairy guy (as previously noted).

MOVE OVER, LICE

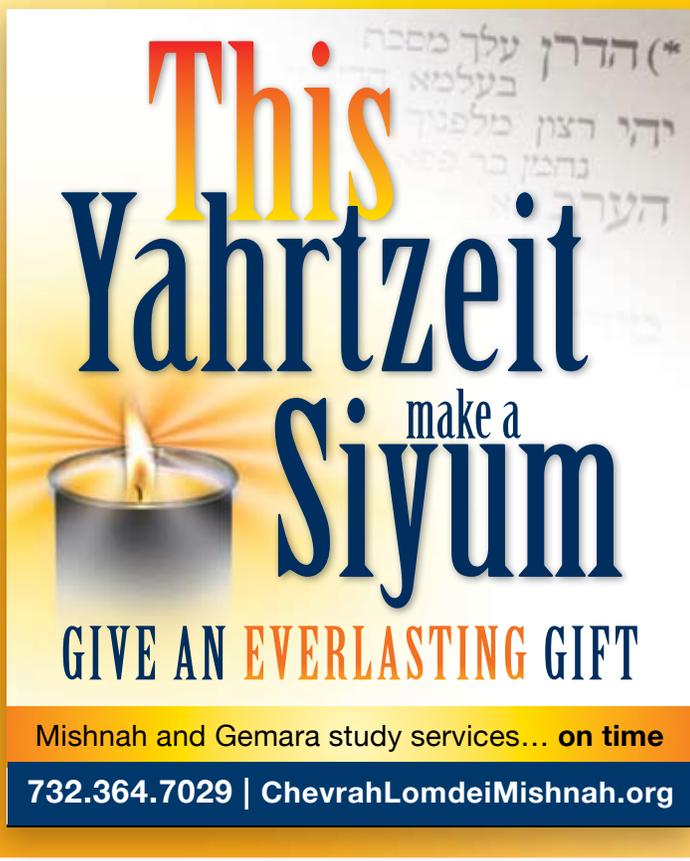
R' Yehonasan perceives a common strand running through all of these aspects, and it relates to the subject discussed last week (involving the prohibition of eliciting communication from the deceased). A major theme of that discussion involved the forces of impurity that the nations would harness to conduct their other-worldly conversations (and other acts of sorcery). Apparently, these impure forces chose an interesting item to use as their favorite haunt: hair. For reasons well beyond the scope of this forum, they tend to gravitate toward and inhabit these fibrous protuberances.

This phenomenon accounts for the various aspects mentioned above. The proliferation of hair on Esav's body and his achievements of wickedness were not unrelated. He was completely engulfed by the impure forces that gravitated toward his substantial mane. It was for a similar reason that the *metzora* and the Levites had to undergo such intense hair-removal: it was an effort to rid them of lingering impurity.

As should be obvious, the mechanics of the interplay between the "dark" forces and bodily accoutrements is beyond the level most of us can comprehend. And so we find more aspects of this relationship that might appear somewhat inconsistent. Apparently, the hair can also serve as a type of barrier, shielding the impure forces from an even closer association with the body. Thus, the nations involved with acts of necromancy would specifically remove their hair so that the impure spirits they conjured up from "beyond" would not merely remain in their hair, but would attach themselves to their very person. This seems to have been a necessary step in facilitating the communication with these departed spirits. And it is specifically for this reason that the Torah forbids hair-removal in response to the loss of a loved one, and an abstention from haircuts is

observed. In this way, the impure aspects associated with the departed's spirit will not penetrate beyond the mourner's hair.

R' Yehonasan concludes his fascinating exposition by explaining why the Torah in this week's *parshah* had to repeat these prohibitions when addressing the *kohanim*. Due to their enhanced holiness, *kohanim* would not be as susceptible to "invasion" by the impure forces had they been lacking a covering of hair. On the contrary, one might have thought that they should *specifically* remove their hair (in a manner reminiscent of the consecration of the Levites), so as to be completely disassociated from those impure elements that nestled therein. To refute this notion, the Torah states explicitly in this week's *parshah* that, nevertheless, the prohibitions are in effect for the *kohanim* as well.



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