



# SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

**DISTRIBUTION DATE:**

**TUESDAY JUNE 2, 2009 / י' סיון תשס"ט**

**PARSHA:**

**NASSO/ נשא**

**SERMON TITLE:**

**WHY THE OBSESSION WITH HAIR**

**A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE**

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family

In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל אה זאב בן פנחס זייל  
who loved and supported Torah learning.

## **NASSO**

### **WHY THE OBSESSION WITH HAIR**

The last time I was at the barber, he pointed out to me that until now, I only had white hairs, itself only half a problem—but that now I was making real progress: Now the white hairs were falling out. So I asked him, “Well, since I have less hair, should I have to pay less for the haircut?” He smiled a sad smile and commented: “Just the opposite—it’s going to cost you more today, because now I need to use a magnifying glass to find the hair.”

Everyone’s busy with their hair. Some people dye it so that they look younger. Other people immediately shave all their hair off the second they begin losing hair and go around completely bald. Some pay small fortunes to grow new hairs on their head—they just can’t get used to the idea that they won’t have hair.

On top of all that, there is an entire shampoo industry, promising you that their shampoo will preserve your hair. “Just try it!” And there are those who convince themselves that the shampoo actually does help them... until they look in the mirror.

In this week’s Torah portion of Naso, we read about the Nazir. A Nazir is a person who decides to become more spiritual—he wants to get closer to G-d, at least for a period of 30 days or more, and so he decides to become a Nazir.

What does that actually mean? Three things: One, he can’t drink wine; two, he can’t be exposed to dead bodies, meaning to be under the same roof as a corpse or within four cubits (about 6 feet) of a grave; and three, he can’t cut the hairs of his head. During his Nazir period, he must let his hair grow wild and he may not cut even one hair.

Now, let’s try to understand the reasons for these rules.

We can understand the prohibition against wine. Alcohol causes a person to lose control of himself, and indeed, Jewish law bars a person from praying while drunk, or a Kohen from entering the Temple while drunk. Therefore, when a person wants to be more spiritual and get closer to G-d, obviously the first thing he needs to do is stay away from wine. He can’t let himself lose control for even a second.

The second prohibition is not to become spiritually contaminated by dead bodies. This is also understood, since death is impurity and the opposite of life—while the Nazir wants to get closer to G-d Who is the Source of Life, as the verse states, “And you who cleave to the L-rd your G-d, you are all alive today.” Therefore, becoming spiritually contaminated by a dead body is a complete contradiction to what the Nazir is trying to accomplish.

But why does the Nazir need “to grow the wild hairs of his head,” as the verse states? What’s so bad about haircuts? To the contrary! Chasidim specifically try not to grow long hair, because it’s considered shallow and superficial to be obsessed with your hair.

And if so, if a person wants to get closer to G-d, he would have to cut his hair every day. As a matter of fact, Jewish kings were required to trim their hair every day. But here, the Torah says that the Nazir is forbidden to cut his hair!

Some commentators want to explain that the reason for this is that the Nazir is actually in a state of mourning. As the Midrash states, “Growing of the hair is for the purpose of anguish and mourning... so that the evil inclination does not pounce upon him.”

But seemingly, this doesn’t make sense, because mourning is something that the Nazir distances himself from: He is forbidden to contaminate himself to a dead body. And besides, a dead body is depressing, and getting closer to G-d is a matter of joy and happiness. So this explanation is contradictory.

Now, we also read about the Nazir in this week’s Haftarah. The Haftarah tells us about the angel that revealed itself to the wife of Manoach, informing her that she would have a son “and no blade shall go upon his head because the lad shall be a Nazir unto the L-rd from the womb, and he will begin to redeem Israel from the hand of the Philistines.”

This child grew up to be Shimshon HaGibor, the famous Samson the Mighty—and as long as he had hair, he was strong, and as soon as his hair was cut off, he lost all his physical strength. So again, we see that the entire concept of being a Nazir is connected to hair.

And there is yet another famous person in Jewish history who was also a Nazir: Shmuel HaNavi, Samuel the Prophet, who was born to his mother Chana after numerous prayers in which she promised that she would dedicate him to G-d “and no blade will go upon his head.” From that verse, the Sages learned that Shmuel was a permanent Nazir.

Even in recent generations there were people who observed Nezirus.

There was a great rabbi in the Latvian city of Dvinsk (today called Daugaupils) named Rabbi Yosef Rosen. He was known as the Rogachover Gaon, or Genius of Rogachov, the Belarussian city where he was born in 1858. He was a fearsome genius who blazed a new trail in the study of Torah—and he grew his hair long.

So, what's the story behind hair? Is hair a good thing or bad thing?

To explain, let's look at the word "Nazir." In Hebrew, Nazir comes from the root word "Naizer," which means a type of crown put on the head. In our Parshah, the Torah tells us that a Nazir can't contaminate himself to a dead body, because "the Naizer of his G-d is upon his head." In other words, the Torah refers to the Nazir's hair as nothing less than the "Naizer," the crown, "of G-d."

But how does hair suddenly become G-d's crown upon a person's head? What's so special about hair?

The Tanya (Chap. 35) cites the saying of Rav Hamnuna, who says that a man should never go bareheaded more than four cubits, because "the Divine Presence dwells on his head." This tells us that some sort of spiritual presence hovers above a person's head. Now, what's actually on a person's head? Hair. So now we know that the Divine Presence dwells in a person's hair.

The Midrash tells us that G-d spoke with Moses from between the two staves of the Aron Kodesh, the Holy Ark—and "sometimes" G-d speaks with Man "from between the hairs of his head."

Thus, hair symbolizes the Shechina, the Divine Presence—and the Shechina, which rests above Man's head, rests in the hair of his head. That's why hair is called the "His G-d's naizer," the crown of G-d: Because that's where the Shechina rests.

We can say that one of the reasons a Nazir must bring a Korbon, a sacrifice, at the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, after he completes his Nazir period and shaves his head is because he has shaven off "the crown of G-d." Since doing so is not a positive thing, as he is pushing away the Divine Presence, he therefore must bring a sacrifice as atonement.

As the Rebbe explains in his 1988 essay on the verse "And I shall be sanctified in the midst of the Sons of Israel": Holiness is related to hair because the drawing down of holiness comes through condensation [in channels] like hair... the entire matter of

Nezirus is related to growing hair because it symbolizes a drawing down of higher holiness.”

We can say that this is the origin of the Jewish custom to not cut a Jewish boy’s hair until he turns three: The upshernish. Why indeed are his hairs not touched? Because we want to emphasize that just as Shmuel HaNavi was dedicated to G-d by his mother and was a Nazir, so too does every Jewish boy begin his life like a Nazir—so that his life will be dedicated to G-d.

With girls, it’s even more spiritual. They don’t cut their hair even after they reach age three. We can thus say that for them the spirituality is even more out in the open, as they generally do not cut their hair as much and, as females, are naturally closer to G-d than males anyway.

This is the inner reason why there’s such an obsession with hair—because deep inside, people want to feel the Divine Presence.

**A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE**

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family  
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman אה אבן פנחס ז"ל  
who loved and supported Torah learning.