

The Shaitel Controversy

Reviewed by Horav Yisroel Belsky

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• Email Edition •

The Market for Human Hair

In our society, human hair plays a tremendous role in the production of many commercially sold items. Most commonly, hair is used in the manufacturing of wigs, toupees, and hair extensions. These products are widely used for individuals who experience hair loss, either naturally or as a result of undergoing medical treatment ל"ע (e.g. chemotherapy). These products are also commonly used by individuals such as actors, news reporters, talk show hosts, etc. who wish to have a certain appearance. Hair extensions are implanted into one's head and blend in with one's natural hair. Hair extensions are often used to produce a desired style which cannot be created solely with one's natural hair. Likewise, they are used to cover up a minor bald spot. The portion of the wig market that caters to married Jewish women is only a minor segment of the very lucrative international market.

Human hair is also very beneficial in the pharmaceutical and food industries. There is a chemical known as L-cysteine that is commonly used

as a dough conditioner or as an essential component in the production of certain flavors. L-cysteine is an amino acid which can be extracted from human hair after it undergoes a hydrolyzed process. L-cysteine makes up about 14% of the hair. This acid can also be produced from poultry feathers or artificially, but human hair is one of the most popular sources.

Human hair is also used in the production of suit and coat linings.

Sources for Commercially Used Human Hair

Human hair can be obtained for commercial production primarily from two places across the globe: Europe and Asia. European hair is from the most expensive hair due to its rich quality. India is one of the leading exporters of human hair in Asia. After countries in Europe, India is the second leading exporter of hair in the world. Indian hair has a very close resemblance to European hair. Two of the major sources in Europe for cut human hair are: 1) poor people who cut off their hair and sell it in order to

make money, and 2) barber shop droppings.

India has two very unique sources for human hair. One is from combed waste hair (i.e. the loose strands of hair that get tangled in one's comb or brush). Many people who live in India do not put the hair in the waste bin out of the superstitious fear that the hair might be found by someone they know who will use the hair for black magic or curses against them. Instead, the hair is given or sold to strangers who collect the hair for purposes of exporting it for the production of hair products. Also included in this category of combed waste hair are barber shop droppings.

The second source of hair in India is from temple hair. India has a number of Hindu temples where people go and shave their hair. The exact ritual and motives for this practice will be part of our discussion.

Some reports have asserted that it is not part of the Indian culture to cut off hair and sell it for monetary reasons as is the case in Europe. Consequently, the origin of hair that comes from India is primarily limited to the two sources previously mentioned. Others have contented that there is a large market of women who cut off their hair and sell it, but that the overwhelming majority of hair comes from combed waste hair.

Practices Performed at the Tirupati Temple in India

Prior to discussing the practices performed at the Tirupati temple, it is vital to mention two points. Firstly, it is forbidden for a Yid to study the practices of other religions. However, when doing so is necessary in order to arrive at a halachic decision, it is permitted. Obviously, even in such a situation, only the portions of the religious practices that are directly related to the halachic question may be studied. This last point was taken into serious consideration when the following discussion was prepared. In the following discussion, we have included some details that may appear to be inconsequential. However, as we will attempt to illustrate, all of the information we present here is indeed important and necessary in order to gain a complete picture of the practices performed. This will ultimately aid in attaining a clearer understanding of the halachic ramifications of these religious rituals. Secondly, although there are no footnotes for the upcoming paragraphs, extensive research was done to gather this information and all the information recorded here is based on accurate and reliable sources. Some of these sources include eyewitness reports, official documentations, as well as interviews with individuals who are knowledgeable and well-versed in these matters. In instances where there were conflicting reports, we will present the facts as they were reported. If, indeed, some of the information is inaccurate, we stand corrected and appreciate the feedback of our readers.

Tirupati is a religious city located in southeastern India. Tirupati is one of the largest religious attractions in all of India, with over 50,000 visitors daily. Tirupati contains seven hills and at the top of the seventh hill is the Tirumali temple. This Hindu temple is the wealthiest religious institution in India and is the second richest in the world after the Vatican in Rome. The Tirumali temple has an annual budget that exceeds 120 million dollars. The temple uses the money it receives to

provide free food and housing for pilgrims, as well as to operate five hospitals, twelve colleges and other charitable institutions.

According to Hindu legend, their lord supposedly came down to earth taking the form of a human being. He met a princess whom he proposed marriage to. He borrowed huge funds to pay for the costs of the royal wedding and agreed to repay it with interest. Shortly thereafter, he died without repaying the money. The temple in Tirupati is dedicated for the purpose of raising money to repay this karmic debt. The temple has many boxes called *hundi* where people place all sorts of monetary gifts. We will discuss below that the sale of hair is only a small fraction of the temple's income and that the sale of hair is actually a relatively new monetary venture in the temple.

Most of the pilgrims begin hiking up the long and steep hill to the temple in the morning. While hiking up the hill, they chant one of their god's names. Upon arriving at the peak of the hill, they perform all sorts of astounding practices there. To name a few: Some people begin rolling down a hill chanting all types of lyrics, while others insert various food items into the mouth of an elephant and then place their heads under the trunk of the elephant. It is unclear whether these practices are performed merely for the pilgrims' own enjoyment or if they are actual religious rituals.

There is a place in the temple where weddings are performed daily. There is one building where the idol undergoes a religious bath and is anointed with camphor, saffron and musk. The waiting list to observe this ceremony is over a half a decade long.

One of the main attractions at the temple is the *Kalyana Katta*, which is more simply known as the barber shop. The *Kalyana Katta* is a four-story building where over 600 barbers operate in three shifts around the clock tonsuring the pilgrims (i.e. shaving the hair of the pilgrims). The barbers are not priests, but are regular believers of

the Hindu faith who are employed by the temple. Approximately 25,000 pilgrims tonsure daily (i.e. half the amount of the daily attendees at the temple). There is no charge for the tonsure. The pilgrims remove their shoes and leave them outside the building. The *Kalyana Katta* building is located on top of the hill, but is separate from the temple building. The actual temple only occupies a portion of the hill. The *Kalyana Katta* is the largest location for tonsures. There are a number of mini barber shops located nearby that charge a fee for those who wish to avoid the lines at the main tonsure hall. Additionally, those staying at nearby guest houses and cottages can request, for a fee, that a private tonsure be performed there.

Most pilgrims have their heads shaved completely with a razor blade, though a practice of cutting only three locks of hair has recently become widespread. While receiving the tonsure, the pilgrims sit on the floor with their legs crossed and they bend their heads forward while chanting or thinking their god's name along with various lyrics. For pilgrims who have long hair and are having a complete tonsure performed, two long braids are made with a ribbon placed on each braid to hold it in place. The braids are cut off and allowed to fall into a small ditch behind the pilgrim. The rest of the hair is then razed off at the scalp. As the hair piles up in the ditch, a group of hair collectors go around collecting the hair in dustpans and place the hair in a large metal bin. Once that bin is full, special employees arrive and transport the bin to a storage facility.

After receiving the tonsure, the pilgrims are directed to immerse themselves in a tank called the *Pushkarini*. They immerse themselves without removing their clothing. Following the immersion, they dress themselves with clean, dry clothing. They then proceed to the temple where they wait on a long line called the *darshan* for their chance to meet the shrine deity for a few fleeting seconds. The wait on the line often lasts as long as 24 hours.

Prior to waiting on the line, the pilgrims are required to circle a person, an idol or the temple in a clockwise direction. Once inside the temple, they enter one of the innermost rooms where they get a brief glimpse of the deity and they quickly circle it once while chanting one of his many names. The idol has a diamond crown which is said to be one the most expensive ornaments in the world.

The Recent Hullabaloo

The act of tonsuring has always been an integral part of the pilgrims' visit to the Tirupati temple. The cut hair was always discarded after the tonsuring. Within the last half a century, the temple realized that there is a great need for human hair on the open market and that if they were to auction off the hair, it would be quite a lucrative venture for the temple.

Approximately thirty years ago, the *shaila* was raised as to whether a *Yid* is forbidden to benefit from the tonsured hair. In the previous issue, we discussed at length a number of precise guidelines that apply to items which play a distinctive role in the service of an *avodah zara* and are thus forbidden to be benefited from. At the time that this *shaila* was first broached, based upon the information the *poskim* received, virtually all *poskim* ruled that it was permitted to benefit from the hair. The *shaila* resurfaced again approximately fifteen years ago, and once again, after researching the ritual procedure, almost all the *poskim* permitted the hair. The *poskim* who permitted its use included Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, and יב"ח Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv.

Recently, the *shaila* was raised yet again based on a claim that the information that had been presented to these *Rabbonim* was inaccurate and that the matter must therefore be investigated anew. Suddenly, a major tumult broke out. Several delegations were sent to India to investigate

the matter. A number of Indian Hindu priests and professors were consulted. Additionally, some *ba'alei teshuvah*, as well as converts who once believed in the Hindu faith and were exposed to these rituals, were interviewed extensively.

These various investigations resulted in contradictory reports. At first, many of the *gedolei Eretz Yisroel* accepted the reports of some of the delegations sent down to India. The reports from these delegates indicated that the earlier understanding of how and why the tonsuring is performed was inaccurate. Many signs were then posted forbidding any benefit to be derived from Indian hair. Since then, much investigative work has been done. Many more witnesses and experts in the field have come forward and completely rejected these reports, claiming that the original understanding is indeed the accurate one.

Consequently, many of the leading *gedolei Eretz Yisroel*, with Rav Elyashiv at the forefront, have strongly encouraged that a *beis din* convene and decide which report regarding the actual tonsuring procedure is more accurate. Much effort is being exerted to see to it that the arrangement of such a *din torah* is efficiently organized and will take place shortly.

In this article, we do not intend to present any specific opinion as the more accurate one. Instead, we will explore all the issues involved and the differing views as they will be presented to the *beis din* אי"ה.

The Halachic Inquiries

We mentioned in the past issue that תקרבות עבודה זרה, sacrificial offerings, are one of the categories of *avodah zarah* which can become forbidden. Only certain items can qualify as sacrificial offerings when merely given as a present and placed in front of the *avodah zarah*. Examples of such items are oil, wine, flour, meat, etc. which were brought on the

mizbe'ach. Other items must undergo a very unique process. For example, if an item that is normally used in the worship of the *avodah zarah* is cut or broken in front of the *avodah zarah* and the one breaking it has the intention of worshiping the *avodah zarah* through that act, the item becomes forbidden.

Thus, virtually all *poskim* agreed that the answers to three questions would determine whether the hair from the Tirupati temple is indeed considered a sacrificial offering and forbidden to be benefited from.

1. Why do the pilgrims tonsure their hair?
2. Where do the pilgrims tonsure their hair?
3. What intentions do the barbers have while tonsuring the hair?

Each question will be analyzed individually.

Why Do The Pilgrims Tonsure Their Hair?

It is unanimously accepted that tonsuring is usually performed for one of the following three reasons: 1) In rites of passage (e.g. to mark a change in social status, such as from infancy to childhood or upon entering widowhood), 2) In anticipation of divine intercession (i.e. as an act to please the deity in hope that this will merit the acceptance of one's wish), 3) In fulfillment of a vow (i.e. as a form of thanks to the deity for responding to one's wish positively).

The point of contention primarily hinges upon what the religious objective of the practice of tonsuring is. As mentioned above, investigations have produced contradictory reports.

The accepted explanation amongst Hindu priests, professors and the media is that the hair is removed as a surrender of one's ego. Hair on one's head is considered a symbol of vanity. Removing the hair is an act of self-sacrifice of a prized possession. It is an act of submission

of one's ego to the deity and causes the pilgrim to be overcome with a strong sense of humility. Thus, it is not an act of worship, but a preparatory act for worship.

If in reality this would be the accurate explanation of the tonsuring procedure, the hair would not be prohibited as *תקרובת עבודה זרה*, for the hair itself is not an integral part of the ritual. It is *the act of removing the hair* and the results of doing so (i.e. submissiveness, humility and lessening one's vanity) that is of consequence. In other words, it is an act that is done to the person and not to the hair. A similar illustration would be regarding a person who takes a shower in front of an *avoda zara* in order to cleanse himself, where all agree that the dirt removed would not be rendered *תקרובת עבודה זרה*, as it is only a by-product of a purification process.

As an aside, it is worthy to mention that some people erroneously distorted this understanding of the ritual practice and reported that the objective is to demean and embarrass oneself by appearing bald in front of the idol (similar to the descriptions of acts done in front of the *avodah zarah* of *בעל פער*). Although the hair would be permitted even according to this version, it is an inaccurate understanding of the practice, for even if some of one's hair is removed and he is not defamed, it is still an acceptable tonsure. Furthermore, it is clearly documented that it is the act of surrendering one's ego that is significant.

Nevertheless, a number of distinguished delegates who were sent to India at the behest of *gedolei Eretz Yisroel* reported a totally different description of the ritual. They reported that although the previous assertion that the accepted explanation amongst the priests and intellectuals is that the sole purpose of the tonsure is to surrender one's ego, nevertheless, after interviewing a number of simple-minded pilgrims,

their understanding of the practice was completely different.

According to the information these delegates gathered, the pilgrims stated that they were under the impression that their god 'likes' hair and that they are giving him their hair as a sacrifice. Thus, the act of tonsuring would be considered an act of worship just like slaughtering an animal to an *avodah zarah*. These delegates commented that in order to reconcile the conflicting reports, it seemed to them that the intellectual Hindus are fearful of being projected to the western world as a primitive third-world country full of archaic customs and bizarre rituals. Therefore, according to these delegates, the Hindus prefer to describe the act of removing one's hair as an act of self-sacrifice and surrendering one's ego, as opposed to an actual act of worship.

In proof of their analysis, the delegates cited the fact that a number of women don't perform a full tonsure and instead only remove a few locks of hair. The delegates claimed that if the purpose of the tonsure was to surrender one's ego, it is incomprehensible that the removal of such a diminutive amount of hair would be sufficient. As a present to the deity, however, any gift in any denomination is acceptable.

A number of other findings also seem to portray tonsuring as an actual act of worship. Firstly, those entering the *Kalyana Katta* are required to remove their shoes and leave them outside the tonsure hall. They utter or think the idol's name while receiving their tonsure and they all sit in a prescribed position. A small amount of people actually take the hair and offer it on an altar before an idol. In fact, one of the rooms where people receive tonsures in the *Kalyana Katta* actually contains an idol, while some of the other rooms simply contain pictures of idols. Those receiving private tonsures in their cottages and guest houses actually

perform the tonsure in front of an idol.

A number of *ballei teshuvah* and converts came forward and confirmed the version reported by the priests, professors and the media. They explained that the statements made by the priests were not distorted in order to maintain a positive image to the western world. Rather, the statements that the delegates had gathered from some of the worshippers which implied the contrary, were made by simple-minded pilgrims who are not fluent in the Hindu code and attempt to interpret their practices with a more straightforward and practical outlook.

The *ballei teshuvah* and converts were appalled at how such an understanding could even be considered, since it would clearly contradict the very essence of Hinduism. They explained that maintaining ritual purity is a constant concern for Hindus; a concern that underlies the hierarchical caste system which demarks the social order. The primary source of defilement is contact with death and organic wastes (i.e. primarily those from the human body) such as saliva, urine, perspiration and cut hair and fingernails. Consequently, shaving hair is considered pollution which can be remedied by bathing. Barbers who constantly come into contact with polluting substances (i.e. cut hair) are classified as impure and occupy a low status in the hierarchy of castes. The collectors who go around collecting the cut hair from the floor have an even lower status than barbers. These people are referred to as 'untouchables', since people of higher ranked castes distance themselves from them. They avoid accepting cooked food from them, since such food is considered polluted. It is for this reason as well, that the *Kalyana Katta* is a separate facility away from the temple, so that no contamination enters the temple. The immersion that is done prior to entering the temple purifies the pilgrims from the pollution caused by

the cut hair and the impurities that are contracted by coming in contact with the barbers. According to the Hindu faith, it is forbidden to bring any cut hair into the temple. Thus, the Hindu religion would surely not call for the giving of such impure waste to their god.

They also explained that perhaps due to a language barrier, the delegates may have misunderstood the information they received when interviewing a number of pilgrims. There are many languages spoken by the pilgrims and often their responses had to be translated several times into a number of languages until the delegates understood them. Additionally, although many Indians speak English, their dialect and their method of expression differs from the English that is spoken in Western English-speaking countries.

The common usage of the word “offer”, which was one of the key words used by the pilgrims to describe the tonsuring ritual, differs greatly when used by Indians and those living in Western English-speaking countries. To the Indians, the word “offer” is used in the context of “surrender” or “renunciation”. When they say that they offer their hair to their god, they mean that they are performing an act of abandonment and are giving away their hair. When they say that their god accepts the hair, they do not mean that he physically receives the hair, but that he is happy with it. It is similar to the expression ‘G-d accepts our prayer’.

Consequently, the pilgrims’ statement that they are offering their hair to their god is no proof that a *korbon* is being given to their god. The reason why shoes are taken off before entering the temple and prayers are recited while receiving the tonsure is due to the fact that such a sacrifice of ego carries much weight and importance in the Hindu religion and is a very significant preparatory act for worship which will follow in the temple. The fact that a number of people only have a di-

minutive amount of hair cut from them does not take away from the humility associated with the act. The main idea of the act in their eyes is for one to be willing to part with some of their vanity in order to please their god. Obviously, the more hair a person surrenders, the more praiseworthy it is considered in their eyes.

The *ballei teshuvah* pointed out that outsiders who are not fluent in the religion will surely be overwhelmed at first sight by what takes place at the *Kalyana Katta* and draw erroneous conclusions.

Furthermore, even if there are a number of simple-minded pilgrims who interpret the act of tonsuring in a more primitive and practical way, still, religious tenets are determined by the pastors and ministers of the religion and not by the masses.

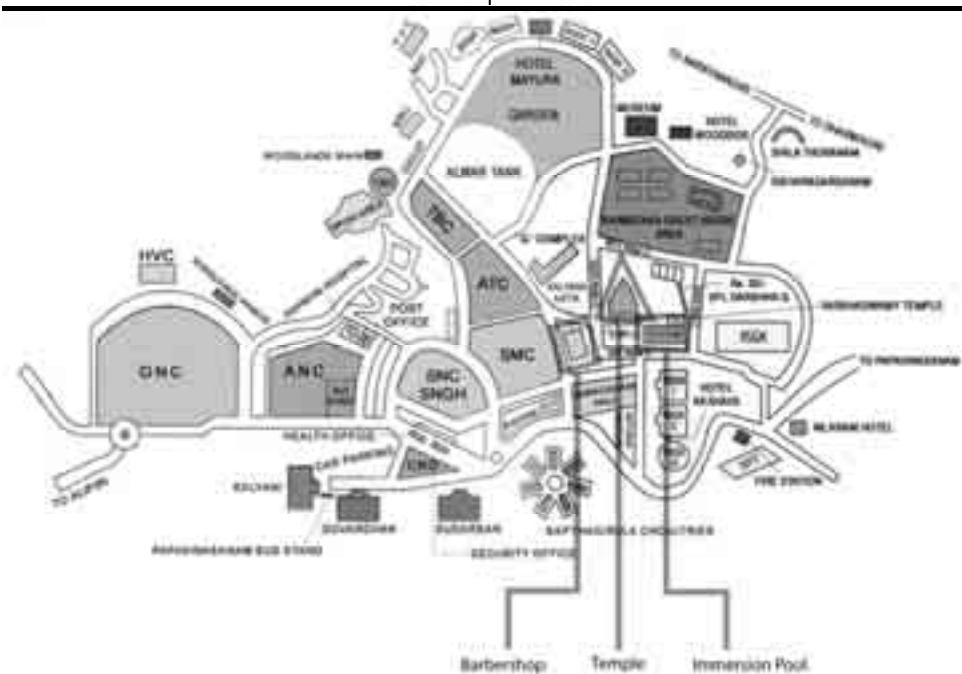
Be’ezras Hashem, a *beis din* that is currently being convened by the *gedolim* will analyze both viewpoints and decide which one is more authentic and reliable.

Where Do The Pilgrims Tonsure Their Hair?

We mentioned above that the tonsure hall is located on the moun-

tain where the temple is situated, but that it is in a separate building from the temple. We also mentioned that many *poskim* maintain that even if the cutting of the hair is in fact an act of worship, the hair would only be forbidden if the cutting is done in front of the *avodah zarah*.

The delegation that went to India inquired as follows: If the intent is simply to give the hair to their god as a present, why don’t they just send the hair to the temple instead of having to go up to the temple to receive the tonsure there? The pilgrims explained that they choose to have the tonsure performed at the temple, because that is where the idol is present. Additionally, upon hearing that various acts of worship are performed on that hill, a number of *gedolei Eretz Yisroel* stated that the entire mountain is viewed as being in the presence of the idol and that a tonsure that takes place on that mountain is considered to have been done in front of the *avoda zara*. The *poskim* who permitted the hair the first time this *shaila* was raised, based their *p’sak* partially upon the understanding that the haircuts are actually performed in a distinct location outside the temple.



Map of the Tirumala temple mount

It is worthy to mention that the outcome of this *shaila* is directly dependent upon our discussion in the previous section whether the act of tonsuring is an inherent act of servitude. Additionally, it has been reported that Indians who cannot be present at the temple do have tonsures performed elsewhere. Just recently, an Indian lady who is very well-versed in the Hindu code was interviewed. She recounted that she was in New York before her daughter's birthday and wanted to have a tonsure performed on her daughter, so she took her daughter to a regular barber shop and had the tonsure performed there. In fact, in the state of Pennsylvania there is a barber shop that advertises that one can make an appointment to have a tonsure performed there.

Based upon the interrogation of witnesses, the *beis din* will also determine whether the rituals performed on top of the mountain create an atmosphere that causes the entire mountain to be considered the presence of the *avoda zara* or if the locations where the rituals are performed are considered completely distinct.

What Intentions Do The Barbers Have While Tonsuring The Hair?

We discussed in the previous issue that in order for the hair to be considered *תקרובות עבודה זרה*, the one who actually cuts the hair must have in mind that he is performing an act of worship.

The delegation reported that some of the barbers claimed that their intentions are twofold: 1. To earn a good salary, and 2. To fulfill their religious duty. The barbers added that they themselves receive tonsures and have the same religious beliefs as the pilgrims.

Others contended that even though the barbers are aware of what is transpiring, nevertheless, while performing the tonsure, they are not thinking of any religious

thoughts. Instead, they are heavily engrossed in conversation with each other about the most mundane topics including union issues and politics, or they simply joke around with one another.

This issue will also be taken up by the *beis din*.

What Happens To The Hair?

We mentioned above that the hair is collected and deposited in large metal bins. Once the bins are full, they are transported to a storage facility where the hair is combed and separated according to size, color and texture. The temple holds an auction several times a year where Indian hair distributors bid for the hair. At the distributors' processing centers, the hair gets sorted, washed, dried and hackled, and then goes through several other processes which increase the quality of the hair. The hair is then exported to manufacturers of wigs, toupees, hair extensions and other hair products. China, Korea and Italy are the leading importers of cut hair from India. Once the hair products are manufactured, they are sold to wholesalers who distribute them worldwide.

Various Grades of Hair

There are several different grades of hair available on the market. The grade is determined by the quality of the hair and by the alignment of each batch of hair.

Each strand of hair is generally made up of three components: the medulla, the cortex and the cuticle. The outside hair shaft is comprised of several layers of overlapping shingle-like cuticles. These cuticles run in one direction from the base of a person's head to the tip of the hair.

In natural human hair, all the cuticles go in the same direction. This prevents the strands of hair from getting tangled. In order to prevent processed hair from tangling, the cuticle layer has to be stripped or the hair must be aligned in the same di-

rection. Cuticles can be stripped by soaking the hair in an acid bath.

Healthy tight cuticles reflect shiny, silky and strong hair, while hair with damaged or removed cuticles reflects dull lifeless hair. Consequently, premium quality hair is hair that has all the cuticles intact and all the hair aligned in the same direction. Such hair is called remy hair.

Remy hair is obtained by placing ribbons on portions of a woman's long hair and then cutting off the hair. The cuticles are still intact and the ribbon preserves the proper alignment. The availability of such hair is very limited and the hair is expensive.

Most industrial hair is processed from combed brush hair or barber shop droppings. Such hair must be chemically processed to remove the cuticles to avoid tangling and must be matched with other hair based on size, color and texture. Due to the large availability of such hair and the fact that such hair must still be chemically processed, the hair in its raw state is significantly cheaper.

We mentioned earlier that some reported that in India it is generally not the custom for poor women to have their hair grown and then cut to be sold. The temples are thus a very good source for obtaining remy hair, since women voluntarily offer their hair to be cut. As mentioned above, the temple in Tirupati holds several auctions a year selling such hair. The temple also sells inferior quality hair, but such hair is not used in the manufacturing of wigs or hair extensions.

The Hair Market

Even if it is established that the hair that comes from India is indeed forbidden, we must still analyze whether there is reason to suspect that the hair in one's wig comes from the temple.

Please note: Just as we mentioned above regarding the description of the ritual procedure, much

investigation has been done to track distribution routes and import and export quotas. We have been in contact with leading distributors, the United Nations statistics division and other experts in the hair industry. In addition, we have received much documentation and many detailed media reports on the subject.

Only a minor portion of the wigs sold in the United States are made from Indian hair. Consequently, when the tumult initially broke out, the *gedolei Eretz Yisroel paskened* that one should try to determine the origin of one's wig. People who have trouble doing so may rely on the majority and assume that their wigs do not contain Indian hair.

The remainder of the article will discuss the market of Indian hair.

Based upon sales statistics, India exports over 1,100 tons of hair annually which can be used for wig-making. The Tirupati temple, which is the largest temple where tonsures are performed, sells only about 140 tons of hair annually which can be used for wig-making. This hair is used in the production of hair products such as wigs, toupees and hair extensions. The hair that the temple sells for the production of these products is considered remy hair, since the hair is unprocessed and retains its natural alignment. Obviously the significant majority of hair exported from India does not originate from temples. Most of the hair exported from India is the combed brush hair discussed above. Many of the leading exporters have hundreds of woman sorting out such hair and performing various preparative steps prior to exporting them. The hair is primarily processed in the countries that make them into wigs. India hardly exports any finished wigs. China, which has many hair processing plants, is the leading importer from India, as they import over 660 tons of hair annually which can be used for wig-making.

We mentioned above that some reports have asserted that it is not part of the Indian culture to cut off hair and sell it for monetary reasons and that only a small amount of hair comes from women who cut and sell their hair. Consequently, according to these reports almost all remy hair that is available originates from the Indian temples. Others have contented that there is actually a large market of women who cut off their hair and sell it. Determining the true source of remy hair is dependent on which of these reports is valid.

Recently, reports have quoted individuals who invested much time investigating the market of hair production and claim that there is a very minute chance, if any at all, that temple hair is used in the manufacturing of our wigs. These individuals reported that most remy hair is used to manufacture hair extensions. A much smaller percentage of remy hair is used for the manufacturing of expensive wigs. Moreover, they asserted that the remy hair from the temple is sold primarily to countries such as Italy, Argentina, Singapore, etc. The average price of hair purchased by the hair processing plants in China and Korea is significantly less than the price that the temple sells its hair for. This determination was made by inspecting the invoices of leading manufacturers and the sales receipts of the temple foundation. The Indian wigs commonly sold on the Jewish market are primarily manufactured in China and Korea. The very expensive wigs used by actors, news reporters and talk show hosts, are processed in the other countries.

There are others who have contented that these assertions are not entirely conclusive. Nonetheless, some have pointed out that logic would dictate that the previous conclusion is indeed correct because most Indian hair is naturally very black. Jewish wigs are not that color. In order to change the hair color, the hair would have to be processed. Once the hair is processed in such a

manner, the hair loses its premium natural quality. This premium natural quality is what sets remy hair apart from the more popular and cheaper combed waste hair. Consequently, remy hair is too expensive for the companies to purchase and then have processed. It is much cheaper to purchase the regular combed waste hair which has to be processed anyway.

■ *As we mention in every article, we have no intention to be מכריע on any issues, especially an issue as complex as this one. Our only intention is to present a basic synopsis of the halachic issues that the poskim have dealt with in dealing with this shailoh.*

In the Next Issue

The Shechita Crisis, Animal Rights and Pets in Halacha

- *In which instances does the Torah exhibit its extreme sensitivity towards the treatment of animals?*
- *Is shechita considered the quickest and most humane method of killing animals?*
- *Do post-shechita procedures violate any common decency towards animals?*
- *Are hunting and fishing halachically acceptable hobbies?*
- *Fly-zappers, glue traps, fly swatters: Which of these are halachically recommended?*
- *Does the process of producing white veal violate halacha? Should one avoid purchasing white veal?*
- *Is it permissible to over-feed geese to produce abnormally enlarged livers?*
- *Animal Experimentation: Is it halachically forbidden?*
- *Does the Torah advocate giving food to a hungry street-cat?*
- *Is feeding bread to pigeons permitted? How does this affect the minhagim of Tashlich and Shabbos Shira?*
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Publisher; Author

Yitzchok Hisiger
Managing Editor

Mordechai Goldburd
Typeset & Design

Rabbi Meier Saslow
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Avrohom Goldberg
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לז"נ פנחס בן ר' זאב
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Mazel Tov to Binyamin and Naomi Kurland on the birth of twin girls, Meira and Shanni. May they see much nachas.



Ask the Gedolei Haposkim

New Column coming soon

A Forum for Our Readers to Pose Halachic Questions to Leading Poskim of Our Time

Halacha Berurah is proud to announce that we will soon begin a new column, *Ask the Gedolei Haposkim*, through which readers will be able to submit *shailos* to some of the leading *poskim* of our generation.

Questions submitted will be posed to one of the following *poskim*:

- **Horav Dovid Feinstein**, *Rosh Yeshivah*, Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim
- **Horav Yisroel Belsky**, *Rosh Yeshivah*, Yeshivah Torah Vodaas
- **Horav Shlomo Miller**, *Rosh Kollel*, Kollel Avreichim - Toronto

In addition to the *limud hatorah* that is generated by this column, the purpose of this column is twofold. Firstly, it is to provide the general public with an available forum to present questions in all areas of *halacha* to leading *poskim* of our time. Secondly, it serves to alert readers of common *shailos* that some people are bothered by and may go unnoticed by the general public.

Please note that this column is not aimed at tackling well-known halachic disputes amongst *poskim* and publicizing or promoting the view of a particular *posek*. Additionally, this column clearly does not take the place of local *Rabbonim* who should be consulted constantly with regard to all *shailos*.

Please send questions to **Ask the Gedolei Haposkim**, c/o Halacha Berurah, 1341 East 23rd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11210-5112 or to asktheposkim@thekosher.net. Please include contact information, including a name, city, state and phone number, which will be used solely to ensure the accuracy of the *shailos* submitted. Questions submitted will be selected randomly and presented to one of the *gedolei haposkim* on the panel. We cannot guarantee that every question we receive will be printed. Questions submitted may be edited for content and will be presented to the *posek* verbally. The *posek's* verbal response will be transcribed and reviewed by the *posek* for accuracy.

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Dedicated by Yossi and Suri Zafir
Monsey, New York