

בעזהשי"ת

Today's Sheitels In Halacha

תקרובת עבודה זרה ושער מאינדיא

כסלו תשפ"ד

All sources mentioned in this booklet
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מכתב עוז ממרן הגר"מ שטרנבוך שליט"א

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Jerusalem

Rosh HaYeshiva- Ramat Bet Shemesh

משה שטרנבוך

ראב"ד

לכל מנהלות האשכנזים

עיר"ק ירושלים ת"ו

ראש הישיבה ברמת בית שמש

מח"ס מועדים חזנים ושר"ת תשובות והנהגות ועוד

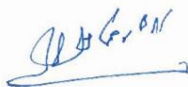
בע"ה

בעניין השימוש בשער שמקורו בבתי עבודה זרה בחודו, כבר כתבתי כמ"פ לאיסור אחר שנתבררו הדברים מפי עדים נאמנים שנכחו במקום לברר הדבר, וכן הורו גדולי ההוראה זצוק"ל ויבדלחט"א, ופלא הדבר שקמו איזה אנשים לפרסם להיתר נגד גדולי ישראל שאסרוהו, ומי לא יחוש אפילו לחשש רחוק דעוון החמור ביותר של הנאה מתקרובת ע"ז, שלדעת הרבה מהפוסקים הוי אבזרייהו דעבודה זרה, ויחרג ואל יעבור, וכ"ש לאחר שנתבררו הדברים בבירור גמור על ידי הבד"ץ דפיעה"ק ועוד רבים מגדולי התורה, הרי לאחר שכבר אסרוהו בית דין אין אחרים יכולים להתיר ח"ו ולומר שטענו במציאות, וזהו תעודת עניות שמוציאים היתר מדומה לאחר שגדולי ישראל כבר אסרוהו.

והנה בהיות שהטשטוש נתרבה בעניין זה, ורבים אינם יודעים את מציאות הדברים וחומר האיסור ובפרט שהדברים נעלמים, הנני בזה לחזק ידי האברכים היקרים, אשר יראתם קודמת לחכמתם, העושים לשם שמים, העומדים על המשמר להתריע על חומר האיסור למען לא ייכשלו בו בית ישראל, ומפרסמים דברי הסברה לגלות ולהראות את המכשול, וראוי להרבות בפרסום הדברים בבית ישראל.

וכל העמלים עם הציבור לשם שמים זכות אבותם מסייעתם וצדקתם עומדת לעד (אבות ב, ב) וכל המזכה את הרבים אין חטא בא על ידו (שם ה, יח), ויתברכו על המתעסקים בזה בברכת "ברוך אשר יקים את דברי התורה הזאת", ויה"ר שחפץ ה' בידם יצלח ונזכה לראות בהעברת גילולים מן הארץ, בביאת גואל צדק במהרה בימינו.

בג"מ אברהם יהודה אשכנזי זצ"ל





תשרי תשפ"ד

מכתב ברכה והתעוררות

ברבינו יונה (שע"ת שער ג' אות י"ז) מעלות רבות נמסרו לנו במצות עשה, מעלת הבחירה שנאמר ובחרת בחיים. ובספר חרדים מביא דבריו וכתב שבכל עת שמזדמן לפני האדם איסור או ספק איסור והוא פורש, מקיים מצות עשה זו, ובסוף פ"ק דקידושין כתב רבינו נסים דמאי דאמרינן בכוליה גמרא ספק דאורייתא לחומרא ד"ת ולא מדברי סופרים וכו', עכ"ל. ור"ל שאפילו באופן שמוצד עצם האיסור היה אפשר למצוא היתר עדיין נתחייב בה מה"ת מצד הובחרת בחיים שכולל לבחור שלא להכנס בספק חיים, ויש גם בכל קיום מצוה עשה ול"ת ענין של קיומה מצד הבחירה בחיים.

עוד מבואר (משלי יג ג) 'וירא מצווה הוא יושלם', שגם במצות עשה שעיקר שכר ועונשו של מצווה הוא מצד היראת שמים שבו, וכשמקיים המצות ואינו מפחד להכנס בספקות הרי זה קיום בלא יראת שמים, וזהו ענין מה שמצאנו בהרבה פעמים ענין בעל נפש יחמיר.

והנה הפולמוס בענין הפאות הנכרית שבאים מאינדיא או שמיהת ספק גדול ויתכן שאפילו ע"פ רוב באים מאינדיא, ואע"פ שיש כמה מתירים, מ"מ גדולי הפוסקים שכל בית ישראל נשענו עליהם יצאו לאסור, ומדי ספק לא יצאו, והנה הרב המחבר של הקונטרס "תקורות ע"ז ושער מאינדיא" דרש וחקר הסוגיא לארכה ולרחבה, והראה את חומר הענין וא"כ בני תורה שבדרך כלל הם בכלל בעלי הנפש ומוחמירים ומהדרים ומשלמים הרבה על איזה הידורים ונזהרים במאכלם בכל מיני חומרות ורוצים לחיות חיים של "כי עמך מקור חיים", וחיים של "ובחרת בחיים", הרי אף אם ימצאו מתירים והמוריס, הרי בוודאי שיחושו לצד האיסור, וקשה למצא אברך בן תורה שבשום שאלה וספק אחרת לא יחמיר כשמן פוסק הדור הגרי"ש אלישיב אסר, ועמו עוד גדולי פוסקים זי"ע ולהבח"ח.

ע"כ תחזקנה ידי הרב המחבר שליט"א שערך קונטרס זה כדי להראות חומרת הדבר ושלמד חומרת הספק, ואינני בא לברר ההלכה עם מי, רק לעורר לבני תורה ובחרת בחיים, ונזכה על ידי זה לסיום הכתוב למען תחיה אתה וזרעך לאהבה את ה' אלקיך ולשמע בקולו ולדבקה בו כי הוא חיין וארך ימין לשבת על האדמה וגו', ונזכה לראות בשבו ה' את שבות עמו בבג"צ בב"א.

הכו"ח לכבוד התורה ולומדיה

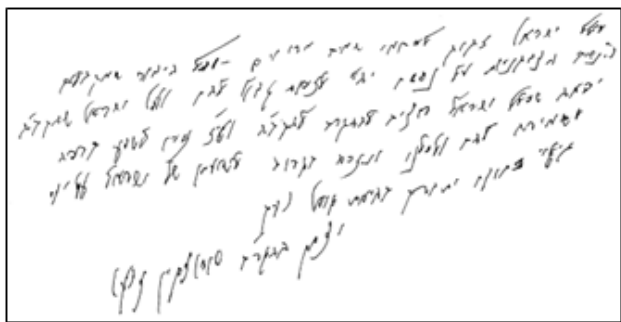
ארי' מלכיאל קוטלר

בלאאמו"ר הגר"ש צצוק"ל

ואצטרף בזה לדברי הראש ישיבה שליט"א דודאי נכון לכל ירא שמים לחוש לאיסור החמור של ע"ז.

ישראל צבי ניומאן

Divrei Bracha From Hagaon Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin*



ערב ר"ח כסלו תשפ"ד

כלל ישראל זקוק לרחמי שמים מרובים, וכל הידור שמקבלים הנשים הצדקניות על נפשם יהיה לזכות גדול להם ולכל ישראל שהקב"ה יראה שכלל ישראל רוצים להתקרב להקב"ה, ועל ידי זה יזכו לשפע ברכה ושמירה להם ולכולנו ונזכה בקרוב לישועתם של ישראל על ידי גילוי כבודו יתברך בביאת גואל צדק,

יצחק בהגר"ב סורוצקין זצ"ל

Klal Yisroel is in the need of much *Rachamei Shamayim*, and every *hiddur* that the *Nashim Tzidkaniyos* take upon themselves will be a great *zechus* for them and for all of Klal Yisroel, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu will see that Klal Yisroel wants to come close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and by doing so they will be *zocheh* to an abundance of *Bracha* and *Shemira* for themselves and for all of us, may we be *zocheh* to see the *yeshu'asan shel Yisroel b'karov*, by the revelation of the *kavod* of Hashem, *B'vias Goel Tzedek*,

Yitzchok Sorotzkin

* Before going to print, this kuntress was shown to the Rosh Yeshiva Hagaon Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin, who graciously added his *Divrei Bracha* to the *Nashim Tzidkaniyos* of Klal Yisroel.

Divrei Hisorerus from Hagaon Rav Elya Ber Wachtfogel*

Today, there's an issue that needs a *tikkun* [- the issue of Indian hair in *sheitels*]. Serious *shailos* have been brought up, and there are many who forbid it. Serious *shailos*! *Shailos of issurim* that are *yehareig v'al ya'avor*!! From the *gimmel chamuros*!! Certainly, there are also those who are lenient, however the *oilam* approaches this as if there isn't even a *shailah*! With a *leichtkeit* (lightheadedness), they can make a *safek* like this, and a *sfek sfeika* like that... This is a very serious *shailah*, and people relate to the topic as if there is no issue here that needs to be discussed!! If this were a different topic the approach would certainly be different. Just from the quality of the heteirim being suggested, one can clearly see how *shver* of a *shailah* this really is.

Divrei Hisorerus from Hagaon Rav Malkiel Kotler**

We, of course, also have no *shailah* that we would never be *oved avoda zarah*. But there is a *shvere shailah* about *tikroves avoda zarah* in regard to certain items of clothing. Without going into much detail, yes, there are *matirim*, and I am not getting involved if there are good heteirim, but the problem is that the fire isn't burning!! *Avoda zara*!! Who can take a chance with such things? Who?! There may be *matirim*, I don't know if they are good *heteirim*, but where is the trembling for *avoda zara*? If we would have had the appropriate fear of the *avoda zara*, perhaps there would not have been a concert where there was dancing with a *getchke*, and we could prevent them from being spit out of Eretz Yisroel.

* Adapted from a *drasha* given in Beis Medrash Govoha on 2 Kislev 5784; the *yahrzeit* of Rav Aaron Kotler Zt"l and the *mashgiach*, Rav Nossan Wachtfogel Zt"l.

** Adapted from a *drasha* on 16 Cheshvon 5784, given at a gathering of *hisorerus* in Lakewood, due to the situation in Eretz Yisroel.

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Divrei Hisorerus from Hagaon Rav Ephraim Wachsman¹

The most frequently visited religious site in the world is not the Kosel Hamaravi, not Mecca, and not Rome. It is a place that most of us have never heard of. It is called Tirupati. Tirupati is situated on top of a towering mountain in India, and it is a *beis avoda zara*. Over thirty million pilgrims come there annually to worship *avoda zara*. One of the forms of worship is called tonsuring, or hair shaving. Approximately half of the visitors do this, and they give their hair as an offering to their deity. There is a sign there that says, "Place of offering hair to... [name of avoda zara]." Experts, both Jewish and non-Jewish, tell us that most human hair *sheitlach* have this hair in them. This is a huge issue in halacha. Yes, there are *matirim* and there are *osrim*, but it is a very serious matter. It's a huge problem. *Medakdikim* need to know that today the *metzius* is clearer than it was years ago. Reliable people who are not driven by any agenda have been investigating the subject and have found that the facts lead to a horrifying conclusion, that the hair is indeed *tikroves avoda zara*. The Rama and the Gra *pasken* that getting *hana'ah* from *tikroves avoda zara* is

1. Excerpts from the Drasha given the night of Erev Yom Kippur 5784. Reviewed for print by Rav Wachsman Shlit"a.

yehareig v'al ya'avur! That is not a simple thing, and one must take this very, very seriously.

The Rosh Yeshiva of Lakewood (Rav Aryeh Malkiel Kotler Shlit"a) and the Rosh Yeshiva of South Fallsburg (Rav Elya Ber Wachtfogel Shlit"a) both told me today that they believe this to be a serious issue and that *bnei Torah* should be *makpid* on this.

We all know the story of Acher. The Yerushalmi tells us that Acher's mother walked by a *beis avoda zara* while she was expecting him. She inhaled and enjoyed the fragrance of the incense - which was forbidden because of *tikroves avoda zara*. Chazal tell us that the toxic impurity seeped into her being and contaminated the soul of her unborn child. The Torah teaches us לא ידבק בידך מאומה מן החרם למען ישוב ה' את חרון אפו ונתן לך רחמים ורחמך.

Can I tell you it is *assur*? I am not qualified to make such a determination and I don't know.

I will tell you though, a story about the *heilegeh* Rachminstrikve Rebbe Zt"l who was recently *niftar*. A woman came to him to ask his advice. She was thinking about switching from a human hair sheitel to a synthetic sheitel. It wasn't about the *avoda zara* issue but rather as a *chumra* in *tznius*. He asked her why it would be difficult for her to wear a synthetic *sheitel*. She explained her personal preference for a human hair sheitel. The rebbe said, "I can't answer you." She asked, "Why not?" In his precious humility he said, "Because I never wore a sheitel, so how can I tell you what to do." *Aza heilegeh teshuva!*... And because of that answer she decided right then to switch.

An *adom gadol* said to me that there is something strange about the whole subject of the *sheitel* that is irrational. It just doesn't make sense. What was meant to be a *begged* of *tznius*

became a coveted symbol of glamor. There is so much emphasis and focus on any and every latest improvement available. Price seems to be of no consequence... there seems to be no *gevul* in the quest for excellence. Yet we are talking about our exalted *nashim tzidkaniyos*, women who are *medakdek b'kala k'bachamura* without hesitation or compromise, many of whom are *moser nefesh* for Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. Yet when it comes to this *inyan* there seems to be for many an inexplicable blockage. What is happening? This doesn't *shtim* with who we are. This is a *shailah* that could mean many decades of constant *issurim* of *yehareig v'al ya'avor*. Why is this such a powerful and difficult *nisayon*? He said perhaps there is a *ruach tuma* that is coming from the *avoda zara* that is causing something that nobody can understand. This is what an *adom gadol* told me.

What can **we** do? I don't know. We may be past the stage of "we" can do. But **you** can do. And I can do. And each *yachid* can do something. Everyone can do something. Just stop looking at what everybody else is doing. Declare your freedom and honestly think about what Hashem wants.

*Rabosai*², we need to have a change. But who will do this? Can the *tzibbur* do a reset? *Halevai*, but that may not be possible yet. But certainly *yechidim* can. Rav Tzadok Hakohen Zt"l writes that every single *yachid* is a *rosh hador* in one *inyan*. Don't be intimidated by anybody, don't be a *yarei v'rach haleivav*. Do it on your own, that is greater than anything. The Chafetz Chaim once said, "When I was young, I thought I would fix the whole world. Then I thought I could fix my whole city, and then I thought at least I could fix my

2. This was said later in the *drasha*, after some other issues were mentioned as well.

own family...and then I realized I can fix myself, and that is what I must do.”

The Tomer Devorah writes that each of us has a part of every *yid's neshama* inside his own *neshama*, so when I fix myself, I am truly lifting up the whole world.

We don't live in a world where we can be *goizer gzeiros*. Rabbonim can't effectively be *goizer gzeiros* today. The *koach haleitzonis* is so powerful, it's *b'oifan mavhil*. But every *yachid* - can be a *rosh hador*. Every *yachid* can make a difference. You can do it, I can do it, every *yachid* changes the world when he makes a decision... You're a *rosh hador*. Do something...

In the end I can't tell you what to do. **But you can. You can tell yourself what to do. Think about it.** Everybody can make their own decisions. But whatever you choose, one thing is certain. If you know somebody that has made the decision to be more *machmir*, encourage that person. Admire that person. And definitely do not disparage them, don't *mach avek*. For that there is simply no excuse, no *terutz*. A person might say “I can't,” for whatever reason, but at least give *chizzuk* to those who want to be greater, who want to be *medakdikim*...

Overview of The Issue of Indian Hair in Sheitels

In recent years, there has been extensive discussion surrounding the issue of *tikroves avoda zara* concerning the Indian hair in *sheitels* (as well as hair extensions), which renders the hair as something forbidden to derive any *hana'ah* from it. As time goes on, more and more *Bnei Torah* are being *makpid* about this, and are seeking solutions which do not have this issue. While many people seem content to continue wearing standard sheitels, prominent Rabbonim express concern. Notably, Rav Elya Ber Wachtfogel Shlit"a has emphasized the seriousness of this matter.

We will try to explain the reason people are starting to be *choshesh* for this *shailah*, and what is the underlying issue of the Indian hair in *sheitels*.

To start, considerable confusion prevails, prompting valid questions:

- Hasn't this issue already been addressed and resolved in previous years?
- Is this really a genuine issue, or mere anti-*sheitel* propaganda from those who oppose all *sheitels*?
- Didn't respected Rabbonim, like Rav Yisroel Belsky Zt"l, permit Indian hair?
- Haven't knowledgeable experts on Indian culture and

religion been consulted, and according to their information it was decided that the use of such hair is acceptable?

- Even if Indian hair is problematic, why worry about Brazilian or European hair?
- What if a *sheitel* has a *hechsher* that it is not Indian hair?

These inquiries deserve thorough responses. *B'siyata d'shmaya*, we will try to explain the issue clearly and address all these important points.

Part I - Tikroves Avoda Zara

Historical Background

The issue of Indian hair in *sheitels* was first discussed in 5728 (1968) when R. Nachum Rabinowitz proposed in the journal *Kol Torah* that hair cut in Indian temples constitutes *tikroves avoda zara*. Two years later, in 5730 (1970), Rav Moshe Sternbuch Shlit"a also extensively addressed this in his sefer *Das V'halacha* (later published in *Teshuvos V'hanhagos* 2:214). Although he *paskened l'chumra*, he advocated for further investigation through researchers sent to India, which did not happen at the time.

In 5750 (1990), the *shailah* was brought before Rav Elyashiv Zt"l. The query came complete with input from an individual whom the questioner presented to Rav Elyashiv as being the foremost expert on the Hindu religion. Based on the information presented, Rav Elyashiv tended toward leniency but demanded that further investigations be made. This is a significant point. Despite the information being presented as if it came from a world-class expert, Rav Elyashiv still insisted that more research was necessary.

In 5764 (2004), the *shailah* regarding the permissibility of the hair was revisited. Rabbonim from Eretz Yisroel, seeking clarity, dispatched *shlichim* (emissaries) to India to gather firsthand knowledge. The initial envoy was Amir Dromi, an

individual familiar with India due to his extensive travels in his earlier years. He relayed his observations to Rav Nissim Karelitz Zt"l and Rav Shmuel Vosner Zt"l. After hearing his testimony, they determined that the hair was forbidden. On 18 Iyar 5764, Rav Karelitz and Rav Vosner wrote a letter together affirming that such hair carried the *din* of *safek tikroves avoda zara*, and they also urged those in possession of it to make every effort to get rid of it.³

At that time, Rav Ahron Dovid Dunner Shlit"a from London was dispatched upon Rav Elyashiv's directive. Although Dromi had already brought a thorough report, Rav Elyashiv had several specific inquiries that he wanted to further investigate. Rav Dunner reported to Rav Elyashiv, which followed with a *psak* dated 21 Iyar (written by Rav Efrati on behalf of Rav Elyashiv) asserting that the hair from the temples is indeed *tikroves avoda zara*. This view was reiterated by Rav Elyashiv during his shiur the following day, where Rav Elyashiv added that the hair must be destroyed, as the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Avoda Zara* 8:6) that *tikroves avoda zara* must be destroyed. At the time, this *psak* was embraced by Klal Yisroel, embodying great *mesiras nefesh*. Before burning the *sheitels*, Rav Chaim Kanievsky Zt"l made a *bracha* (without the *sheim Hashem*) לעקור עבודה זרה מארצנו. This is in line with the Maharsh"a (*Brachos* 57b) who mentions that such a *bracha* should be made.

3. There is also a *kuntress* available upon request that has a collection of rare handwritten letters from Rav Vosner Zt"l that show how he was indeed concerned *me'ikar hadin*. In one letter, Rav Vosner writes to his son that even if there would be a place to be *meikel*, we must warn the *Bnos Yisroel* to stay away from such things that have the *tumah* of *avoda zara* in it, and Rav Vosner adds how it is likely that this (Indian hair) is the cause of many physical and mental illnesses in our communities *R"l*. At the time, when the *psak* was briefly accepted by all of Klal Yisroel, Rav Vosner told his grandson "Now that the women have removed these *sheitels*, a great *kitrug* was removed from Klal Yisroel."

What Happened Next?

Following the *psak*, numerous points were raised, regarding different aspects of the *metzius* (factual details) and also how much the *psak* on the Indian hair applies to the general hair market.

First, questions arose about the proportion of hair actually originating from India, and even if the hair was from India how much was actually from the temples. Additionally, many individuals trusted that their *sheitelmachers* were not sourcing hair from India, especially those who didn't acquire the hair directly from that region.

Subsequently, all sorts of reports surfaced that claimed reassurances about certain companies that they did not use hair from India.

Further complicating the narrative were questions concerning the true situation in India. A week after Rav Elyashiv's *psak*, a meeting was held in New York between Rav Dunner and many other Rabbonim, where Rav Dunner provided a detailed account of his findings in India (a recording and transcript of this meeting are available upon request). At this gathering, an opposing point of view was presented by Lee Weissman, who had spent some years in India at an earlier stage of his life. He contested the findings, suggesting that given Hinduism's view of hair as impure, it



Rav Chaim Kanievsky Zt"l burning sheitels after the *Psak* of his Shver, Rav Elyashiv Zt"l
(Courtesy of ד' אמות של הלכה)

seemed unlikely for it to be considered a *korban*. He suggested that potential translation errors may have occurred, thereby affecting Rav Dunner's conclusions. Thus, Rav Elyashiv was misinformed.

At the time, Rav Yisroel Belsky Zt"l corresponded with Rav Elyashiv, presenting his reasoning for permitting the hair. In response, Rav Elyashiv wrote him a concise *teshuva*. This exchange led to a follow-up letter from Rav Belsky and eventually a face-to-face meeting between the two, where they engaged in an in-depth discussion on the matter.

Rav Belsky's primary argument was based on what he presented as the consensus among experts and priests, who maintained that the hair was not offered as a *korban*. He emphasized that this consensus should not be undermined by what Rav Dunner heard through multiple translations.

Furthermore, Rav Belsky argued that most of the hair in India did not originate from temples, therefore regardless of the status of the temple hair, there is a *חוב* of non-temple hair, thereby permitting all the hair. While he did incorporate certain halachic arguments, the core of his position centered on questioning the facts on the ground.⁴

Likewise, at the time, Rav Feivel Cohen Zt"l also met with Rav Elyashiv, and also advocated the opposing perspective that hair cutting was done merely as an act of removing impurities and ego.

4. See more on Rav Belsky's opinion later. For those interested, we can provide a *kuntress* that deals with all the nuances of the arguments raised in Rav Belsky's *teshuva*.

However, all these arguments failed to sway Rav Elyashiv, who remained resolute in his position that the hair is *tikroves*.

For the most part, people at that time accepted the ruling that Indian hair is problematic, and only continued using *sheitels* that they were under the impression were not problematic, such as the ones with a *hechsher* that it is not from India.

The Facts about the Tonsuring Process

We've chronicled the historical timeline, and now, let us delve deeper into the essence of the *shailah* itself.

Before we start, let us point out that according to *halacha*, it is forbidden to casually study how the *goyim* serve their *avoda zara*, as per אל תפנו אל האלילים. However, to understand and *pasken* the Halacha (להבין ולהורות) it is permitted to research the ways of *avoda zara*. Therefore, in order to fully understand this topic, some of the ways of *avoda zara* will have to be mentioned.⁵ However, when quoting their sources, the names of the deities have been erased, in accordance with *halacha*.

5. נציין שברשי"י עה"ת (דברים יח, ט) כתב: "לא תלמד לעשות אבל אתה למד להבין ולהורות, כלומר, להבין מעשיהם כמה הם מקולקלים, ולהורות לבניך לא תעשה כך וכך, שזה הוא חוק הגוים," ומבואר שזה לא דווקא להורות הלכה. ועי' ביד רמ"ה (סנהדרין סח.) וז"ל: "לא תלמד לעשות כתועבות הגוים ההם, כלומר, להתעסק בהם להנאת עצמך כתועבות הגוים ההם, אבל אתה למד להבין ולהורות", ומשמע שעיקר הקפידא זה דווקא להתעסק לשם הנאה.

ובלא"ה אין כל חשש בדברינו כאן, ולא צריכים להגיע להחיתר של להבין ולהורות, כמו שכתוב באגרות משה (יו"ד ב', נג): "אבל נראה פשוט שהאיסור הוא רק בספרים שחברו העכו"ם שעובדים להע"ז, שהם כתבו זה לשבחה בדברי הבל ושטות שנדמה להם שהוא שבח, שספרים כאלו נאסרו בשביל הטעם בלאו דאל תפנו ונאסר לעולם אף כשיתבטל הטעם שלא ימשכו בנ"א בדבריהם הטפשיים, אבל ספרים שנתחברו מוכפרים בע"ז היא, שהוא רק להתלוצץ בהם ולבזותם במה שמספרים הבלותם ושטותם לא נאסר גם אז, ומצינו גם בקראי שמספרים מעבודתם אבל כיון שהוא באופן שהוא לבזות ולהתלוצץ אינו כלום," עכ"ל.

The information presented is based on hundreds of documented sources, interviews, recorded conversations and email exchanges with priests and Hindu experts.

In India, the *goyim* uphold their *avoda zara* practices steadfastly, reminiscent of the ancient times of our Avos. There are a lot of different forms of *avoda zara*, each with its own unique rites and rituals.

Tirupati stands as the epicenter of *avoda zara* in India. Situated atop a towering mountain, it draws pilgrims in droves. They consider the entire mountain holy, and many, out of reverence, ascend the mountain by foot. Tirupati is the most frequented religious site globally, attracting close to 30 million pilgrims annually. Among the many rituals practiced, tonsuring of the hair, is done by close to half the visitors.⁶ Following this ritual, they briefly visit the main idol.

All the different rituals done for the main *avoda zara* are performed on the mountain summit. The mountain's summit houses various sites, each one dedicated to a specific type of worship. Although the main idol is not directly in view during these rituals, smaller idols are almost everywhere. There are specific areas designated for offerings, such as coconuts, fruits, *ketores*, and notably, a large building known as the “Kalyanna Katta” where the tonsuring ritual is performed.

In the Kalyanna Katta there are several floors of tonsuring halls, and on each floor a large idol is visible.⁷ Likewise, a

6. The tonsuring is also practiced at hundreds of other small temples in India, but for the sake of simplicity we will only focus on the biggest place. There are countless sources proving that in the smaller temples as well, tonsuring is done as a *korban*.

7. These idols in the tonsuring halls are worshipped and are frequently adorned with flowers. There are clear sources that explain how these idols have been consecrated (-declared sacred) and in their eyes constitute an earthly presence or manifestation of the deity. In addition, there are also many smaller pictures of the idol hanging on the wall, which are frequently worshipped.

large idol is built onto the exterior of the building. The complex sees a constant hum of activity 24/7, with nearly 600 barbers working around the clock, shaving roughly 35,000 pilgrims daily. The barbers are from the Nai-Brahmin caste,⁸ who are assigned various jobs to help the priests in the rituals, and *lehavdil*, are sort of the equivalent of Levi'im.

These barbers start their shifts by saying the name of the *avoda zara*, a fact consistently corroborated by numerous sources, including official temple correspondence. It is also common practice for the pilgrims themselves to either vocalize or mentally recite the *avoda zara*'s name during tonsuring. This can be seen on many videos.

Post tonsuring, the shorn hair is collected by temple workers. They gather it routinely, depositing it in a dedicated repository called the "hair hundi." Subsequently, this hair undergoes sorting and is auctioned to the highest bidder. It is worth noting that many pilgrims remain unaware of this hair trade, as a large percentage of them are uneducated simple people. However, for those in the know, the sentiment

It should be noted that the temple also provides a VIP tonsuring service, allowing privileged individuals to avoid the lengthy lines by arranging to have their tonsuring performed in the nearby hotels for a fee. However, the *hakpada* to tonsure in front of the *avoda zara* is so great, that even the VIP off-site tonsuring is specifically done in a room that has an *avoda zara* present. In summary, the tonsuring is always done in the presence of an *avoda zara*.

נציין שלהלכה אין נפק"מ בזה, מכיון שתקרובת נאסרת גם בעבודה שנעשית שלא לפני הע"ז, כמבואר בתוספות (חולין מ. ד"ה בפני), והרשב"א (ע"ז נא:), וכן כתבו החת"ס (ע"ז כט:), המנחת חינוך (מצוה כו), ובשו"ת זית רענן (ח"ב סי' יג) והחזו"א (יו"ד נו, ז), [וכן יש להוכיח מדברי הראב"ד בענין הנירות, ואכמ"ל], וכן נקט הגרי"ש אלישיב זצ"ל להלכה בשנת תשס"ד, כמבואר להדיא בקובץ תשובות (ח"ג סי' קיח), ח"ל: "גם אי"צ לפני מהקלקלין בגוונא דשחיטה וכעין זביחה" עכ"ל. וכן בשו"ת ישא יוסף (יו"ד סי' כה), הגרי"י אפרתי הסביר את דברי הגרי"ש, והביא שם שמבואר ברשב"א שאם זה עבודה שנעשית להדיא לשם ע"ז, זה נאסר גם שלא בפני הע"ז.

8. In India, the Hindus are divided according to level of importance into different groups called "castes". The task of tonsuring the pilgrims is normally passed from father to son in the Nai-Brahmin caste. The pilgrims may not use a regular barber for tonsuring, but rather it must be done in an area belonging to the temple. All this shows that the tonsuring is not a regular haircut, but rather a religious ritual.

is universal: they have fulfilled their religious obligation by tonsuring; and what the temple decides to do with the hair doesn't concern them at all.

The aforementioned description is based on clear-cut evidence, including many videos and pictures.

Is Tonsuring a Sacrifice or a Symbol of Removing Ego?

The debate concerning the reasons behind tonsuring, as alluded to earlier, has been intense and protracted. To elucidate, we will go through the arguments in chronological order.

As mentioned, in 5750 (1990), the *shailah* was posed to Rav Elyashiv, and at that point he was *noteh l'hetter*. At the time, it was presented to Rav Elyashiv that the (supposed) big *mumcha*⁹ claimed tonsuring was not a *korban*. Rather, it was seen as an act of piety, a method to efface one's ego. He said that at no point did they consider the cutting of the hair itself as giving of the hair to the *avoda zara*, even though they do donate the cut hair to the temple.

In 5764 (2004), when the question surfaced again, *shlichim* were dispatched to India, who sought to ascertain whether the hair-cutting ritual was merely symbolic of ego diminishment, or if it is cut as an offering to the *avoda zara*.

9. The individual in question is Dr. Anand Mohan. During the *shoel's* research on the topic, he encountered an Indian at a gas station. This individual, unable to explain the topic himself, referred the *shoel* to Mohan. Dr. Mohan's report from that time is available. However, it is important to emphasize that the claim regarding Dr. Mohan's expertise on the topic was unfounded. While he did volunteer on the financial board of a temple in New York, he never held the position of a priest. Furthermore, several basic details he shared turned out to be inaccurate. Dr. Mohan was a professor of political science. He authored a biography about one of India's prime ministers and co-wrote another piece on terrorism and was never considered an expert on the religion.

Rav Dunner and Amir Dromi both observed multiple indications that the tonsured hair was indeed perceived as a *korban* for the *avoda zara*, and the cutting of the hair is like the *shechita* of the hair. They explained that the act is described as a “sacrifice” and “offering.” Rav Dunner explicitly asked them if by sacrifice they mean sacrifice like the *ketores* they offer, or maybe they just mean self-sacrifice. They confirmed that they mean sacrifice as in the context of *ketores*, and Rav Dunner recounted hearing that they said the *avoda zara* loves hair, which starkly contradicts the innocuous interpretation of the act as mere ego-shedding.

Contrarily, Lee Weissman claimed that hair is deemed impure in Hinduism. Thus, offering it would be inconceivable. He also underscored that the hair never graces the presence of the idol, negating its potential status as a *korban*. Lee proposed that the act is genuinely about eschewing the ego, and the point was to make oneself bald. He claimed there is definitely no intention to “give” the hair. While some call tonsuring a “sacrifice,” he believed this refers to personal sacrifice (self-sacrifice) and doesn’t necessarily imply an offering.¹⁰ Regarding claims about the *avoda zara*’s alleged affinity for hair, Lee dismissed these as misinterpretations or miscommunications.

Given India’s remoteness, there wasn’t much accurate information available at the time. It was somewhat

10. It seems implausible for this to be the case. When they say they “sacrifice the hair **to** the *avoda zara*,” it suggests a direct offering. If they meant it as self-sacrifice, the phrasing would likely be “sacrifice **for** the *avoda zara*.”

Regarding the term “offering,” the argument was made that when Indians communicate in English, they might not always use the most precise wording. However, this is a very forced explanation. Furthermore, Rav Dunner explicitly mentioned that he inquired whether the hair is considered a sacrifice in the same vein as their *ketores*, or if it maybe bore a different significance, and they clearly responded to him that it is called offering in the same sense.

understandable that some wanted to prioritize the testimonies of experts, over the observations of those who visited for only a short period of time.

To summarize the discussion, the main point is about how to understand the act of cutting the hair. There were primarily two possible understandings:

- Do people think they are giving something to the *avoda zara* when they cut their hair, and the *avoda zara* receives it (נותן ומקבל)?
- Or is cutting the hair just a symbol to show humility, without believing that the *avoda zara* receives anything?

It is important to recognize that these interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Just because one believes that hair removal symbolizes the removal of ego or sin does not negate the possibility that it is an offering. Meaning just because they say that by removing their hair they are removing ego/impurity/sins, this does not necessarily mean that they think that there is no נתינה going on. Different points can explain different aspects of the tonsuring and do not necessarily differ on how to classify whether it is a *korban* or not.¹¹ We will elaborate on this point later.

Recent Investigations

What changed in recent years is that today there is unprecedented access to primary sources, and it is much easier to come across reliable information. While in earlier

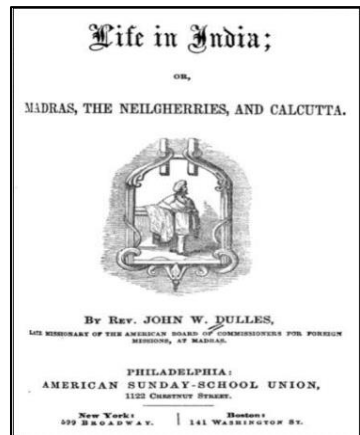
11. This point is crucial, because after reviewing all the sources, while there are indeed some sources explaining the tonsuring practice as a means of ego removal, as well as countless sources that clearly say the *avoda zara* is *mekabel* the hair, we have yet to have found a single source that explicitly states that the accepted belief in India is that the *avoda zara* does **not** receive the hair.

times, there was a lack of clarity because there was only sparse data, in today's world, it is possible to connect directly with the Indians, study their literature, and examine their websites to gain a more authentic understanding of their perspectives.

Recent research has highlighted numerous aspects of this subject, which clearly indicate that tonsured hair is indeed akin to a *korban*. This research encompasses hundreds of pages from literature (collected from 137 books) spanning the past 300 years, numerous email correspondences with priests and religious experts, and dozens of recorded conversations with priests (all of which are available upon request). This booklet does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of sources, instead, our focus is to spotlight specific, decisive points that can shed significant light on the matter.

We will choose several old books, that clearly exhibit that the tonsuring is giving the hair to the *avoda zara*.

The first, entitled *Life in India* was published in 1855 by Rev. John W. Dulles.



On page 103, it describes different rituals done in India. He writes: “Another little fellow has his hair matted in long filthy locks all over his head. Why is he not

shaved like the rest? His parents have made a vow to present his hair as an offering to the god at Tirupathy, and hence it is not cut or combed. At the next annual festival he will ask for leave of absence, to go and present his locks to the god in his temple.

shaved like the rest? His parents have made a vow **to present his hair as an offering to the god in Tirupathy,**

according to a vow they had grown long from their youth up.”

This is just a small sampling of sources collected from over 100 books. All these sources indicate clearly that the hair is an offering, not different than any of their other offerings.

The Legend of Tonsuring

One of the important revelations in recent years is the legend they believe that explains the reason behind tonsuring. The legend is featured prominently in literature published by the temple, as well as on their websites. A report has been made that collects over 75 sources (available upon request) where the legend is mentioned. This was not known when the *shailah* came up in 5764¹² (2004)!

The following is the version that appears on the “Go Tirupati” website, an informative portal detailing the temple's rituals, and timings for those rituals. (The bold letters appear so in the original source.)

Story behind Tirumala Hair Offering At KalyanaKatta

First devotee who gave her hair to god is Neeladri. Lord Sri named this hill by her name as Neeladri. When Lord Sri was hit by a Shepard on his head, a small portion of his scalp becomes bald. There is no hair growth over that place and this was noticed by Gandharva princess, Neeladri. She felt such a handsome face should not have any defect. Immediately she cuts a portion of her hair and implants it on his scalp with her powers. As hair is considered as the beautiful aspect of women, Lord Sri notices her sacrifice and **he said all the hair given to him by devotees in Tirumala or Tirupati belongs to Neeladri**. Giving our hair to god is the symbol of leaving our ego. The word “Talanalalu” is also came from her name.

So, why is this legend of such significance? It is not out of mere curiosity or to delve deeply into the silly reasons why

12. Some wanted to claim that this legend is a recent addition to their religion, but this is not true, as there are many sources older than 2004 discussing it (including a source from 1990, and a correspondence with an Indian professor relating that she remembers this legend from her college days in the 1950's).

the *goyim* practice idol worship. It is in order to gain an understanding of the act of shaving hair — is it an act of offering the hair, or is it symbolic of ego removal? Previously, every reference to this was hotly debated. Mere labeling it as an “offering” or “sacrifice” was not persuasive, as critics argued that translations could distort original meanings.

This legend expresses the authentic beliefs of the devotees in their own words. Clearly, they assert the existence of a recipient deity, proclaiming, “all the hair **given to him** by devotees in Tirumala or Tirupati belongs to N— [name of female idol, who is this idol's wife]”, stating clearly that the hair is indeed “given to him.” Yet, almost paradoxically, they also mention that offering hair is a symbolic act of ego removal.

This revelation underscores that those who claimed that tonsuring symbolizes ego removal were not mistaken. But this is only a small part of the story. While it does indeed symbolize ego removal, it simultaneously stands as a *korban*.

L'havdil elef alfei havdalos, in *yiddishkeit*, there is a distinction between the act of a mitzvah and its reasonings — *taamei hamitzvos*. *Taamei hamitzvos* do not necessarily define the mitzvah itself. Consider the *korban Pesach*. The act of the mitzvah at its core is an offering. The reason? The Torah says that Hashem “passed over” the Jewish homes in Mitzrayim. These two aspects do not conflict; rather, they emphasize different facets of the same mitzvah.

Similarly, when these devotees tonsure their hair, they are making an offering. **Why** are they making an offering? One reason provided is the symbolic act of ego removal. Yet, this symbolism doesn't detract from its essential nature as an offering.

L'havdil bein hatomei la'tahor, in *yiddishkeit* there is a similar pattern with *korbanos*. Numerous sources express that the essence of *korbanos* revolves around *hachna'ah* — subduing one's ego. The Alshich (*Tehillim* 51:18) as well as the Gra (*Mishlei* 21:27) write that the central role of a *korban* is for an individual to humble his ego and engage in *teshuva*.¹³ If such meaning is tethered to our *heilegeh korbanos*, it is a stark oversight to assume that offerings made to *avoda zara* work differently.

This point becomes even more clear when considering another recently uncovered detail, regarding the coconut offerings practiced at the same temple. The coconut offering consists of breaking a coconut, and part of the coconut being placed on a fire altar, while the remainder is deposited in a container known

So coconut is very special to Lord and coconut is offered to him. Next, the breaking of coconut symbolizes the breaking of the ego. The coconut represents the human body and before the Lord it is shattered – breaking the 'ahem (ego)' and symbolically total surrendering and merging with the Brahman – supreme soul.

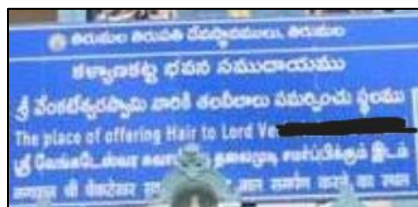
as the “Coconut Hundi.” This is obviously an act of offering, in the sense of a *korban*. However, the given explanation for this act is that the coconut symbolizes the head, and its breaking represents the shattering of the ego upon offering. This reinforces the idea that the symbolic reasons provided do not always capture the true essence of a ritual.

13. במשלי (כא, כז) כתוב “זבח רשעים תועבה, אף כי בזמה יביאנו”, ופירוש רבינו הגר”א: “כי עיקר הקרבן הוא שהאדם ישבר גאווותיו ורומו הנישאה וישוב לה’ מרוע מעלליו, אבל הרשעים שאינם שבים לה’ מדרכיהם הרעים גם קרבנם תועבה. ואף גו’- ומכל שכן שהקרבן גופא הוא בזימה שהוא גזול או משאר עבירה.”

כיצא בו בתהילים (נא, יט) כתוב “זבחי אלקים רוח נשברה גו’”, שכפשוטו [וכ”כ הרד”ק] אומר שענין הקרבן הוא ההכנעה. ובאלישיך שם כתב (נא יח): “כי הנה הזבח שהאדם מביא אין עיקרו שור או שה, רק מה שהאדם נכנע על ידי כך בעלות על לבו שכל הנעשה בבעל חי ההוא היה ראוי לעשות בו, והוא הזבח האמיתי כד”א אדם כי יקריב מכם, כי ההקרבה אמיתית היא האדם עצמו, ע”ל.”

The Sign on the Tonsuring Building

If there were any further doubts, a look at the prominent sign atop the Kalyanna Katta (tonsuring building) should most definitely clarify the purpose of tonsuring. Photographic evidence from 1954 proves that this text has been hanging for nearly 70 years¹⁴ with a picture as recent as August 2022 that shows that the sign still stands, though minor changes have been made.



Above, is the sign that stood for close to seventy years. Below, is the more recent sign were they wrote 'offering' in place of 'surrendering'.

So, what is the message? It does not reference any purification or ego removal process. Instead, it clearly emphasizes the act of gifting hair, akin to a *nosein umekabel*.

The original sign in English described it as the “Place of **surrendering** human hair to ... [name of *avoda zara*].” While “surrendering” in general may be open to different interpretations, in the context of surrendering an object, it unequivocally connotes giving — as clarified by the Cambridge dictionary under the entry “surrender.”

Just in case the word “surrender” is not clear enough, the more recent sign (first documented in 2022) reads, “The place of **offering** hair to... [*avoda zara*],” which leaves no room for any doubts.

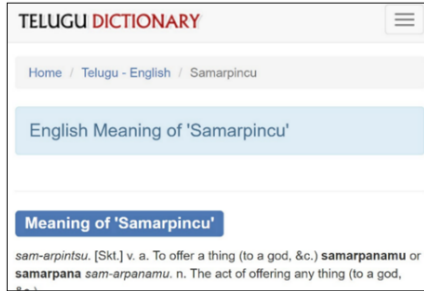
14. The original sign in 1954 is identical, just at the time there was only 3 languages (English, Tamil, Telugu), and only later they added the Hindi language as well.

Some have raised concerns that perhaps focusing on the English translation might not convey the intended meaning, given potential discrepancies in translation. However, with inscriptions in four languages, the message becomes direct and unambiguous. Alongside English (which has been India's official language since the British rule in 1858), the sign is also presented in Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi.¹⁵

In the Telugu language on the sign, the term "సమర్పించు" (pronounced samarpinchu) is used in the place of “offering” / “surrender”. It means “to offer a thing to a god.” A dictionary explains: “Samarpinchu signifies respectful offering, teeming with devotion.”

In Tamil, the word on the sign is "தலைமுடி," pronounced samarpanam. It translates to “dedication, votive offering,” and “giving, presenting to superiors.”

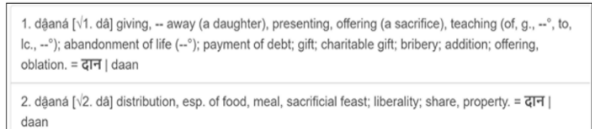
The Hindi term used on the sign is "दान" or “daana,” signifying “giving”,



Telugu-English Dictionary



Tamil-English Dictionary



Hindi-English Dictionary

15. Telugu is the most spoken language in the area, whereas Tamil is a nearby area, and Hindi is not spoken much there, but it is the most spoken language of India in general.

“presenting”, or “offering” often in the context of a sacrifice or *korban*.

All the terms used clearly align with the concept of sacrificial offerings.

Lee Weissman, the one who originally discredited Rav Dunner's testimony, was recently contacted and asked about the sign that was standing for several decades at the entrance to the tonsuring building. Lee admitted he was previously unaware of the sign and conceded that the wording unmistakably designates the hair as a *korban*, adding that no other terms could have emphasized its nature as a *korban* as clearly as these words do.¹⁶ In recent (recorded) discussions, Lee's position shifted significantly. While he previously believed that viewing the tonsuring as a *korban* demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding, he now acknowledges that he was just sharing his personal interpretations.¹⁷ He admitted that there are apparently

16. However, Lee suggested a conspiracy theory insinuating that perhaps the temple administration had a hidden agenda to magnify the act of tonsuring and thus inspire more hair donations, especially given the temple's potential financial gains from selling the hair. However, this notion falls flat on its face. The temple did not embark on the hair-selling venture until 1962, yet evidence solidly places the sign's existence as early as 1954. This glaring inconsistency in the timeline shows that this far-fetched theory is not correct. [It should be noted that even if this was true, as long as the pilgrims believe what the temple is selling them, it is still *tikroves*, וואס זיי האבן.]

17. Although Lee's concurrence does not make a difference, as regardless of his opinion, the evidence is quite conclusive, it is highly significant when bearing in mind that his testimony was one of the primary bases of the *mattirim*.


The main takeaway is that Lee simply expressed the impressions he had as someone who speaks Tamil and has casually visited the temple several years earlier. On the other side there were *shlichim* who went specifically to clarify these fine-tuned details, and were well-aware of the alternative interpretation, but based on their findings they concluded that the hair is indeed a *korban*. Today it is known that there is irrefutable evidence supporting the *shlichim*'s take, and it is also clear that Lee gave over much inaccurate information [i.e., he said nobody says name of avoda zara during tonsuring, that nobody brings hair to inner temple, that in the local language they use no word even slightly similar to offering to describe tonsuring, he was unaware of the legend etc.].

indeed people in India who consider it a *korban*. Ultimately, he affirmed that if faced with the decision, he would choose against using a *sheitel* made from Indian hair.

Can Impure Hair Serve as a Korban?

The insights we have shared thus far are merely a fraction of the vast trove of information available on this topic. As mentioned, there are dozens of written sources that unambiguously describe the act as a *korban*, leaving no room for shadowy interpretations. Furthermore, there are numerous dialogues with priests, all of which corroborate this understanding. For those wishing to further immerse themselves in this topic, there is a tremendous amount of information available for perusal upon request.

One fascinating point that warrants mention stems from ancient sources that suggest that the act of hair-cutting substitutes for the more extreme act of sacrificing one's head, reminiscent of the historical

things to them. Strange people! when their women go on pilgrimages to , they have their heads shaved before the image of their god; and the offering of the hair is equivalent to the offer of their heads; for heads, thank God, they dare no longer offer within the Company's territories."

A book printed in 1915, that explains that tonsuring is equivalent to offering the head.

Ancient Hindu literature stipulates that a man must be ready to offer his head in the service of God.⁶⁴ It is not known for certain when and why the Hindus began to offer the hair to the deity instead of the head. Presumably at some stage religious and fertility rituals somehow got associated with hair, which began to be offered as an alternative to human sacrifice. In

From the book "Sikh Religions and Hair" (Sidh, 2008) p. 43.

practice of human sacrifice in India. This further emphasizes the act's classification as a *korban*.

Another important point to mention is that the primary counter argument, asserting the hair is not a *korban*, is grounded in the belief that the hair, deemed impure in its religious context, could not serve as a *korban*. Yet, when this notion was presented to experts in India, the responses were varied. Many highlighted the sacrificial nature of the act

despite the fact that there is an impurity in the hair, while others refuted any notion of hair impurity.

Rav Eliyahu Posen of Bnei Brak recalled an insightful interaction with Rav Nissim Karelitz Zt"l, who had ruled that the hair is indeed *tikroves*. When presented with the argument of hair's supposed impurity and that therefore it is unlikely to be considered a *korban*, Rav Nissim countered that we cannot superimpose our own logic to explain their beliefs. This assertion — that the hair's impure status disqualifies it as a *korban* — originated not from priests, but rather from outsiders presuming to know the inner workings of the religion.

In this particular instance, the profound insight of Rav Nissim was actually affirmed. There is an important source recently found from Prof. Patrick Olivelle, Professor of Indian Religions at the University of Texas, who is recognized as one of the world's leading authorities on Hinduism. Olivelle grew

up as a Hindu and has penned more than 14 scholarly books on the subject. In his book *Language, Text and Society* (p. 338 - slightly

A significant and informative contradiction within the native tradition occurs, however, when what is said to be equivalent to feces is offered ceremonially to gods and goddesses (Hershman 1974). This happens, as we have seen, especially when young children are shaved for the first time. How can the same substance be regarded as excrement in one ritual setting and as a substance fit for the gods in another?

The _____ of hair that I discuss below may provide one clue. If at some level of its symbolic complex hair represents the _____ of its owner, then we can see how it can be at the same time both a sacred offering and excrement. Indeed, _____, are at one time said to be the most refined part of the body and of food, even the carrier of personality from one birth to the next,⁴⁵ and at other times bracketed with urine and feces as impure substances. A common way to indicate the depravity of a particular act, for example, is to say that if a man does it "he, in fact, offers to his _____, urine and excrement."⁴⁶

censored to maintain *lashon nekia*), he addresses the apparent paradox of hair being both impure and a form of sacrifice. He explains and resolves this seeming paradox, asserting unequivocally that the hair indeed serves as a sacrifice despite its impurity. There is no need to delve into his reasoning, given that our objective is not to immerse

ourselves in their *shtusim*. The takeaway, however, is clear: Hair can be impure while concurrently serving as a *korban*.

It is quite evident that the information brought to the *Gedolim* by Amir Dromi and Rav Dunner was incredibly precise, and thus the *psakim* of Rav Elyashiv, Rav Vosner, and Rav Karelitz were based on accurate information. The hair in question is considered by the Indians as a *korban*.

Tikroves Avoda Zara

To provide some clarity why the *poskim* ruled that the hair is *assur*, let us delve into the concept of *tikroves avoda zara*.

The Torah prohibits the worship of *avoda zara* in two distinct ways (*Sanhedrin* 60b). One is the manner in which this particular *avoda zara* is regularly worshipped, such as casting a stone to Markulis. In this case one is only *chayav* if it is done to the *avoda zara* that is regularly worshipped that way. Hence, if one casts a stone to an *avoda zara* other than Markulis, he is *pattur*.

Besides that, the Torah also prohibits doing any of the four acts of *avoda* done in the Beis Hamikdash (שחיטה, זריקה, הקטרה, והשתחויה), and this prohibition applies even to an *avoda zara* that is not worshipped that way. Meaning even if someone slaughters an animal to an idol that is never worshipped by slaughtering, he is still *chayav*.

Besides for the prohibition of worshiping *avoda zara*, by extension, the Torah also forbids deriving any benefit (*hana'ah*) from various aspects associated with it: *noi avoda zara*, *mishamshei avoda zara*, and *tikroves avoda zara*.

Noi avoda zara pertains to items enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the *avoda zara*, such as flowers placed around it. *Mishamshei avoda zara* refers to items instrumental to the act of worship itself, exemplified by a tray used for *ketores*.

Tikroves avoda zara commonly denotes an animal offered as a sacrifice to the *avoda zara*.

This prohibition of *tikroves avoda zara* is rooted in two *issurei de'oraysah*, according to the Rambam (*Hilchos Avoda Zara* 7:1). However, the Ramban (*Shemos* 34:15) and others understand that there is only one *issur de'oraysah*.

Tikroves stands out as more stringent than the other aforementioned prohibitions. While the others can be nullified (“*bittul*” — meaning, if a non-Jew degrades it before it comes into a Jew's possession, it is deemed permissible), there is no such leniency with *tikroves* (*Avoda Zara* 50a and *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 139:2).

The Gemara in *Avoda Zara* 51a states: עבודה זרה שעבודתה במקל, שבר מקל לפניו חייב ונאסר. This means if there is an *avoda zara* that is worshipped by using a stick (like shaking the stick before the idol) and one subsequently breaks the stick in its presence, the one who does so is *chayav*, and the stick becomes forbidden. This is based on the rationale that breaking the stick (שבירת מקל) is a derivative act (תולדה) of *shechita*. Thus, just as slaughtering (שחיטה) renders something as *tikroves*, similarly breaking the stick has the same effect.

There are two *chiddushim* mentioned in this Gemara:

1- The Gemara asserts that even if the customary practice is merely **shaking** the stick, if one breaks the stick, even though it is a slight variation of how the *avoda zara* is actually served, he is still *chayav*, and the stick is forbidden. Meaning if breaking the stick is the standard practice, the prohibition is more obvious.

2- The Gemara introduces the idea that just like an animal that is slaughtered to *avoda zara* is forbidden because it is

tikroves avoda zara, so too an object that had a derivative act (תולדה) of *shechita* done to it, is also forbidden because it is *tikroves avoda zara*.

How does breaking the stick resemble *shechita*? Rabeinu Chananel and the Meiri shed light on this by explaining the commonality as “cutting” (חיתוך).

Besides for the breaking of the stick, there are several other examples of acts that have cutting involved that are considered *toldos* of *shechita*. In the Gemara (*Avoda Zara* 51a) it is mentioned that harvesting of grapes¹⁸ is similar to *shechita*. Therefore, if the grapes were cut with the intention of worship to *avoda zara*, they are *tikroves*.

The Rishonim give many other examples:

- Cutting a *lulav* off a tree (*Meiri, Sukkah* 31b).
- Cutting a *hadas* (*Rokeach, Hilchos Lulav* 601, *Rashi Avoda Zara* 12b).
- Cutting a *shofar* (*Meiri, Rosh Hashanah* 28a).
- Kneading of dough (*Rashba Avoda Zara* 51b).
- Cutting of leather to make a shoe (*Raavad, Avoda Zara* 47a, *Raaviah* 1068).

In some of these cases, the resemblance to *shechita* is not so “clear cut.” This shows that the Rishonim understood this to be a very broad idea, and even seemingly far-out resemblances are included.

In the context of Tirupati, the custom is to worship the *avoda zara* by cutting the hair. Given that this is the regular way of worship, this is like the case of an *avoda zara* that is

18. The Ri Hazaken (*Avoda Zara* 51a) explains that this includes both removing a cluster of grapes along with a portion of the branch, as well as plucking a grape individually while leaving all other parts of the branch intact on the tree.

regularly worshipped by breaking sticks, in which the sticks are *assur*. So, when they cut their hair as an act of worship to the *avoda zara*, the cut hair is *tikroves*. The Shulchan Aruch and subsequent *poskim* do not include any additional conditions that are necessary for something to be *tikroves*.¹⁹ As long as the act of cutting is done with the intent of worship, the hair becomes forbidden, regardless of whether or not it is presented before the *avoda zara*.

If someone wishes to delve further into the *inyan*, there are several *maamarim*, *sefarim*, and *kunterisim* that explore every aspect of the halachic *sugya*, addressing all the *taynos* that are brought *l'hetter*. However, in this booklet, we are working with the assumption that if the facts are indeed as described, the *psakim* of Rav Elyashiv, Rav Karelitz, Rav Vosner, Rav Dovid Feinstein and *yblcht"u* Rav Moshe Sternbuch carry a lot more weight than any *chiddush* suggested by those of a lower caliber, particularly in regards to *issurei de'oraysah*, and even more so to an *issur* that may be *yehareig v'al ya'avor*.

19. The premise of most of the *heteirim* were based on the understanding that the cutting must be done with the intention of a *korban*. It so happens to be that from the *sugya* and the Rishonim and the Shulchan Aruch there is no mention of such a requirement, and there are many proofs to the contrary. The cutting does need to be a ritual (*avoda*), but nowhere does it say it must be done with the intention of *korban*. There is also *eidus* that this point was iterated in 5764 by Rav Elyashiv (The original *hetter* of Rav Elyashiv in 5750 assumed that the cutting was not an *avoda* at all). This point is important as far as understanding the *sugya*, and much has been written on this, but being that in India they clearly do it *l'sheim korban*, and every *korban* obviously is an act of *avoda*, there is no *nafka mina*, therefore we will not expand on this matter.

Part II – Indian Hair Around the World

Where Does Most Hair Come From?

After discussing the halachic status of the hair from temples, let's see how it affects *sheitels*.²⁰ Do most wigs really use hair from Indian temples? And even if they do, is my wig made from that hair? How can one be sure about where the hair is from?

Let's first take a look at the facts, then we will attempt to explain what this means *l'halacha*.

As mentioned, the temple in Tirupati stands as a very significant pilgrimage site, with approximately some 35,000 devotees tonsuring daily.²¹ Temple records indicate that

20. Although this essay focuses on *sheitels*, it should be noted that the same issues apply to hair extensions as well.

21. From an official temple document of the years 2016-2017. In 2017, 27.3 million people visited the temple, and 12.2 million did tonsuring. See graph on the next page (note that in India they use commas differently).

approximately 35% of those participating in the tonsuring ritual are women.²² This translates to around 12,250 women shaving their heads daily at this temple alone, amounting to over 4 million women annually.

Besides Tirupati, hundreds of smaller temples also practice tonsuring. According to expert estimates, there are approximately an additional 4 million women tonsuring their hair each year across all the smaller temples in India, besides the 4 million of Tirupati. Given that the hair from 3,000 women weighs about one ton,²³ this means the Tirupati

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Comparative MIS Report on different activities at Tirumala : Year 2016 & Year 2017					
S.No	Activity	Year 2016	Year 2017	Difference	% Diff (Increase/Decrease)
1	Darshan (in Nos.) דארשאן (אין נוס.)	266,08,928	273,19,897	7,10,969	2.7
2	Laddu Prasadam (in Nos.)	1036,02,106	1066,72,730	30,70,624	3.0
3.a	Annappasadam (Food Items : MTVAC, VQC I & II inside, Outside Q lines, Food Counters, etc) (in Nos.)	506,51,324	627,31,798	120,80,474	23.9
3.b	Annappasadam (Beverages : VQC I & II inside, Outside Q lines, Food Counters, etc) (in Nos.)	272,54,520	395,89,796	123,35,276	45.3
4	Tonsuring (Head Count in Nos.) טאנסורינג (האד קאונט אין נוס.)	125,30,732	122,37,368	-2,93,364	-2.3
5	Hundi Collection (Rs. In Crores)	Rs.1,046.28 Cr.	Rs. 995.89 Cr.	(-) 50.39 Cr.	-4.8
6	Revenue (Accommodation) (Rs. In Crores)	Rs. 85.91 Cr.	Rs. 83.76 Cr.	(-) 2.15 Cr.	-2.5
7	Occupancy Ratio (Accommodation) in %	101%	103%	2%	2%

High Lights :

- Highest number of dharshans took place @ 2,73,19,897 devotees compared to any other past 6 years
- Highest number of Sarva Darshanam took place @ 1,07,56,515 pilgrims compared to any other past 6 years
- Laddu prasadm sales crossed over 10.67 crore number which is an all time record.
- 6.27 Cr food pockets supplied to pilgrims in Yr 2017 compared to that of 5.06 Cr in the Yr 2016 which is 23.9% excess.
- 3.96 Cr beverages supplied to pilgrims in Yr 2017 compared to that of 2.72 Cr in the Yr 2016 which is 45.3 % excess.
- Highest number @ 67,33,320 SED pilgrims took darshan in the Yr 2017 which is 4.23% excess over that of Year 2016 @ 64,59,928
- Revenue collected thru Special Entry Darshan (Rs. 300/-) in Yr 2017 is Rs. 210 Cr compared to Rs. 201 Cr in Yr 2016, which is Rs. 9 Cr. Excess.
- Hundi collection (SriTT Hundi + eHundi + SED Hundi) @ Rs.995.89 Crores which is less by 4.8% than that of last year. Hundi Collection in the year 2016 was Rs.1046.28 Cr.

The daily number of visitors is also updated daily at Tirumala.org.

22. The temple management (TTD) answered the following question by email: “What percentage of people that tonsure every day/week/year are women? **35%.**”

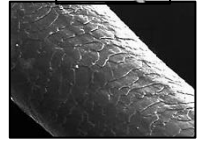
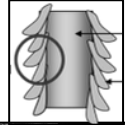
23. Based on many sources. For example: M. Balasara (who oversees the annual export of more than 50 ton of temple hair) said in an interview:

“According to Balsara, one ton of hair is equal to donations from about 3,000 women. Since the shaving ceremony and sale of hair is not limited to one holy site,

temple gets over 4 tons of wig-suitable hair every day or around 1,500 tons each year.²⁴

What's the Difference Between Remy and Non-Remy Hair?

In the vast world of hair products, two types of hair dominate the market: remy hair and non-remy hair. Every human hair strand is naturally enveloped by minuscule protective scales known as cuticles, extending from the root to the tail end, all consistently facing one direction. This unidirectional alignment of the cuticles is integral to the hair's health, shine, and overall appearance.



The standard for quality wigs is only “remy hair.” This premium hair type is meticulously gathered into a ponytail before being cut, ensuring that all cuticles remain aligned in one direction. The careful collection process preserves the

and 85 percent of the people in India are Hindu, those companies that export India's human hair don't foresee a shortage of temple hair anytime soon.”

24. Some have raised a claim that only 4% of hair exported from India originates in the temples. Let us explore the ramifications of such a far-fetched claim.

With the established knowledge that the temple hair is from over 4 million women each year, were it to be only 4% of the total hair exported from India, that would require over 111,781,250 women in India selling their hair annually. Hair grows on average 6 inches a year. Since the discussion is about hair averaging 15+ inches, one woman cannot cut more frequently than every 2.5 years. So, the Indian market must be made up of some 223,562,500 women who don't shave their hair in a temple, but rather sell it every 2.5 years!

The population of females in India is 597 million. This includes children, older people, people who aren't poverty stricken, and other who are obviously not selling their hair and not contributing to the market. If so, close to half of the population in India would need to be contributing to the non-temple hair market, and yet this seems to evade everybody's attention! There is absolutely no documentation or mention of this grand-scale hair market, and it was only somehow discovered by some yidden when the shailah of Indian hair came up. There are literally hundreds (!) of articles writing about the major hair market based on temple hair, and there is no evidence or sources mentioning that 96% of this major market is contributed by more than half of the population selling their hair!!!

natural texture, sheen, and longevity of the hair, making it a preferred choice for wigs.

However, not all hair retains this alignment. When hairs become misaligned, their cuticles face multiple directions, leading to a tendency to interlock and cause severe tangling. This misaligned hair is termed “non-remy hair” and is the primary material for cheap processed hair extensions. To combat the inherent tangling problem of non-remy hair, manufacturers resort to acid processing, stripping away the cuticles. While this procedure solves the tangling issue, it also robs the hair of its natural shine, resilience, and elasticity, as these traits are primarily imparted by the cuticles. To mimic the luster of healthy hair, non-remy hair is subsequently coated with silicone and other substances, offering a temporary gleam and smoothness. However, this facade is short-lived. After several washes, the silicone layer wears off, rendering the hair dull. This hair is primarily used in cheap hair-extensions that are changed often. It is not used much in wigs.

It is easy to determine if a hair is remy or not. The way to do so is to grip a few hairs (even while attached to the head) with one hand and slide the fingers of the other hand along the hairs, first in one direction and then in the other. One will notice that his finger slid smoothly when going in one of the directions (the direction that the hair grows, away from the head), while in the opposite direction, he encountered slight resistance. This resistance was a result of his fingers pushing against the cuticles. However, while sliding along the direction that the hair grows, the finger is sliding in the same direction as the cuticles, therefore they do not cause resistance. This is what happens with remy hair. But when one slides his fingers along a non-remy hair, he will not

encounter resistance in either direction. This is because it has been stripped of the cuticles.

Rav Belsky believed, based on the information available to him at the time, that most Indian hair did not originate from temples. His assertion was grounded in data about “brush hair,” also termed “non-remy hair.” This type of hair is gathered from individual strands that become detached during everyday brushing and combing. However, it has subsequently been confirmed that practically all *sheitels* are constructed using “remy hair,” which is derived from entire ponytails cut directly from the scalp. As mentioned, it can be easily determined if the hair is remy or not.

Given this understanding, the discussion regarding “brush hair” is irrelevant, and certainly cannot be counted as a רוב (majority) against the remy hair sourced from temples, as brush hair isn’t used in quality *sheitels*.

The Unraveling “Tail” of Hair Suppliers

In the southern regions of India, hair exportation is a massive industry. In the city of Chennai alone, there are over 300 hair exporters. Numerous companies were approached and questioned about their sources. The results of this extensive outreach were extremely revealing.

It was a unanimous agreement: Remy hair, is entirely (or 99%) from temples. In contrast, regarding non-remy hair, different companies cited varied statistics regarding the temple-to-brush collection ratio, yet they all agreed that there is no other source for remy hair besides the temples.²⁵

25. Copies of the email exchanges, and recorded conversations can be provided upon request. The following companies were contacted: K. K. Gupta, Preeti Gupta,

Given that the wigs are crafted from remy hair, the conclusion is clear. If remy hair primarily stems from temples, then there is little room for debate about the origin of the wigs. This is not just recent information. This was already established when the topic first stirred controversy in 5764 (2004).²⁶ The response, time and again, was consistent: Remy hair from India is invariably sourced from the temples.

Once it is established that all remy hair in India is sourced from the temples, then even if one would argue that temple-sourced hair is a minority in the broader export spectrum, that is irrelevant since it remains irrefutable that all the remy hair is temple-sourced.

The Distinctiveness of Indian Hair

Before diving into the prevalence of Indian hair throughout the world, it is essential to emphasize its unparalleled quality. Industry leaders and experts from non-Jewish corporations, are unanimous in their praise for the high standard of Indian hair, which is genetically similar to European hair.

The non-Jewish companies describe in detail the method used for recoloring Indian hair: showing how it can take on various brown and blond shades that look so real, that they're impossible to distinguish from hair naturally colored

Allure Hair Products, Shaan Hair, Iris Hair Emporio, Awesome Hair, Comfort Indian Hair Store, Shanmuga, Sona Devi Trading Company, R2R Export, Eagle Inpex.

26 Raj Hair Exports. As per an exchange conducted with Raj Hair in 2004 (the full exchange is available upon request), they exported 12.5 tons of remy hair, and 22 tons of non-remy.

They wrote:

"99% of Remy Hair comes from Temple... We would like to let you know that the people in the household do not sell their hair, they offer it at the temple."

in those shades. They explain a unique osmosis process it can undergo for lightening and recoloring. This is not a simple dyeing technique that offers a fleeting change by merely coating the hair's surface. Rather, this specialized method extracts the hair's dark pigment, facilitating a lasting and natural color change. Since this lightening technique leaves the cuticles intact, the hair is still considered to be “unprocessed.” So refined is this process that experts struggle to differentiate between naturally raw blond hair and hair that has undergone such treatment.

Yet, this well-acknowledged quality does not go uncontested. Some *sheitelmachers* claim they can differentiate between Indian and other types of hair, which prompts the question: When did they develop this expertise, especially if they allegedly don't work with Indian hair? Their responses to such questions are surprising, to say the least. One *sheitelmacher* based her expertise on a single encounter with an Indian, who had hair on her head. Another decided Chinese hair is the same as Indian hair (it isn't). Some even boldly stated that Indian hair fails to meet the quality standards for wig-making. This stands in stark contrast to the broader non-Jewish market, which is full of wigs labeled as Indian hair, with many happy customers.

It is clear that in the intricate realm of hair sourcing, one must navigate with a mix of curiosity and discernment, making sure that truths are not obscured by layers of misinformation.

The Misconceptions of Brazilian and European Hair

As mentioned prior, temple barbers tie the hair of devotees in a ponytail (using a rubber band) before shaving the head. Those high-quality ponytails are then exported to regions such as Brazil, Paraguay, and various countries throughout

Europe. There, the hair undergoes enhancement treatments to upgrade its quality and to lighten its color, so it resembles the local raw hair of these respective regions. Notably, these enhancement treatments employ advanced methods that leave the hair cuticles intact, ensuring the hair structure remains unchanged (remy hair). As a result, the ponytails retain the label of “unprocessed.”

In the *sheitel* industry, *sheitelmachers* or *frum* hair suppliers often travel to these regions to purchase ready-cut (washed and enhanced) ponytails from hair suppliers. These regions definitely receive a significant amount of Indian hair. It is widely acknowledged that much of the global hair trade is controlled by the mafia. Consequently, *frum* hair suppliers typically have to trust these mafia-controlled entities that the ponytails are not sourced from India or mixed with Indian hair.

It's important to note that no one ever witnesses these hair cuttings.²⁷ The only verified location to witness any such cuttings is in the Indian temples.

Is there a way to distinguish between Indian hair and hair from other sources? When some *sheitelmachers* claim that they can distinguish between the hairs, it is not really about the origin of the hair that they are identifying but rather the enhancement treatment it undergoes. There are different distinct treatments to upgrade and enhance the Indian hair. For instance, hair labeled as “Brazilian” often undergoes a

27. Although some *sheitelmachers* have made claims that they personally witness the hair cutting, upon further questioning, all of them admitted they never actually see the cutting. Instead, they assert that the hair's distinctively Brazilian quality is so evident that it is as if they had witnessed the cutting. This assertion has also been corroborated by the *mashgiach* of the Chanichei Hayeshivos *hechsher* (see later), who confirmed that any *sheitelmachers* who claim to see the cutting firsthand are not being truthful.

Keratin and Formaldehyde treatment. Formaldehyde (a dangerous chemical) is used without much regulation in Brazil. This treatment gives the hair a long lasting distinct, silky appearance.²⁸ It leaves the cuticles fully intact, and therefore the hair still feels raw to the touch and unprocessed.²⁹

In a revealing test preformed under the auspices of Rav Sariel Rosenberg of Bnei Brak, several *sheitelmachers*, who claimed they can distinguish high-quality Brazilian hair and Indian hair, were challenged. An individual procured hair directly from an Indian supplier and then had it treated with Keratin. This hair was then presented to the *sheitelmachers* by a *yungerman*, (who recorded these encounters with a hidden camera), expressing his concerns about Indian hair and seeking their expert opinion if the hair he had was problematic (which he claimed was meant to be used for his wife's *sheitel*). They confidently identified the hair as top-tier Brazilian (though one mislabeled it as Vietnamese), completely missing its Indian origin.

Questions emerge when scrutinizing hair alleged to be from countries outside India. Take Brazil as an example: By the

28. This treatment is also done to hair on the head, known as a “Brazilian Blowout”, hair straightening, and other similar names. It is used to make curly and frizzy hair straight for the long-term. This treatment originates in Brazil, and hence most of the hair sold in Brazil as Brazilian hair is treated with this.

29. This leads *sheitelmachers* to believe that the hair is locally sourced, “straight from the heads of local villagers.” However, as mentioned this can be done to Indian hair, and it still looks raw. Some *sheitelmachers* also argue that the hair must be local due to the musty scent and the appearance of what seems to be nits in the ponytails. In reality, the musty odor arises from storing the ponytails together for an extended period in sacks, particularly when some may still be damp after washing and treatment and has nothing to do with the origin of the hair. As for the nits, the treatments do not eliminate nits. If nits are present, they will be there even after the treatment. Moreover, what is commonly identified as nits may not actually be nits at all. Often, the appearance of nits is actually the result of the treatment process, as the ironing of Keratin leaves tiny balls that can be confused for nits.

time hair arrives at dealers, it has already been notably treated, with white hairs removed and sorted by length. This challenges the notion that the hair is provided in its raw, unadulterated state. Intriguingly, while a mere 3% of Brazilians have blonde hair, about 30% of the hair in the Brazilian market is blonde. While methods exist to lighten dark hair, this fact still conflicts with the assertion that the hair is untouched. Turning to Ukraine, it is puzzling to find an abundance of dark hair in the market when it's scarcely natural in the population. Dyeing is not a viable option to darken light hair either. Meanwhile, India boasts a vast supply of dark hair. These discrepancies certainly open up serious questions.

Independent Research

Numerous individuals deeply rooted in the hair business, backed by extensive research, have concluded that a vast majority of the hair on the global market is temple hair from India. This is data from some 60 independent sources confirming that most of the global hair trade is supplied by Indian temples.

The way hair is collected in Indian temples is unique — they shave it from the root. On the other hand, those who sell their hair (meaning,

95% OF REAL VIRGIN HAIR ORIGINATES FROM THE TEMPLES IN INDIA! THAT'S A FACT!

Women in Brazil, Peru, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Russia, etc. are **NOT CUTTING THEIR HAIR OFF!** There might be a few who do it due to financial distress, but not enough to supply so many different "hair" companies with 8-40" in multiple different patterns over and over again. Real virgin hair from those countries is extremely rare and extremely expensive! It's a simple case of supply and demand. Also, the collection methods in those countries can be very unethical forcing women to cut their hair off. The truth is **there's only one country on planet Earth** that has a large enough population to supply the hair industry, and that's India! Only India has millions of Hindu women who willingly stand in line at the temples, and sacrifice their hair because of religious beliefs.

FUN FACT: There are more Hindu women in India that believe in the practice of sacrificing hair, than the ENTIRE populations of Brazil, Peru, and Malaysia COMBINED! You ladies still think people selling so-called "Brazilian" hair for ridiculously low prices have real virgin hair that came from a Brazilian woman's head? We highly doubt it... **PROVE US WRONG AND WE WILL GIVE YOU FREE HAIR!!!**

From the website of IHS - an online store selling Indian hair. They claim that if you prove that Brazilian hair actually exists, they will give you free hair.

Arthur Ramlal, a consultant for the China International Hair Fair from the Netherlands, said that geopolitics, trade disputes and the pandemic have created a uniquely frustrating situation for hair vendors and buyers, be they corporations, small business owners or consumers.

"India had a very strict lockdown, and something like 80 percent of the hair for wigs and extensions come from India, mostly from the temples" where people donate hair, Mr. Ramlal said. Furthermore, he said, the political relationship between China and India "is not so good at this moment, with boycotts" and threats of impending trade wars.

An article in the New York Times (Sep. 2020) that explained Covid's effect on the hair market, where they casually mention how most of the hair is from the temples.

hair not from the temples) typically grow their hair long before trimming, and then sell shorter lengths, usually around 15 to 20 inches. Therefore, exceptionally long hair is highly probable to have originated from the temples.

Several secular books and documentaries delve into this topic. Alix Moore, with three decades in the hair industry, recently penned a guide, shedding light on the widespread sourcing of remy hair from temples and the rampant deception in the trade. Vince Selva, an Indian hair exporter and wig seller in Los Angeles, echoes similar sentiments in his writings. Rique Hailes, not just content with hearsay, journeyed to Brazil herself, trying to uncover the truth behind the “local” hair. She produced a documentary depicting her journeys and her verdict aligns with the majority: There is almost no local hair in Brazil, and Brazil is flooded with Indian hair. Another documentary produced by Chris Rock also comes to the same conclusions.

The book *Entanglement* (Tarlo, 2017, p. 102) gives an insightful peek. During interviews with Indian hair

dealers, one candidly commented on the challenges posed by the Rabbonim banning Indian hair and said: “Those rabbis made it very difficult when they introduced the ban on Indian hair. Nowadays, hair has to travel a very long way before it gets to them!” It is not inconceivable that some

dealers, one candidly commented on the challenges posed by the Rabbonim banning Indian hair and said: “Those rabbis made it very difficult when they introduced the ban on Indian hair. Nowadays, hair has to travel a very long way before it gets to them!”

A similar point is made in the study “*Commodity Chain Analysis of Hair*” by Suvir Singh. He

writes on page 7: “In 2003, there was a

and created a niche market for themselves as well(Tarlo, 2016). In 2003, there was a massive uproar in the Jewish community regarding the usage of Indian tonsured hair. The problem was that this hair was offered up to a non-Jewish God and constituted idolatry (Rai, 2004). This resulted in a mass burning of Indian wigs and increased the demand of Brazilian or Ukrainian hair. However, most of the hair is still sourced from the same location, just repackaged as Brazilian to sound better (Mead, 2012). The 2010

massive uproar in the Jewish community regarding the usage of Indian tonsured hair... This resulted in a mass burning of Indian wigs and increased the demand of Brazilian or Ukrainian hair. **However, most of the hair is still sourced from the same location, just repackaged as Brazilian to sound better.”**

There is overwhelming evidence, as well as countless articles that clearly point to the same conclusion, which is widely accepted by all those involved in the hair industry. In fact, there is no known expert who asserts today that only a minority of the hair comes from India.³⁰

30. It's worth mentioning that some have attempted to construct an argument that the majority of the hair is not from India based on manipulating the UN export data to project that only a minority of hair is from India. However, these conclusions are fundamentally flawed for several reasons.

Firstly, the UN data doesn't distinguish between remy and non-remy hair. Consequently, it's entirely feasible that while most of the world's remy hair comes from India (as experts assert), the bulk of hair in general, which includes non-remy types, may be sourced from other regions. Additionally, the UN's categorization often groups with hair various hair accessories like clips, trimmers, blow dryers, and even unrelated items like toothbrushes. This method makes it impossible to accurately gauge the precise quantity of remy hair based on these statistics. As a result, there is no reason to dismiss the consensus of some 60 global expert sources, based on information that does not contradict them.

Anyone interested in exploring the nuances of this argument can request a detailed essay that delves deeply into how to interpret the actual implications of the UN data and how it aligns with expert opinions.

The Halachic Requirements

Let us delve into the halachic implications of hair sourcing, in light of the aforementioned facts.

If a *sheitelmacher* obtains hair from a *socher*, who in turn receives it from some *goy* in Brazil, Ukraine, or elsewhere, and this individual asserts that the hair is local, what is the halachic status of the hair?

Before anything else, we must dissect the nature of the hair market:

Rov: If it is assumed that the majority of the hair is temple hair (as the world experts say), it is unequivocally prohibited. Halachically, a 51% majority holds the same weight as 99%.

Kavua: Even if only a fraction of the hair would come from temples, nevertheless, based on market operations, it might still bear the *kavua* status, meaning it remains problematic even if a small percentage of hair merchants sell Indian hair. Rav Elyashiv zt"l emphasized this point, noting that even if most of the hair in India does not originate from temples, the problem is not resolved. This is a complicated topic, and we will stay out of it since it isn't too relevant.

Price and Availability: The classic example regarding the principle of רוב is with ten meat shops: If nine sell kosher and one sells *treif*, meat found in the possession of a *goy* is presumed kosher. But this stands true only if the price and quality are uniform. If non-kosher meat is more affordable or available, the *poskim* write³¹ that the meat's source is deemed

31. כל זה כבר נאמר ע"י מרן הגר"מ שטרנבוך שליט"א בתשובות והנהגות (ח"ב סי' תיד, וח"ה סי' רס"א). מקור הדברים הם מדברי הר"ן על הרי"ף (חולין צה). בזה"ל: "אבל כשהוחזקה טרפה אסור לפי שרובן של גוים מן הטרפה לוקחין, דמוזלי גבייהו" עכ"ל. מבואר מדבריו שאפילו אם יש רק טריפה אחת, משום שהמחיר של הטרפה הוא יותר זול ממה שמוכרים בשר כשר, שוב לא הולכים אחר הרוב, כי יש להניח שהגוי קנה דווקא הטרפה.

to be from the non-kosher shop despite non-kosher being the minority.

In the context of hair:

- **Price:** Indian hair, especially when bought wholesale, is much cheaper. The temple gets it for free, and thus selling it at 100% profit. As mentioned, the Indian hair is of the same quality as the other hair.
- **Availability:** India uniquely offers vast quantities at a single source. A wholesaler requiring tons per month can either consistently source from temples or get stuck hunting for thousands of new donors every month. The latter involves traveling, bargaining, and logistical challenges, while the Indian hair is easily available.

Therefore, even if temple constitutes the minority, based on these factors, it is still problematic.

Ne'emanus of a goy: If a *goy* assures that hair is not Indian, their word doesn't bear halachic credibility since they're aware of Jewish aversions to Indian hair.³² Thus, according

וכן כתב התבואות שור (סי' ס"ג סעי' טו בשמלה חדשה, ואות כז בתבואות שור) שהדבר ברור שלא נאמר הדין ללכת אחרי הרוב אלא כשאין לגוי שום סיבה לקנות דווקא בשר טריפה, וזה לשונו: "ובמקומות שאין הגוים קונים כשירות כמו טריפות, אי משום דמוזלי טריפות לגבייהו, או מטעם אחר, מדינא אסור בשר מיד גוי אפילו ברוב כשר בעיר, דסתמייהו ממיעוט טריפות נהו" עכ"ל.

וכן כתב הפמ"ג סי' ס"ג שפ"ד ס"ק א, וזה לשונו: "ומיהו במקום שטריפות יותר בזול מן הכשירות, הרבה מאחרונים אוסרין אך דלא ראינו ממי לקח, דמסתמא מטריפה לקח" עכ"ל. וכן כתבו בספר יד יהודה (ק"י, יט), ובבדי השלחן (ק"י ס"ק נא). והנה על אף שהר"ן כתב את דינו רק אם הטריפה יותר זול, התבואות שור הרחיב הגבול, והוסיף שגם אם יש איזה טעם אחר למה נוח לו לגוי לקחת ממקום הטריפה שוב לא הולכים אחרי הרוב.

32. בענין נאמנות של גוי, עי' הרא"ש בתשובותיו (כלל ב' סי' ז') שכתב:

"ומה ששאלת אם גוי מסיח לפי תומו ואומר זה שאני מוכר הוא תפור בקנבוס, אני רגיל תמיד להורות שאין להאמינו. כי הוא ידוע לכל הגוים דחייטי ישראל מחזרין על הכפרים לקנות מהם מטוה של קנבוס לתפור בו כי אינו מצוי כמו הפשתן, הלכך איכא למיחש דגוי להשביח מקחו הוא אומר שהוא קנבוס ולא מהימנינן ליה."

וכן נפסק בטור ובשו"ע (יורה דעה סי' שב סעי' ב').

to halacha, all hair in their possession is presumed to come from the most affordable and accessible source.

When a *yid* purchases from a *goy* and places trust in the *goy's* words, it's crucial to understand that the *goy's* claim doesn't carry halachic weight (*ne'emanus*). Thus, it is meaningless for the *yid* to rely on such assurances. The hair's acceptability comes only when a *yid* can vouch for it based on firsthand knowledge, not merely repeating what has been told to him.

To put it simply: Given the prevalence of Indian hair, for a *sheitel* to be deemed acceptable, it requires a trustworthy halachic testimony confirming that the hair is not Indian. Any *sheitel* lacking this testimony is not to be used. Almost every single *sheitel* available today is missing this testimony. In other words, practically all *sheitels* are subject to this issue.

בענין אומן לא מרע אומנתו, יש הרבה מה להאריך, אבל כללו של דבר שכל כמה שיש קפידא ע"פ הלכה דייקא, ולא מצד המציאות, אין בזה נאמנות. חוץ מזה, כבר כתב הפרי חדש (או"ח תסז) בזה"ל: "וכמו שכתב הר"ן [בפרק] אין מעמידין דכל דאיכא למיקפד במילתא תגר לא מרע נפשיה ואף על גב דליכא למיקם עליה, ע"כ. ואף על פי כן אם הדבר ידוע שאחד מהם זייף הצוקר הרי הורע חזקתן של התגרים ויש להם דין שאר אנשים," כלומר במקום שיש כבר זיוף אחד, גם אם על פי דינא באמת יש החזקה של אומן לא מרע אומנתו, כל כמה שיש זיוף אחד, נפל כל החזקה לבירא. ובניד"ד, הדבר ידוע לכולי עלמא שיש זיופים, ותו לא מידי.

Part III – Hechsheirim

Chanichei Hayeshivos

What is the story with the hechsher of Chanichei Hayeshivos that claims to take care of the problem of Indian hair?

Several prominent Rabbonim in Eretz Yisroel have unequivocally stated that this *hechsher* cannot be relied upon. Rav Moshe Sternbuch went as far as to say it holds “less than no value.” There was a *kol korei* that cautioned the *tzibbur* against using this *hechsher*, and declared one can only use hair from foreign countries that is watched from the time of the cutting and onwards. This letter was signed by Rav Chaim Meir Vosner Zt"l, Rav Shimon Badani Zt"l, and *ybltc"v*, Rav Azriel Auerbach, Rav Sarel Rosenberg, Rav Yehuda Silman, and Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp. This point was reiterated by many other Rabbonim as well (the letters are brought in Part IV).

Why are the Rabbonim of the opinion that one cannot rely on this *hechsher*?

Until recently, Chanichei Hayeshivos was the only *kashrus* organization that gave a *hechsher* on human hair to determine that the hair is not from India. The responsibility of supervising hair sourced from 12 countries, as well as overseeing the production in Chinese factories, and

managing the activities of over 60 *sheitelmachers* worldwide, all falls under the responsibility of one *mashgiach*. It is noteworthy that the *mashgiach* mentioned that the *hashgocha* on human hair is just a small aspect of his many responsibilities, alongside various other *kashrus* matters he handles.

The *mashgiach* wrote in Elul 5778, “Nowadays, we travel **several times a year** to each country that exports hair.” He said in various conversations (all recorded and available) that he has the unique ability to differentiate between Indian hair and hair from other countries by smelling the hair. He claims that the *goyim* around the world have a מִירְתָּה, meaning they are always suspicious he could show up any day, which creates a *ne’emanus*, based on the idea of “*yotzei v’nichnas*” (coming and going). When he would arrive, he would take a hair sample, smell it, and identify whether it is from India or not.

This is the *mashgiach*'s claim how the *kashrus* operates (and this is aside from the many claims made by *sheitelmachers*, that the *hechsher* does not implement even these standards).

However, halachically speaking, this is not enough. There are numerous conditions as to when the rule of “*yotzei v’nichnas*” applies:³³

- It only applies when one *goy* works alone; not when there are two or more *goyim* (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dei'ah* 129:2).
- It does not apply if the non-Jew can lock the door, and

33. It should be noted that only items that the issuer is very easily mixed with the *hetter*, such as *cholov yisroel*, *stam yeinam* or fish (and likewise hair) require a *hashgocha* of “*yotzei v’nichnas*.” But products that are constantly manufactured in the same manner, there is no requirement *me'ikkar hadin* for a constant *hashgocha*, hence they do not follow all these *klalim* (see *Igros Moshe Yoreh Dei'ah* 4:1).

in essence can prevent the *yid* from entering the factories without permission (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 118:10 and 129:1).

- The “*yotzei v'nichnas*” rule does not apply if the *mashgiach* does not live in the same city (*Shu"t Maharshada"m*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 52, *Shu"t Minchas Elazar* 4:25).
- According to the most lenient opinion in the *poskim*, the minimum of *yotzei v'nichnas* requires a visit at least every week, and these *poskim* state clearly that less often than that is not considered *yotzei v'nichnas* (*Shu"t Divrei Malkiel* 5:142, *Shu"t Zekan Aharon*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 46, Rav Elyashiv quoted in *Yisa Yosef*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 6).

But besides for that, there is another major issue which negates the “*yotzei v'nichnas*” method. The whole premise of “*yotzei v'nichnas*” hinges on the *goy's* fear of being caught. In our case, this does not apply. Why? Because if the *goy* in China gets caught using Indian hair, he can argue that this is what arrived in the shipment from a dealer in Brazil or any other place and it is not his fault. The *mashgiach's* supposed sense of smell to differentiate between Indian hair and kosher hair, is something that the *goyim* don't claim to be experts in.³⁴

In truth, a factory owner in China³⁵ under this supervision explicitly said she herself does not know the smell of Indian hair at all, “only the Rabbi knows”. And this was even though she deals with Indian hair for non-Jews not under the *kashrus* supervision. So, besides the fact that her words

34. Though some do claim there's a distinct smell, they explained that it's not a reliable indicator, due to frequent washings, shampoo use, and chemical treatments that are used to eliminate all odors. Additionally, when mixed with other hair, it's even harder to detect.

35. The full recording of the conversation, in which the factory owner revealed many questionable practices of the *hechsher*, is available.

raise serious questions about the *mashgiach's* claim that Indian hair has a distinct smell, there's no “*Mirsas*” (fear) at all. If the *mashgiach* finds Indian hair with her, she can simply say she got it from dealers as European hair and didn't know how to distinguish it.

Moreover, checking based on smell is subjective. It is not absolute. So, the *goyim* would not be “fearful” anyway, since they can always argue that the *mashgiach* is mistaken in his sense of touch and smell and it's not Indian hair. Or they could claim the opposite, that they mistakenly identified the hairs and inadvertently introduced Indian hair.

Thus, even if we were to consider the account of the lone *mashgiach*, it's evident that such a *hashgocha* lacks any halachic validity. Perhaps these leniencies can be better understood with the knowledge that several trustworthy individuals relayed that the Rav Hamachshir is of the position that Indian hair is not inherently forbidden, rather it's only preferable to avoid.

It should be noted that there are many other *pikpukim* on this *kashrus*. A *kuntress* is available that discusses many more issues at length.

Millennium Wigs

Another *hechsher* that exists on *sheitels* is the *hechsher* on Millennium Wigs. While in-depth research is needed to fully investigate this matter, especially given the varying accounts heard from the *hechsher* regarding their specific approach, many have already raised significant reservations regarding the overall methodology.³⁶

36. Everything written here was after confirming the standards of the *hashgocha*, both with the Rav Hamachshir, and the *mashgiach* on site. Everything they said is

Although the Rav Hamachshir of Millennium does acknowledge that there exists a halachic question concerning Indian hair and that it is preferable to avoid it, however, he strongly rejects any assertion that it's *assur*.³⁷ Furthermore, the Rav Hamachshir believes the Chanichei Hayeshivos *hechsher* adheres to the basic halachic requirements, even though he personally advocates for a higher standard. This portrays a lack of serious concern about the core issue, because as explained above, the *hechsher* of Chanichei Hayeshivos has very low standards of *kashrus* (such as relying on the smell to identify hair etc.), and many *Gedolim* have paskened it to be unreliable. This stance underlines his perspective: his *hashgocha* isn't established to address a problem seen as fundamentally prohibited, but rather as a *chumra*.

We already mentioned the letter from the *Gedolei Haposkim* in Eretz Yisroel that when using hair from any foreign country, even one far from India, one can only rely on a *hashgocha* that starts from when the hair is cut (the complete letter can be found in Part IV). However, the *hechsher* of Millennium is not from the time of the cutting.

Yet, Millennium themselves seem to mislead people to believe that the hair is under constant supervision from the point of cutting.

documented. It should be noted that it seems that some inaccurate and misleading information was portrayed to some Rabbonim, which caused them to be unaware of specific crucial details, some of which are pointed out above.

37. In his own words, the Rav Hamachshir said (recorded) that being *me'orer* the issue of *tikroves avoda zara* to the *tzibbur* is not a mitzvah at all, as he claimed that many dozens of Rabbonim hold that there is no problem at all with Indian hair.

From: Millennium Wigs <info@millenniumwigs.co.uk>

Date: Fri, 20 Sep 2019 at 14:35

Subject: Re: new shaitel

To: [REDACTED]

The hashgacha does indeed start from the cutting stage. We go down to the actual site where the cutting takes place and then choose the hair.

Kind Regards,
Millennium Wigs

In their advertisements they write, “*Mashgiach temidi on site from start to finish.*” While this theoretically can be interpreted that there is a *mashgiach* from when the hair is acquired and onwards, on a simple level this is understood as meaning that a *mashgiach* is present from the very first step — the cutting of the hair.

MASHGIACH TEMIDI
ON SITE FROM
START TO FINISH

The certification relies on hair that is pre-washed and procured from non-Jewish vendors in Juancheng county, located in the city of Heze, China.³⁸ They oversee the hair from the moment of purchase and argue that it's obvious the hair is from the local area and is sold soon after the cutting.

However, many have raised issue with Millennium's approach, being that it has a fundamental oversight: it fails to monitor the initial critical step, which is the acquisition of hair from non-Jewish suppliers. Any subsequent supervision

38. In an official letter written by the *hashgocha*, it is explained how all the hair comes from collectors who collect hair but added that rarely a woman might come to the market to sell her own (cut) hair. However, for an unclear reason, in many conversations, the *hashgocha* is presented as if all the hair is from individual women selling it, and only when asked bluntly if they buy from collectors as well, it is confirmed that “some” comes from collectors as well.

The *mashgiach* (as per documented conversations with him) explained how he finds it unlikely that Indian hair would be transported to such a remote Chinese city, especially one located seven hours from the closest airport. [A side point, this is not accurate, and there is actually an active airport in that very city (Heze Mudan Airport), which facilitates numerous domestic flights, as well as another active airport (Jining Qufu Airport) just 40 miles away].

by the *mashgiach* after this point has little significance. This is akin to procuring meat at a non-Jewish meat shop, and then being cautious that from that point on it doesn't have a problem of *בשר שנתעלם מן העין*. Hence, according to the approach of the *Gedolei Haposkim*, the method employed by Millenium does not offer a viable solution.

In a report called “The Chinese Hair Industry Research — History and Present,” it states: “The temples then auction the hair to raise money, with a large percentage of the hair bought by the merchants in Xuchang and Juancheng.” This is just one of the many sources that clearly state that Indian hair is indeed sold in Juancheng, Heze.

It is growing more and more difficult to find this specific hair in China as people are not willing to sell their hair. Most of the main source countries for hair have relatively backward economies, with India now a choice location.

A large number of people in India do not regularly dye or chemically perm their hair due to their economic status. The large number of religious orders and sects mean many women travel to the various temples and dedicate their hair to the gods. The temples then auction the hair to raise money, with a large percentage of the hair bought by the merchants in Xuchang and Juancheng. The hair is then processed and exported to the rest of the world. Much like China dating back to the 1930's, India is a major exporter of raw human hair.

Part IV – Revisiting the Shailah

Having laid down the whole *sugya*, let us revisit the shailah, and see what the opinion of the *Gedolim* is.

As mentioned, many *Gedolim* previously *paskened* that the temple hair is *assur*. In the past some have claimed that the hair is not really given as a *korban*, but clear evidence shows that the hair is indeed given as a *korban*.

It was also clarified that the Indian hair is very widespread, and according to expert opinions most of the remy hair is from the temples. We explained how according to *halacha* one cannot assume that any hair is not Indian unless there is clear testimony of a Jew who sees the hair being cut.

All the research leads up to the conclusion that according to **Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv Zt"l**, **Rav Nissim Karelitz Zt"l**, and **Rav Shmuel Vosner Zt"l** all *sheitels* are problematic.

Along these lines, in the recent years several letters came out in Eretz Yisroel from leading *poskim* explaining that all the sheitels are problematic.

In the year 5777, a letter was written to explain that one should not be *somech* on the existing *hechsher*, and was signed by Rav Chaim Meir Vosner Zt"l, Rav Shimon Badani

Zt"l, and ybltc"v, Rav Azriel Auerbach, Rav Sarel Rosenberg, Rav Yehuda Silman, and Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp.

בעדה

להסיר מכשול צב"ז ממחננו

נדרשנו לאשר שאלונו: בדבר פאות נכריות אשר יש עליהם איזה-שהוא הכשר שאין בהם שיער מתקרבות עבודה זרה, האם ניתן לסמוך עליהם?

תשובה: כידוע, בשנת תשס"ד נדרשו רבותינו גדולי הפוסקים שבדורנו לבירור שאלת תקרבות עבודה זרה בפיאות נכריות המעורב בהם שיער אדם שהוכא מהודו, מרן הגר"ש אלישיב ומרן הגר"ש הלוי ואזנר זצוק"ל, ולהבחיל"ח מרן הגר"נ קרליץ שליט"א, והרבנים הנאונים חברי הבד"צ העדה החרדית, ובראשם הנאב"ד רי"ט ווייס שליט"א,

והעלו כולם לאסור פאות כאלו בלבישה.

וכתב מרן הגר"ש אלישיב זצוק"ל (בתשובתו מיום ה' סיון תשס"ד):

אסור להשתמש בפיאות נכריות העשויות משיער אדם שהוכא מהודו, עכ"ל.

ובמכתב נוסף (מיום י"א סיון תשס"ד כתב בחי"ד, ובקובץ תשובות ח"ג סי' קיח) וז"ל: "הדבר פשוט שאומרים בזה סתם עכ"ס לעבודה זרה שהרי עצם מטרת המתגלחים הוא לעבודה זרה", עכ"ל. ומרן הגר"ש הלוי ואזנר זצוק"ל כתב במכתב, וז"ל: **מי יודע אם גם זה גרם להרבה מקרים גופניים ונפשיים בבתי ישראל, עכ"ל.**

וכבר התברר בזמננו שבתעשיית השיער בעולם מצוי ריבוי גדול מאד של שיער אדם שמקורו ממאות מקדשי עבודה זרה בהודו, וקשה ביותר לברר מקור השיער שבשווקים,

על כן אסרו רבותינו כל שיער - שאין בירור גמור מהיכן הוא מגיע.

וכפי שעלה בדינו בבירורים, **אי אפשר לסדר בשום אופן השגחה על דבר זה, ואפילו שיער הבא ממדינות הרחוקות מהודו, יכול להיות מקורו בהודו.** וכמוכן שאי אפשר לסמוך על המפעלים, היבואנים והסוחרים האומרים שהם בעצמם גזו זה השיער במקומם. וחייבים ע"פ הלכה שיהיה פיקוח צמוד של משגיחים יודים ידאי שמים משעת גזירתו ועד סוף, דבר שאינו אפשרי כלל.

ועל כן דעתנו דעת תורה שכל ההכשרים שניתנו בזה אין בהם ממש ואין לסמוך עליהם, ושומר נפשו ירחק מהם.

והגנו מרגישים חובה בעצמנו למחות על כך שניתן הכשר מאיסור ע"ז על פאות האסורות ע"פ הלכות צניעות (ארוכות ופרועות ובמראה טבעי), ואשר כל גדולי ישראל אסרו לתת הכשר לפאות כאלו. וכשם שלא יעלה על הדעת לתת הכשר על בשר שהתבשל בחלב ולומר כי לכה"פ הוא נשחט 'כהלכה', כך אי אפשר לתת הכשר מעבודה זרה לדבר הנוגז את דיני הצניעות ואסור בלבישה, והרי זה גורם לביטול הצניעות של גנות ישראל.

ובזכות שבנות ישראל יזהרו ממכשולים חמורים אלו, נזכה במהרה לגאולה שלמה בב"א.

ועל זה באנו על החתום להציל רבים מעון, בין המצרים תשע"ז לפ"ק


משה מרדכי קארפ
ד"ר ז"ר חבנע חרדונית
מדינת


שמעון בעדני
חבר מועצת חבני החרדית


יהודה סילמן
אב"ד בני ברק


שריאל רוזנברג
ראב"ד בני ברק


עזריאל אויערבך
רב מוסטת בית גן


חיים מאיר הלוי ואזנר
רב אב"ד ורזון סאד

Similar *psakim* have been issued by other leading poskim in Eretz Yisroel, including Rav Shmuel Eliezer Stern, Rav Eliezer Dinner, Rav Tzvi Webber, Rav Nosson Kupshitz, Rav Yosef Binyamin Vosner, Rav Nachum Eisenstein, and many others.

Likewise, in the Chassidishe communities in the US, there have been several *asifos* of Rabbonim from various *kehillos* that discussed this issue. This resulted in Rabbonim from many *kehillos*



A meeting of Rabbonim regarding the sheitels in the Eisenstadt Beis Medrash, Boro Park.

(Viznitz, Bobov, Satmar, Skver, Ger, Belz, Stitschen, Vain, Skulen, Pupa, and more) declaring that the *sheitels* as problematic.

For the sake of clarity, we will explain the opinion of some prominent Litvishe Rabbonim:

Rav Dovid Feinstein Zt"l

After discussions we had with his son Reb Berel, as well as other close *talmidim*, it is clear that Rav Dovid held Indian hair to be *tikroves*. Even after hearing all of Rav Belsky's arguments, Rav Dovid maintained that the hair from India is prohibited. However, it seems he differed from Rav Elyashiv's stance on the issue of *kavua*. While Rav Elyashiv wrote that even if a minority of hair came from India, it would be

prohibited, Rav Dovid held otherwise.³⁹ However, this nuance does not change the core issue as it is known today.

Rav Yisroel Belsky Zt"l

As previously mentioned, the main reasons Rav Belsky permitted the use of the hair were based on specific understandings of the *metzius*. However, these details are no longer relevant. Rav Belsky actually said in a *shiur* (several months after the *shailah* surfaced), that he is not being *cholek* on Rav Elyashiv, and his main point *l'hetter* was mainly because he was of the belief that remy hair is not used for *sheitels*.⁴⁰

Rav Shlomo Miller

Recently, several Rabbonim (one of them being Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen of Lakewood) penned a letter to Rav Shlomo Miller asking him to clarify his opinion. They wrote that they heard rumors that he was *mattir* the hair. Rav Miller responded on 26 Nisan 5783 that he never was *mattir*, nor did he say *assur*, and he always said that it is better to wear a synthetic *sheitel*.

39. There is a *talmid* of his that is under the impression that everyone agrees that only a minority of the hair in India is from temples, and therefore he presents it as if Rav Dovid was *mattir*, but again being that the *metzius* is not like that, there is no such *hetter*.

It should be noted that assuming that the halacha of *kavua* doesn't apply here will result in a *chumra* when the majority is indeed from the *issur*.

40. Although he did say some other *svaros* in the *sugya* of *tikroves*, they were never said as a reason to be *mattir* it by itself. It is worth pointing out that in his *teshuva*, the points are written as a proposal to Rav Elyashiv, and ends off that Rav Elyashiv should decide based on this. In other words, Rav Belsky was never actually *mattir* using temple hair.

כ"ו ניסן תשפ"ג

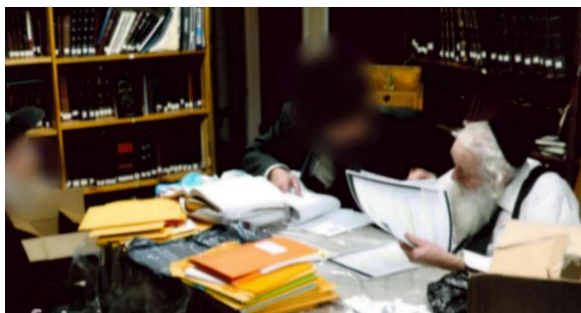
העולם לא התרתי, ולא אסרתי, ותמיד אמרתי יותר טוב ללבוש שייטל סינטטי,
שלמה אליהו מילר.

”מעולם לא התרתי, ולא אסרתי, ותמיד אמרתי יותר טוב ללבוש שייטל סינטטי,

שלמה אליהו מילר.”

Rav Elya Ber Wachtfogel

After having listened to the aforementioned concerns and reviewing countless documents, recordings, email exchanges and other evidence and testimony, Rav Elya Ber engaged in much personal investigation (this accumulated to many tens of hours). Eventually he instructed his family to switch to synthetic *sheitels*. Rav Elya Ber also turned to many Rabbonim asking whether they had a substantial *hetter* for this issue.⁴¹ After reaching out to many



Rav Elya Ber Wachtfogel Shlit"a reviewing documents regarding the metzius in India.

41. One Rav did write up a *teshuva l'hetter*, but after discussing it with Rav Elya Ber for many hours, this Rav pulled back from giving a *hetter*, and also told his own family to switch. Despite this, some are still making use of the various *sfeikos* he wrote up. A detailed point by point response was written to his original *teshuva*, that clearly proves how there is absolutely no basis to any of the *sfeikos* brought up, and answers all points raised.

Almost all of the points mentioned would be worthy of discussion in an alternative scenario where the *metzius* would be as presented in the *teshuva*. But in the case of the hair in India most of his points are irrelevant. For example:

1- The first half of the *teshuva* is a long argument trying to prove that *tikroves avoda zara* is only something that is always done in front of an actual *avoda zara*, and if it is sometimes performed without the presence of an *avoda zara*, this implies that it isn't *tikroves*, even in the case that there is an *avoda zara* present. After

prominent Rabbonim, the Rosh Yeshiva related **that he has yet to have heard of a valid hetter.**

When someone told him that he heard the Rosh Yeshiva holds that (only) *bnei Torah* should be *makpid* on this, Rav Elya Ber strongly disagreed and said he does not know of any differences between *bnei Torah* and simple people when it comes to things that are clear *issurei Torah*!

As we made clear until now, this is a *shailah* that depends on many fine-tuned factual details. If one is unaware of the nuances of *shailah*, then there is little authority to their opinion.

Besides for the names mentioned, there are many *Gedolei Torah* in America who have recently spent time investigating this case and concluded that this issue is a matter of serious concern and encouraged the publicizing of this issue to the *tzibbur*.

attempting to prove this point, he uses this as one of the main points of the *hetter*. However, besides there being many questionable points in the actual argument, it so happens to be that the hair in India is always cut in front of an *avoda zara* [see footnote 7], thereby making this whole *shtikel torah* completely irrelevant.

2- Another point he made was that since there are different opinions in India as to what *kavana* to have while tonsuring, therefore he assumes that some hair may be *tikroves* and some not. He therefore suggests that perhaps when there are different approaches, we should assume that the barber didn't have any specific *kavana* at all, and therefore the hair is *muttar*. However, there is zero evidence to suggest that there is a *machlokes* in India about what *kavana* to have. As demonstrated earlier, there are various points that explain different aspects of the tonsuring, but nothing that shows any difference of opinions. In fact, the way these different points are mentioned together clearly imply that there is indeed no *machlokes*. This is besides many other questionable points in the actual argument.

Part V – The Schar and Onesh of Tikroves Avoda Zara

In closing, we will write a few words explaining how serious this *issur* is, and also the great *s'char* promised to one who is *nizhar*.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Avoda Zara* 7:2) writes that *hana'ah* of *tikroves avoda zara* is forbidden because of the *issurim*: 'ולא ידבק בידך מאומה מן החרם' and 'תביא תועבה אל ביתך'. One who benefits from *tikroves*, is *chayav* two sets of *malkus*.

The Rama writes (*Yoreh Dei'ah* 157, 1) that these *issurim* are included in the *klal* יהרג ואל יעבור, and this point is reiterated by the Gra as well (see *Biur Hagra*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 157:17, 155:2). **This means that a person must give up their life before transgressing these *issurim*!**

In *Chazal*, we find a narrative that illustrates the insidious reach of *avoda zara* and its effects.

Here was a giant, a towering Tanna, from the greatest of his generation. Startlingly, this great individual spiraled downwards, distancing himself from the world of *emes*, and tragically ended up neglecting Torah and *mitzvos*.

To understand the root of such a bewildering metamorphosis, let us turn to the Yerushalmi (*Chagiga* 2:1, cited by Tosafos in *Chagiga* 15a). The Yerushalmi unveils a deeply unsettling detail. The mother of Elisha ben Avuya,

referred to as “Acher,” walked by *batei avoda zara* during her pregnancy and was lured by the enchanting fragrance of their *ketores*, which is forbidden because it is *tikroves avoda zara*. The Yerushalmi relates how that aroma was toxic like the venom of a snake, and it seeped into her body, permeating the soul of the unborn child within her.

It's truly awe-inspiring to reflect upon. The Yerushalmi pinpoints the origin of Acher's profound spiritual challenges to those fleeting moments when his mother appreciated the aroma of the *tikroves avoda zara*. This contains a clear message for today's *Yiddishe* mothers. In the choices she makes, even ones that seem inconsequential, lies the potential to shape the spiritual destinies of her offspring. *Midda tovah meruba*, and of course by choosing to stay away from *avoda zara*, a woman can pave a path of *kedusha* and *bracha* for her children.⁴²

In Shaylos U'tshuvos Min Hashamaim (from one of the Baalei Tosafos) it says: וְכָל הַמִּיָּקֵל בְּכָל חֲשֵׁשׁ עֲבוּדָה זָרָה מְקִילֵין לוֹ יָמָיו, וְכָל הַמַּחְמִיר מֵאֲרִיכֵין לוֹ יָמָיו וְשְׁנוּתָיו. "One who is lenient in all chshash of avoda zara, his days are shortened, and anyone who is machmir, his days and years are lengthened."

"Anyone who is lenient in a chshash of avoda zara, his days are shortened, and anyone who is machmir, his days and years are lengthened."

The *passuk* says: (דברים יג יח): "וְלֹא יִדְבַק בְּיָדְךָ מֵאֻמָּה מִן הַחֵרֶם לְמַעַן יָשׁוּבָה" "מִחֲרוֹן אָפֶיךָ, וְנָתַן לְךָ רַחֲמִים וְרַחֲמֶיךָ וְהִרְבֶּה כְּאִשֶּׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם."

The Rambam, as mentioned, includes *tikroves* in this *passuk*.

42. Rav Binyomin Rimmer (son in law of Rav Elyashiv) related that he heard on more than one occasion from Rav Elyashiv that one who is *nizhar* with the issue of *avoda zara* in *sheitels*, will surely see good children. It is very likely that this Yerushalmi was the source of Rav Elyashiv's statement.

"למען ישוב ה' מחרון אפו, כל זמן שעבודה זרה בעולם, כל חרון אף בעולם. נסתלקה עבודה זרה, נסתלק החרון", עכ"ל.

By getting rid of the *tikroves avoda zara*, we remove *charon af* from the world, and bring *rachamim* and *bracha* to the world.

In Parshas Mishpatim (23:24-26) it says:

"לא תשתחוה לאלהיהם ולא תעבדם ולא תעשה כמעשיהם כי הרס תהרסם ושבר תשבר מצבתיהם: ועבדתם את ה' אלקיכם וברך את לחמך ואת מימך והסרתי מחלה מקרבך. לא תהיה משפלה ועקרה בארצך את־מספר ימיה אמלא".

The Ohr Hachaim *hakadosh* and similarly, the Ramban, explain that the *pesukim* should be read continuously, that one who destroys *avoda zara*, is considered an 'עבד, and Hashem therefore gives *bracha* to his *parnassa* (לחמך), health (והסירותי מחלה) children (לא תהיה משכלה), as well as *arichus yamim* (את מספר ימיה אמלא).

The Medrash Aggadah learns the passuk in a similar fashion:

"...ואחר שתבטל ע"ז אזי תהיה שלם, ואז יקובל תפלתך, ועל זה נסמך עליו ועבדתם את ה', שכל מי שיהרוס ע"ז כאלו עבד את ה'." עכ"ל.

We see that getting rid of *avoda zara* is the source of *bracha* in all areas in life. This is not merely a *segula* from a *tzaddik*. These are "open *pesukim*" in the תורה הקדושה where the הקב"ה himself is promising *brachos*.

We should all have the *ko'ach* to be *omed b'nisyaon* and be *zocheh* to see העברת גילולים מן הארץ והאילים כרת יכרתון.