

This Week In Torah Naso part 2

In the late '60s, the musical "Hair" took Broadway by storm. It was extremely popular, and revivals of the show can be seen passing through town from time-to-time. In the title song, the chorus goes: "Give me down to their (hair)/Shoulder length or longer (hair)/Here, baby, there, mama/Everywhere, daddy, daddy/Hair (hair, hair, hair, hair, hair)/Grow it, show it/Long as I can grow it/My hair." Without fail, I find myself humming this as I read this week's *parasha*. I mean, how can you NOT!?!

What is the connection? The Nazirite vow—a promise/oath taken invoking God's name for a set period of time. During the duration of the vow, a person must not cut his or her hair, abstain from all grape products and cannot come in contact with a dead body—no matter how close a relation. Any violation and the clock gets set back and the vows duration begins again as a person shaves the head and offers a series of sacrifices. At the end of the vow's duration, the person offers a series of sacrifices including a sin offering to reenter the normalcy of the society.

There is a whole tractate of this in the Talmud. Rabbi Dr. Aaron Panken [of blessed memory] taught his students that even though we no longer perform these rituals, we hold on to them. The tendency for messianic yearnings in Judaism is such that one day the Temple will be rebuilt, and the sacrificial system would be restored. Thus, performance of this defunct Biblically ordained series of rituals would be reestablished and the Talmudic code would help us reestablish these rites. In the meantime, Rabbi Panken taught, Yom Kippur would annul these vows we would utter. The *Kol Nidrei* prayer is written in the future tense in order to absolve us from our inadvertent or deliberate utterances. To be blunt—we don't do the Nazirite ritual anymore... we can't, we don't offer God sacrifices because the Temple is in ruins... we don't because the rational intellect within us does not permit us to act in such a fashion.

Yet—there is some contemporary application for some of these rituals. Take example of the sin offering the Nazirite would offer at the completion of the vow. What sin could he/she have committed? Rabbi Jacob Milgrom [1923-2010] wrote the sin offering had 3 different purposes: 1. To cleanse the environment of sin; 2. To clean the body of an

inadvertent but normal type of sin—such as menstruation and nocturnal omission; 3. Milgrom borrows from 15th century Biblical commentator Isaac Abravanel who thought that sin offering was related to a self-centeredness that existed during the vow—oblivious to how the nazirite vow affected others, he/she may have hurt people without knowing it. For us, these are great lessons to hold onto--- purify the community of transgression and encourage people to repair broken relationships; work on ourselves so that our bodies can reflect the dignity that God has bestowed on us; and check in with those we love just in case we accidentally hurt them by word or deed without realizing it.

The Nazirite vows might seem like relics from a long bygone era. But like a revival of the musical “Hair”, it might spark some relevance in our lives and remind us of the need to hold on to the past. And for those who can grow hair—that is a bygone era in my life—remember the lyrics and feel free to do it: “Hair (hair, hair, hair, hair, hair) ...Grow it, show it.”