

Does Torah Allow the Cutting/Shaving of Hair or Beard?

“Do not round the corner of your head, nor destroy the corner of your beard.”(Lev.19:27)

Lev.19:27 is one of the pertinent verses for those who advocate strange sideburns and the belief that a man must sport a beard to enter the Kingdom. So let us take a closer look at this verse.

Whilst the above translation is a common translation of the original Hebrew, the terminology used is unusual: heads and beards do not have corners. Is a more understandable translation of the Hebrew text possible? The following is what the Hebrew says and I have inserted in red the English equivalents of the Hebrew terms used,

Do not *naqaf* (encircle, round, curl) the *peah* (corner, edge, side) of your *rosh* (head) nor *shakath* (mar, ruin, destroy) the *peah* (corner, edge, side) of your *zaqan* (beard).

Thus a perfectly legitimate alternative translation for this verse would be,

‘Do not round the edge/side of your head or destroy the edge/side of your beard.’

Other verses referring to head and facial hair are,

“They do not make any bald place on their heads, and they do not shave the corner (side/edge) of their beard, and they do not make a cutting in their flesh.(Lev.21:5).

“You shall not cut yourselves nor shall you make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.” (Deut.14:1-2).

Whilst both of these verses are concerned with defiling oneself by mourning the dead the earlier verse of Lev.19:27 does not make any reference to mourning the dead. So we are left with the questions,

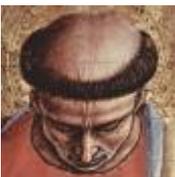
- What is meant by rounding the edge/side of the head or to shave bald spots?
- What is meant by destroying the edge/side of the beard?
- Are these verses, by default, commanding all males must have beards?

To gain a proper understanding of these verses we must consider the meaning of the terms in the context they are used and the culture of the ancient world in which the Torah was given.

Rounding the Edges of the Head and Shaving Bald Spots

Consider the following quote from the Greek historian Herodotus, (Circa 484-425 BCE).

“The Arabians acknowledge no other gods than Bacchus and Urania (the queen of Heaven) and they say that their hair was cut in the same manner as Bacchus’ is cut; now they cut it in a circular form shaving it around the temples.”



Could this be what the Torah is referring to? It is possible that the verses above are referring to a pagan custom that later became known as the ‘Bacchus Tonsure.’ Bacchus was a god of the Babylonians and Romans. However, this hair style is also found in ancient Egypt where it was worn by the priests of Osiris who was the Egyptian god of the dead, hence possibly, the reference to mourning in the Torah. Today this custom is still associated with pagan religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. It is also a custom still alive in Catholicism where some priests wear the tonsure as a sign of clerical authority. One has to wonder if this was the origin of the halo so common within Christianity.

Clearly the tonsure is of pagan origin, it produces a circle around the head and circles associated with worship are usually tied to either the occult or sun worship. The effect of the tonsure can be achieved without actually shaving the hair, all that is needed is a small circular cap placed over the centre of the head!!!

Whether we interpret the above verses in terms of mourning or not, the mere fact that what is referred to was a custom of pagan worship is sufficient cause for its prohibition under Torah,

And YHWH spoke to Moshe, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am YHWH your Elohim. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. (Lev.18:1-3).

YHWH repeats this edict just before Israel enter the land,

"Completely destroy all the places where the nations which you are dispossessing served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. "And you shall break down their altars, and smash their pillars, and burn their sacred poles with fire. And you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and shall destroy their names out of that place. Do not do so to YHWH your Elohim." (Deut.12:2-4).

The last sentence of this verse may be reworded as "do not worship YHWH your Elohim in this way."

Rounding the Edges of the Beard

There is less information about how the ancients styled their beards but the goatee beard was a style attached to the occult. For example, Baphomet the goat god was always depicted with a goatee beard as illustrated below.



The Baphomet is thought to have originated from ancient Egypt's 'Goat of Mendes' but this is not conclusive. The goat has always been synonymous with false worship, hence Mashiach describing the righteous from the unrighteous as the sheep from the goats in (Matt.25:32-33). This style of beard requires trimming or shaping the sides/edges of the beard and would fit the prohibition in Lev.19:27.

Are These Verses, By Default, Commanding All Males Must Have Beards?

There are those who interpret the command not to cut the sides or edges of the beard to infer that the Torah requires for all males to wear beards. In other words if you are clean shaven you are transgressing Torah and not worthy of YHWH's kingdom. Yet in some instances the Torah actually commands the beard to be removed. For example, concerning the purification of the leper the Torah says,

And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, But it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean. (Lev.14:8-9)

Here fascial shaving is essential for the transition from unclean to clean. What is more for the consecration of the Levites the Torah requires their bodies to be without any hair whatsoever,

... and do this to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of sin offering on them, and they shall shave all their body, and shall wash their garments, and cleanse themselves. (Num.8:7).

The following verses in Numbers are explicit: the Levite must be clean shaven in order to appear before YHWH (Num.8:10).

It would be illogical for the rites of purification and consecration of YHWH's priests to require a sinful procedure. It is even more absurd to think YHWH would command transgression of His Torah. A further example of YHWH commanding the shaving of a beard is His instruction to the prophet Ezekiel,

"And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's razor, and you shall pass it over your head and your beard. And you shall take scales to weigh and divide the hair.(Ezek.5:1).

So we can conclude from the above excerpts from the Scriptures fascial shaving cannot be a transgression of the Torah.

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