

לזכות
אליהו צבי יהודה בן רייזל
לרפואה שלימה וקרובה

Tzelem *Elokim*

Why we wear beards

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on the matter, trying to display his brilliance and erudition in finding a

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Why is it that when

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they include a large beard?”

(The Rebbe in a letter)





Halachic

The *posuk* says “לא תשחית את פאת זקנך—you shall not destroy the edge of your beard.” The reason for this, the Rambam explains,¹ is that removal of the beard was the custom of pagan priests.

Historically, Yidden always kept their beards intact. In more recent times, as people began following secular trends and cutting their beards, halachic authorities began giving *heterim* so that they would at least do it in a kosher framework—and in the following generations, what was initially a *heter* became the default in certain places. The Rebbe explains in a letter: “Those were places and times when—in the opinion of the *matirim*—this was the only way to save many Yidden from going to the other extreme, so they toiled to find a *heter*. Even in the case of great and clear prohibitions of the Torah we find such a concept, and even in *Torah Shebichsav*: the whole idea of *eishes yefas toar* is a clear *heter* in the Torah, and *Chazal* also explain the reasoning behind it. However, thankfully today that is not the case. Anyone who truly wants to [grow a beard] has the ability [to do so].”²

The Rebbe continued to make the point that, whichever opinion one

follows as far as the pure *halacha*, nobody denies the history.

“I was speaking with someone who gave similar arguments on the matter, trying to display his brilliance and erudition in finding a *heter*, and I asked him the following question (with the preface that he answer reflexively, without thinking): Why is it that when anyone, Jew or non-Jew, depicts the faces of Moshe Rabbeinu or Aharon Hakohen, they include a large beard? If regarding Aharon Hakohen there is a *posuk* in *Tehillim* that describes him with “a beard running over the mouth of his garments,”³ why is it that they illustrate Moshe Rabbeinu that way? [...] Being an honest person, he answered that when he imagines Moshe Rabbeinu—and not only Moshe, but any person in the past generations who followed Torah and mitzvos—it is obvious that he had a beard “running over the mouth of his garments,” without touching it in any which way.”⁴

The fact that this was the *minhag* throughout the generations is itself a powerful halachic reasoning, as the Tzemach Tzedek points out, but as far as the actual prohibition, there is a difference of opinions. The crux of the issue comes down to this: the Torah prohibition covers cutting the

beard with a razor (*destroying* the beard). Is there, however, a rabbinic prohibition against trimming the beard or cutting very close to the face using scissors (and certain shavers)? Some *poskim*, most prominently the Beis Yosef, are of the opinion that it is halachically permissible. Many others are of the opinion that it is rabbinically prohibited, and the Tzemach Tzedek holds that it is prohibited *min haTorah* (because it is *chatzi shiur*, and especially since there is also another prohibition, that a man may not fix himself cosmetically as a woman would). In fact, the Tzemach Tzedek writes that had the Beis Yosef seen a certain *psak* of the Rashba, who writes clearly about the prohibition, he would have changed his *psak*.⁵ According to the Rambam, who explains that a shaved beard looks like pagan priests,⁶ cutting one’s beard is *avizrai hu d’avoda zara*, an *aveira* for which one must be *moser nefesh*.⁷

In letters, the Rebbe acknowledges that there are *poskim* who rule that it is permissible to cut a beard in certain ways, and that there are many G-d fearing people who do so. Nevertheless, this doesn’t make the prohibition any less stringent for Chassidim or anyone who has a connection with the Tzemach Tzedek.

In a fascinating letter,⁸ the Rebbe explains how seemingly the very same action can have a profoundly different effect depending on the person, illustrating it with a parable: There are certain liquids that are dangerous poisons. If a person drinks one of them, the most radical measures must be taken to save him, especially if he drinks poison many times. There are other substances that will harm a person in certain parts of his body, but in other parts they will be benign, albeit useless. For example, the peels of potatoes or lemons will not cause particular harm if one ingests them, although they are useless and must be gotten rid of by the body as quickly as possible. But if they make their way into the lungs, they can cause tremendous harm.

The same is true of the *neshama*. Certain *aveiros* are poison for all *neshamos*, and although they do not harm a non-Jew, they do harm Yidden, on a spiritual and even physical level. Then there are other things that harm certain types of Yidden and not others; for example, if an Ashkenazi marries two wives he violates the *cherem* of Rabbeinu Gershon, but a Sefardi is allowed to do so.

This applies to beards as well: if any Yid shaves his beard with a razor, *Rachamana litzlan*, he transgresses five separate *lavim* every time he does so. But regarding shaving with certain powders or electric shavers—then it depends: for Misnagdim or *olamische* Yidden—those who are not connected to or are not aware of this *psak* of the *talmidei haBaal Shem Tov*—it is

analogous to the potato peels of the above example—although it is not a good thing for the person, and one must rid oneself of the issue as soon as possible, it is not dangerous. However, for Chassidim, or anyone connected with the *talmidim* of the Baal Shem Tov, it is forbidden and causes harm to his *neshama* and body (albeit not like using a razor), similar to the potato peels getting into the lungs—and one must make sure to resolve the issue immediately and heal the damage.

Spiritual Effect

In the early years of Lubavitch in America, in the 5700s and 5710s, choosing to grow a beard was a very difficult test, to a degree that is nearly impossible to imagine today.

No one—*no one*—in America was bearded; it was so rare that there were actual newspaper articles describing individuals who were found with beards. Those who kept them were looked down upon as vagrants; employers were skittish to hire them, and families were reluctant to make *shidduchim* with them. In the video of the Friediker Rebbe arriving in America, one sees quite a few Chassidim who are clean-shaven. In his autobiography, Rabbi Avraham Hecht writes about his older brother's decision to grow his beard in honor of his wedding in 5698, shortly before the Friediker Rebbe arrived: "A sight that had been so common in most of the European communities was considered peculiar in the new, modernized world of America. Passersby would sadly shake

In Tanach

While it is undisputed history that Yidden always kept their beards, there is also a clear proof from Tanach.

Dovid Hamelech attempted to make a treaty with the new king of Amon, Chanun ben Nachash. Instead of accepting the gesture of peace, Chanun seized Dovid's courtiers and clipped off one side of their beards and half of their garments. Hearing about this, the *possuk* tells us, Dovid "dispatched men to meet [the courtiers], for the men were greatly embarrassed. And the king gave orders: 'Stop in Yericho until your beards grow back; then you can return.'" (Shmuel II 10:5)

The Radak points out that if people cut their beards in those days, why couldn't they just cut off the other half and come home? Clearly, "it was not their custom to cut their beards, even with scissors... It's shameful to have a shaved beard, although this is the custom in these lands, lands of idol-worshippers." It was so shameful, the Tzemach Tzedek points out, that a war was begun because of it!

In Yirmiyahu (41:5) it mentions "shaved beards" as a sign of mourning—but that was because in those generations they knew how to cut around the five parts of the beard that are halachically prohibited.

For a more thorough halachic analysis, see: Sefer *Hadras Ponim Zokon*—Rabbi Moshe Wiener, Brooklyn 5738; 5766.

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THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES IN 5689. MANY OF JEWS FELT COMPELLED TO REMOVE THEIR BEARDS WITH THEIR ARRIVAL IN AMERICA.

Passersby would sadly shake their heads, murmuring with marked sympathy that the 'Hechts' son had obviously gone out of his mind'.

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In the letters and *sichos* encouraging people to overcome the ridicule, the Rebbe's focus isn't so much on the halachic aspect as it is on the tremendous spiritual effect it has on a person. In Zohar and *sifrei Kabbalah*, the beard is referred to as the *tikkunei dikna*, and it has "extremely lofty holiness."¹⁰ Furthermore, by the very act of wearing an untouched beard, one has the ability to draw down levels of *kedusha* and divine mercy that are utterly beyond this world.

Levels of Mercy

The Mishna says that when a person was given *malkus* (lashes) for transgressing an *aveira*, someone would stand nearby and read stern *pesukim* from Devarim as the *malkus*

was being administered. These *pesukim* were followed by the *possuk* from Tehillim, "והוא רחום יכפר עון ולא" ויהוה ירחם יכפר עון ולא"—He is merciful and forgives our sins; He does not destroy, etc." This is because the punishments of the Torah are not given to harm or take revenge; they are for cleansing from sin and returning the person to his former standing. The *possuk* ויהוה רחום has thirteen words, corresponding to the thirteen attributes of Hashem's mercy, which is what punishment truly is—an act of mercy.

The Tzemach Tzedek explains¹¹ that the words of the *possuk* "ולא ישחית—He does not destroy," are significant, because these same words are used in the *isur* of shaving the beard: "You shall not *destroy* the edge of your beard." By fulfilling the mitzvah of not *destroying* the beard, a Yid draws upon himself Hashem's mercies—"He does not *destroy*."

וּבֹ?

Rabbi Leibel Shapiro relates: "There was a certain *yungerman* who didn't have a beard, and his excuse was that his wife didn't want him to. He was from a real Lubavitcher family and yet he didn't have a beard. Once, at a farbrengen, the Rebbe called him by his name, told him to say *l'chaim*, and said, 'זאלסט פארלאזן א' בארד—you should let your beard grow.' Then the Rebbe added, 'אין אזא אופן אז ניט נאר די' ווייב זאל זיין צופרידן, נאר דו זאלסט זיין צופרידן—You should grow it in such a way that not only will your wife be happy, but you will be happy.' In other words, the Rebbe was saying, you're blaming it on your wife but it's really you..."

When we say that the unlimited mercies of Hashem are drawn down into this world, this usually means that the unlimited, infinite mercies are brought down into the finite and limited reality of the world, where it *inherits* the limitations of the world. Although Hashem's mercy is fundamentally unlimited, when it comes into the world, it becomes limited, so-to-speak—mercy within the context of the world. In other words, Hashem helps even sinners, but this is accomplished through *cleansing* them of their sins. A person receives the thirteen attributes of mercy of ויהוה רחום יכפר עון—but only after he is whipped, whether in a literal sense, with *malkus*, or with other types of suffering.

This is also the level of mercy that is accessed when a person doesn't destroy his beard. By not using a razor, the person draws down the

level of mercy that ensures that he is not destroyed—but it is mercy in the terms of the limited world. In Kabbalistic terms, this is referred to as the thirteen *tikkunei dikna* as they shine into *zèir anpin*.

However, there is also a higher level—the thirteen attributes of mercy themselves, as they emanate directly from *atik*, the infinity of Hashem. These are Hashem’s infinite “great mercies,” which help a person regardless of whether he deserves it or not; it is mercy on Hashem’s infinite terms—not in the terms of the world. The Tzemach Tzedek writes that someone who doesn’t touch his beard at all—who not only refrains from destroying his beard with a razor, but doesn’t cut it at all in any way—draws down this infinite level of mercy, which “sweetens all judgements,” and transforms *gevura* and severity into “pleasantness and sweetness.”

In the letters that the Rebbe wrote encouraging people to grow or keep their beards, the Rebbe referred to this passage of the Tzemach Tzedek very often, pointing out that based on this, it is in the best interests of a person to grow his beard. In a letter to Reb Nissan Nemenov about a young man who was touching his beard, the Rebbe writes: “...You must get his friends to influence him, especially since his older brother does behave appropriately. You should also explain to him that the thirteen *tikkunei dikna* correspond to the thirteen *midos harachamim*, and anyone who is not able to rightfully demand his needs from Hashem and must rely on Hashem’s kindness and mercy should leave his thirteen *tikkunei dikna* complete, *mida kineged mida*. Obviously, a young man who needs to figure out a *parnasa* and a good *shidduch* and so on, and, in general, needs the **mercies** of Hashem, must

be careful with the thirteen *tikkunei dikna*.”¹²

·*Parnasa*

Being that it is a channel for Hashem’s great mercies, the Rebbe would sometimes advise people to begin growing a beard in order for them to begin having *parnasa*. After assuring someone that ample *parnasa* would eventually come his way, the Rebbe writes that, “If you would have listened to me about the thirteen *tikkunei dikna*...and your spouse about a *sheitel*...you would have already seen a tangible change in your *parnasa*, evident even to the physical eyes, but what else can I do in these two areas other than speaking about it?”¹³

When people wrote to the Rebbe that they were hesitant to have a beard out of *fear* for their livelihood, the Rebbe pointed out that basic *emunah* in Hashem as the sole provider of sustenance forces the conclusion that fulfilling what Hashem wants can only assist in *parnasa*.¹⁴ When someone reported to the Rebbe that he had lost a job opportunity primarily due to his beard, the Rebbe replied that it was impossible that he truly lost out due to his beard: “Hashem is the master of the world in the literal sense of the word, and this also includes

America. In his holy Torah, which is an eternal Torah and living Torah, Hashem revealed that the beard is the thirteen *tikkunei dikna*...and it is impossible that a *bracha* should cause a lack of *parnasa*. It is only that we don’t have this type of knowledge, why this job was not good for him or his family, but the truth is that this makes no difference—since Hashem, Who watches over you personally, arranged that you should not work there, it was certainly not good for you **at all**.”¹⁵

Rabbi Asher Zeilingold of Minnesota related:¹⁶ “I was learning with a particular individual who did not consider himself a Lubavitcher Chossid, but who followed many *minhagei* Lubavitch. He was the regional manager for a department store chain, a very prestigious position. Recently, he had let his beard grow, in accordance with *halacha*, but his employer told him that he had to cut it off. He was obviously very disturbed by that directive, and he asked for my advice. I said, “In a few days I will be going to New York, where I am going to visit the Rebbe, and I will ask the Rebbe what you should do. However, I must caution you that I doubt the Rebbe will tell you to cut off your beard. In fact, I believe that he will surely say that you must





MAYOR OF S. PAUL, MN, GEORGE LATIMER, VISITS A LUBAVITCH INSTITUTION.

keep it.” He agreed to do whatever the Rebbe advised.

“I explained his situation in a letter. The answer was surprisingly quick. The Rebbe said that this man should tell his employer that the mayor of S. Paul has a beard. The mayor, George Latimer, was not Jewish; indeed, he was a Catholic of Lebanese descent.

“How did the Rebbe know this? A few months earlier, we’d had a celebration in our shul, and the mayor of S. Paul was invited to participate. He came, and we took several group pictures, which were published in the *American Jewish World*... That’s how the Rebbe knew about the mayor’s beard. He had carefully reviewed the newspapers, bulletins, and newspaper clippings—even the photo captions!—that I had sent him.

“The manager brought this point up to his employer, and he was allowed to keep his beard!”

Shidduchim

When it came to *shidduchim*, the Rebbe was equally clear. Starting a marriage is a period in a person’s life when they especially need Hashem’s *brachos*, which are drawn down

through an increased commitment to Torah and mitzvos—not the opposite; it is impossible that growing a beard and having access to the infinite mercies of Hashem will hurt someone’s chances in *shidduchim*.

To a girl who was hesitant about marrying someone with a beard, the Rebbe writes:¹⁷

“I trust that it is unnecessary for me to emphasize to you at great length that marriage is, in accordance with the text of the blessing, ‘an everlasting edifice’ (*binyan adei ad*), and that everything connected with it is not only of immediate and vital concern to the bride and bridegroom, but has a bearing also on their children. Therefore, it is self-understood that the maximum attention should be given to those factors which are essential to ensure a happy life partnership and an everlasting Jewish home. In such a case it is of no importance whatsoever to pay attention to the opinion of a neighbor or an acquaintance. An obvious example would be in the case where a deal is under consideration, involving a million dollars, when it would be foolish to pay attention to nickels and dimes, and thereby

overlook essential conditions which affect the whole deal.

“With specific reference to the matter about which you write in your letter and which seems to worry you, let me say this: When a young man has the strength of will and the strength of character to wear a beard, and has done so for several years, even at a time when wearing a beard was not such a popular thing as it is now, not only in Orthodox circles but even in circles which have nothing to do with religion, it surely shows great courage and conviction, as well as a loyalty to obligations—all of which are essential qualities to ensure a happy family life.

“It is surely also unnecessary for me to add that where religious boys do not wear a beard, it is not because they have the strength of character and conviction, rather because of the lack of them.”

When it did seem that it might hold up a *shidduch*, the Rebbe pointed out that if someone wasn’t ready to finalize a *shidduch* for the sole reason that the boy had a beard, this was an indicator that Torah and mitzvos weren’t important enough to them, and it might just be a good idea to call it off.¹⁸

Siddur Kiddushin

In the early years of the *nesius*, when the Rebbe still officiated at weddings as *mesader kiddushin*, one of the conditions that the Rebbe made was that the *chosson* and the father of the *kallah* grow their beards. As a *bochur*, Reb Sholom Ber Raskin once came into *yechidus* for his birthday and asked the Rebbe about a certain *shidduch*. After giving his approval, the Rebbe said: “I want to ask something of you. It would be fitting [*a glaiचे zach*] for you to let your beard grow. Your father had a beard, your grandfather had a beard, your great-grandparents had beards. [You



should do this] not because I want it, but because Hashem wants it.” Reb Sholom Ber then asked that the Rebbe agree to be *mesader kiddushin*, and the Rebbe replied, “If you do what I asked of you, I will do what you asked of me.”

About two weeks later, on a Friday, he received a phone call from Rabbi Hodakov. The Rebbe wanted to know whether he had agreed to the condition, and if yes, he should put a note on the Rebbe’s *shtender* before *Kabbalas Shabbos*. He replied that he had indeed accepted this upon himself.

A couple months later, when the Rebbe saw him in 770 with his newly grown beard, he said to him, “It would be fitting for you to travel to my father-in-law, at the *tziyun*, with the *tzelem Elokim*.”¹⁹

·Parental·Pressure

Perhaps the Rebbe’s strongest words were reserved for (religious) parents

who pressure their children to remove their beards. “It is uncomfortable for me to write about this, but being that this is for the benefit of a Yid, I am unable to remain silent. I must express my disappointment: Your son underwent a struggle—with himself and his surroundings—specifically in relation to his external image, and I had hoped that the first people who would be supporting him and helping him on this trial-ridden path would be his parents, especially his mother—his doting mother, as the expression goes. Especially since **everyone agrees** that a person’s external clothing have no intrinsic meaning, and no intrinsic importance, and are merely a social construct. The only ‘value’ is to impress other people; to resolve the question of ‘what will “people” say?’—and these people [who are judging] are not the types of people who have a comprehension in the meaning of life, who respect a man or woman who stands strong in their

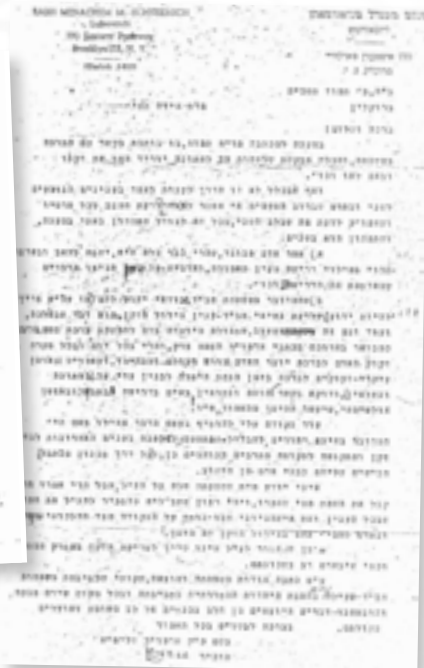
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opinions and swims **against** the tide. These are people who judge the book solely by its cover, whose only interest is that every single person should be carried along with the **crowd**. Furthermore, [by pressuring your son] you are shaking the self-confidence that a person naturally feels by living his daily life according to his own conscience, without being forced to violate his principles. And specifically in such a case, I was disappointed.”²⁰

The Rebbe illustrated it with a parable: If you have a building that has only one or two floors, it can still be a very nice building. If you decide to build a new floor on top of the existing structure—then it becomes an addition to the building. But once you complete the construction, if you would now go ahead and remove the ‘extra’ floor, it would ruin the rest of the building and even the foundation. Because once you added the top floor, the entire building is now connected. And all the more so if you destroy the first floor, it obviously will destroy the rest of the building.

“Every person is a **living organism**,” explains the Rebbe. “When dealing with any issue, one must consider this living person who is not a robot—not always will the general solution work for him... Your son decided to wear a beard because of an inner inspiration, and it is difficult to know whether this is the ‘first floor’ in the above parable or an ‘additional floor...’ As I’ve written in the past, his relatives and friends, and even more so his parents, should be encouraging and strengthening him as much as they possibly can, and I hope that his parents will do so, as this is for the good of their son and them as well.”²¹

A certain *bochur*, who came from a non-Chassidic family, was having trouble from his parents over his beard. They argued, “Why do you have to be different from your friends,



A SAMPLE OF LETTERS WHERE THE REBBE WRITES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF A BEARD.

and why do you want to look like the hippies?”

During a *yechidus*, the Rebbe spoke to him about it at length, explaining that a beard is very important in Yiddishkeit because it serves as a sign that someone is Jewish. The Yidden merited to leave Mitzrayim because they didn't change their names, their language, and their clothing. This showed everyone that this person was Jewish, *duh geit a Yid*. This is something that can be learned from the hippies, the Rebbe added: they don't change their names, language, or clothing, and that's what makes them unique.²²

The Rebbe said that there was another benefit to having a beard. If a bearded Yid goes into the store and begins looking at a newspaper or a non-kosher magazine, he suddenly remembers that he is clearly stamped, that anyone who sees him with his beard knows that he is a G-d fearing person. Therefore, it is not appropriate for him to be looking at such things, and he immediately runs off.

Recording his *yechidus*, the *bochur* wrote: “When I heard the Rebbe’s

last words I nearly fainted. I only recovered outside the Rebbe’s room... The reason I was so shocked was because the example the Rebbe had brought had just recently happened to me.”

Family Resistance

The Rebbe helped many *baalei teshuvah* and *mekuravim* navigate resistance to their growing a beard, whether it was friends, parents, or spouses, assuring them that such resistance was very normal, and gave personalized guidance on what to do.²³ In one letter, to someone who seems to be a recent *baal teshuva*, the Rebbe suggests growing a beard as a way to jumpstart his transition: “It is difficult to advise from so far, but in general it is human nature that a decisive change that is visible to all eases internal changes and the habituation into a new environment. As the expression goes in Yiddish, “To burn the bridges behind you,” and it is possible that in your situation, growing a beard will do this for you.”²⁴

Rabbi Chaim Yehuda Paldi was a prominent activist in Eretz Yisrael in

the fight against *aschalta d'geula* (the destructive notion that the *geulah* has already started, popular among certain Zionist groups) and *Mihu Yehudi*. His connection to Lubavitch began in 5729, when he spent half a year in America and experienced a miracle from the Rebbe regarding his health. By the time he went back home he was sporting a small beard.

To his surprise, his wife couldn't accept the beard. She said that it wasn't a religious issue; it was a deep psychological barrier that she was unable to overcome, and she said that she wasn't able to live under the same roof as him as long as he kept the beard. He managed to get her to agree to a seven-day postponement, during which he would be able to obtain the Rebbe's opinion on the matter. In his letter, he outlined his conundrum: on the one hand, he felt that because he hadn't been wearing a beard until then, he should give it up for *shalom bayis*; on the other hand, he wrote, his beard had deep roots in his soul, and giving it up could cause a decline in other areas as well. “Now—my request: in order to avoid

I do not know you personally, but being that I've heard a lot about you from your husband Mr. Yehuda, *sheyichye*, I take the liberty of writing to you the following lines, and I hope you will not be offended.

Following our correspondence by mail, I had the pleasant opportunity of getting to know your husband on his recent, longer visit here. Based on our conversations, during which he recounted the general story of his life, I was happy to see that he found tranquility through his increasing connection to an outlook based on our Torah, the living and true Torah, tranquility that also borders on and brings inner contentment—contentment of the soul.

Surely this process, which has brought tranquility, harmony, and contentment, is only possible with the assistance of the wife, the *eizer*, in the words of the *possuk*. This was confirmed to me when your husband told me about your assistance in general, and especially in the above.

It is superfluous to write at length about the critical importance of inner tranquility and harmony in order for a person to live a life worth living, especially these days, which are full of upheaval in the public as well as private life.

It is therefore my strong hope that you will continue in the future as you did in the past to stand at the side of your husband in this area of progress as well, for every living thing must surely grow and progress. Together you should both ascend in life according to the our living Torah.

However, I figured that I should write to you about this matter specifically, expressing my hope together with my encouragement and support—because sometimes a person encounters difficulties and so on in their journey, especially (as *Chazal* tell us) when encountering people who have yet to arrive at this level [of progress], and who try reassuring themselves in their own eyes and in the eyes of others by scoffing at and putting down those who have progressed more than them and have arrived at a higher worldview—our Torah and our belief. How much have our Sages enjoined us not to feel embarrassed by the scoffers, for they knew the nature of man that this test is not an easy one.

—I refer specifically to one particular matter, growing the beard. It seems that your husband,

sheyichye, began growing his beard during his stay here. Our Sages tell us that the beard is “the garment of Hashem” and it cloaks a person with the image of Hashem, as is told in several *Midrashim*. This was not easy for your husband when he was here (mostly because of the scoffers), and yet, without any outside influence, he began doing so. It seems that this enhanced his tranquility and recognition that he is standing on a strong foundation of Torah and mitzvos. This is one of the primary objectives of this letter, to request of you—and to express my hope—that in this matter, too, you will assist and encourage your husband to continue in this path in the future, with joy and tranquility.

I am aware that there are many religious Jews who do not grow their beards, and the differences of opinions are recorded in the *poskim*. But in this case we are not discussing only a halachic point of view, but primarily the results in your husband's personal life—and they are not only satisfactory, but **much** more than that. The beard has joined the other positive developments in his life in the past few years, including in his relationship with you and so on—increasing light and vitality into his life, which certainly enhances your life as well.

Clearly, there is no comparison between this achievement and ascension in life—and the scoffing of a few individuals in your area, which, as mentioned above, is essentially the self-justification of the scoffer. The easy way for him to quiet his own conscience, which bothers him from time to time, is to put down those who are above him, even in his estimation. There is surely no need to explain this at length.

Just to add another point—in this case it is a primary one—to quote the words of our Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek, that growing a beard is a special *segula* to draw down Hashem's *brachos* in abundance, in quantity and in quality. Thus, anyone who needs additional *brachos* from Hashem in matters of health, finances, and even more so spirituality, must surely very much hold on to this development. Especially since in all such matters we are promised that those who come to purify themselves are assisted from above, with great assistance.

(Igros Kodesh vol. 26 p. 155)



How Does He Look?

In 5739, after the shluchim to Eretz Yisrael printed Tanyas in Lebanon and Cyprus, the Rebbe gave the directive that a Tanya should be printed in the former capital of Turkey. In an interview with *A Chassidisher Derher*, Rabbi Yosef Gerlitzky relates: “We were told to first visit Reb Shneur Zalman Schmerling, whose son-in-law was the ambassador to Turkey at the time, and offer him to print it. If he wasn’t willing to go, we should go. He immediately replied that he was ready to go as soon as he had printing plates. A few days later, as we were preparing the plates, the question arose regarding the way to print the name of the city. At the time it was called Istanbul, but beforehand it had been called Kushta, so we called Rabbi Hodakov and asked what to do. Suddenly, I heard the Rebbe on the line. The Rebbe told him, and he relayed to us, “שרייבן ווי מ’שרייבט, און אן אנט, write it as it would be written in a *get*.”

It was quiet for a moment, and a few seconds later Rabbi Hodakov asked me (in Yiddish), “How does he look?” I didn’t understand the question, and asked, “What do you mean?”

Rabbi Hodakov said, “Does he have a beard?”

“Yes,” I replied, “he started growing a beard.” It was quiet again—Rabbi Hodakov was talking to the Rebbe—and then Rabbi Hodakov asked me, “How big is his beard?”

I was under such pressure, knowing the Rebbe was on the line, I just said, “Like Reb Binyomin [Klein].” Rabbi Klein had a small beard. Again, it was quiet, and I overheard the Rebbe speaking with Rabbi Hodakov, and then Rabbi Hodakov asked me, “Does he trim his beard?” I said that I didn’t know, next time maybe I’ll try to look...

Rabbi Hodakov finished off the conversation by saying that, obviously, everything said here must remain in utter confidence.

Later on, when I next visited Rabbi Schmerling, I casually asked him what he had spoken to the Rebbe about in *yechidus*. He told me that the Rebbe had spoken to him about growing a beard...And that’s why the Rebbe was asking if he had grown his beard, to see if he had done as he had asked.

utter disaster, I may have to decide to remove the beard, unless the Rebbe directs me differently. My special request is that the Rebbe consider the urgency of the issue and please send the answer by express-mail.”


The Rebbe sent him a telegram: “Regarding your question, the issue may resolve itself. Either way, any such problem should be directed to a local rav who will hear both sides and give his Torah-opinion.”

The Rebbe also sent a letter to his wife, where he asks her to stand by

her husband’s side, and reveals the shallowness of those who scoff. (See sidebar)

A few days later, Rabbi Peldi sent a letter to the Rebbe with the good news that, indeed, the matter had been settled. “I must emphasize,” he wrote, “that the Rebbe’s letter had an effect even before it came. On the very date that the Rebbe’s letter was written, my wife told me these words: “Listen, if the Rebbe would at least write to me a few words, that I should try overcoming my difficulties and that

It was quiet for a moment, and a few seconds later Rabbi Hodakov asked me (in Yiddish), “How does he look?”

this would bring me blessing, then...” At that point I felt that she was just looking for a way to back down with dignity, and then I was sure that such a letter would come. My wife was very touched by the great honor, and asked me to pass on her profound thanks to the Rebbe.” 

1. *Mishneh Torah Hilchos Avoda Zara* 12:7.
2. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 22, p. 192.
3. 133:2
4. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 22, p. 492.
5. *Tzemach Tzedek Yoreh Dei'ah* 93:6.
6. According to the simple reading of the Rambam, this includes trimming as well, see *Tzemach Tzemach Tzedek Siman* 93.
7. *Shemini* 5713
8. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 8, p. 87.
9. *My Spiritual Journey*, p. 22.
10. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 22, p. 490.
11. *Tehillim Yahel Or*, תרכו-תרכז.
12. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 9, p. 235.
13. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 10, p. 311.
14. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 22, p. 166.
15. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 10, p. 365.
16. Special “Guests” of Honor—*Here’s My Story*.
17. English Letter from 28th Teves 5722.
18. See *Igros Kodesh* vol. 24, p. 16.
19. *Mekadesh Yisrael*, p. 248.
20. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 9, p. 264.
21. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 21, p. 273.
22. On another occasion the Rebbe pointed out that many of the hippies were Jewish, and the very fact that they were distinct would be the merit for *geula*. See Living Torah program 124 *Jewish Counterculture*.
23. See, for example, Living Torah program 687 *Peaceful Solution*.
24. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 15, p. 249.

Jfigber · Protection

During the Yom Kippur War, Mr. Efraim Mol served in the IDF, stationed at Israel’s southern border with Sinai. Fearing a chemical attack from the Egyptians, his commanding officer warned that all soldiers must shave off their beards in order to tightly fit a gas mask over their faces.

Efraim wasn’t willing to shave off his beard so quickly and he persuaded the commander of his unit to allow him to ask the Rebbe if this was indeed a case of *pikuach nefesh*. “If the Rebbe says it is, then I’ll shave,” Efraim said.

The Rebbe’s response was not long in coming:



1. It is clear that there will be no poison gas attack.
 2. The soldier may take the gas mask, put it on, and demonstrate that the beard does not obstruct it. Those who hold otherwise either lack knowledge, or haven’t studied the matter in depth, because they don’t consider it all that important.
 3. The soldier should present the above points. If, however, these points are not accepted, then as an extra precaution, to satisfy their opinion, he may concede by carrying scissors with him and, if the need arises, he can remove his beard in one minute—the same amount of time it would take to put on the gas mask—if there is an attack of the type which they fear.
- P.S. During World War I, poison gas was widely used, and all the armies, including the British, used masks. Yet the Indian Sikhs, who fought in the ranks of the British, were permitted to not remove their beards, and they distinguished themselves in battle.

This should be transmitted to the soldiers, and it may be publicized immediately.

(*My Encounter* interview—*Here’s My Story*, *Shabbos Parshas Bereishis* 5775)