



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

VAYIKRA > Tazria

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April 9, 2016

Tazria

**Baldness, Purity and
Mr. Clean**



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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ABSTRACT

Why is Mr. Clean bald?

And what can his baldness teach us?

It can teach us the secret to purity, cleanliness, and living up to our divine image (the subject of this week’s Torah reading).

After all: God created a few perfect heads. The rest He covered with hair.

Hair grows on top of the head. Hair is an outgrowth of the mind. The mind represents the source, while hair represents the mind’s expression – it’s like the mind’s public relations firm. PR is nice, but it’s not the actual source product, merely its presentation and representation. The mystics teach that these are two forms of cosmic energy, direct and indirect empowerment.

Grass doesn’t grow on busy streets. Keep your streets busy and no unwanted grass, weeds, nor thorns will grow.

This is what we can learn from a commercial cleaning product. This is why Mr. Clean is bald.

It is incumbent upon us to always be and remain Mr. or Ms. Clean.

It is time to clean up the world and make it shine like the bald orb that it is.

This is a bald statement.

BALDNESS, PURITY AND MR. CLEAN

1. Why are Babies Bald?

The saying goes (oft repeated by bald people): “God created a few perfect heads. The rest He covered with hair.”

Truth be told, God pretty much created every newborn baby with a perfect head. Sure, some babies are born with a bit of fuzz, but even those adorable little things are essentially bald.

Why *are* babies bald?

I will get to that in a moment, but it occurs to me that even the rare hair that some babies are born with often falls out and grows back. And babies certainly don't have hair on their cheeks. So why do adults? Indeed, one sign of adulthood and maturity is hair growth.

And, often the sign of old age is baldness (or at least thinning hair).

Speaking of baldness, brings to mind the famous bald icon – perhaps the most famous bald personality in the history of bald personalities – the one and only, Mr. Clean. Perhaps in the gleam and polish of his glistening head, we may learn a thing or two about baldness and, more importantly, lessons to live a more productive, meaningful and soulful life.

2. Mr. Clean: The Origins

On its Mr. Clean website, Proctor and Gamble, the multinational manufacturer of family, personal and household care products and the parent company of Mr. Clean products, animates the origins of Mr. Clean with a cute video clip¹ accompanied by this copy:²

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djxTSTEqSDI>.

² <http://www.mrclean.com/en-us/about-mr-clean>.

Where did Mr. Clean come from? Many stories have been told. Some say he was a genie, others a magician ... But this is the story that's most often told.

It was on a warm summer night that a farmer opened the door to his farmhouse to check on his crops. When he opened the door a glint of something caught his eye. He looked down, and there he found a small, but sturdy baby with a bald but shiny head. The couple soon adopted the young Mr. Clean and set about teaching him the importance of helping others.

Mr. Clean learned that being there when someone needs a helping hand is a simple way to make life a little easier and more enjoyable.

As Mr. Clean grew, so did his love of cleaning. He would often surprise his Mom by cleaning the entire house while she made dinner. He would scrub every inch until it was shiny and bright ... a job that took a lot of muscle. And his cleaning went beyond the home. He had the cleanest school desk that anyone has ever seen.

With years of cleaning, and researching around the world under his belt, Mr. Clean wrote the Encleanapedia. When his book wound up in the hands of a company called Proctor and Gamble, they knew they had found the person to revolutionize cleaning. For Mr. Clean, it was a dream come true.

That, my friends, is how you develop a brand character. The line of copy most pertinent to us is: "He looked down and there he found a small, but sturdy baby with a bald but shiny head. The couple soon adopted the young Mr. Clean and set about teaching him the importance of helping others."

Wittingly or unwittingly, in its branding and marketing of Mr. Clean, Proctor and Gamble hit upon a divine truth: a clean, bald, shiny head is intimately connected with helping others.

Long before Mr. Clean, we learn this lesson from the Torah, believe it or not.

3. Parshat Tazria

This week's Torah reading, *Parshat Tazria*, opens by relating the laws and wonders of childbirth, the purity and cleanliness of newborn life.

The Torah then progresses to discuss the signs and laws of various states of spiritual purity and impurity. First, the Torah discusses signs of impure lesions on one's skin.³ Then the Torah discusses the signs of impure lesions (*netek*) on one's head and elsewhere.⁴ And then the Torah says this:

If a man loses the hair on his head,⁵ he is bald – he is clean.⁶

A rudimentary reading seems to correlate baldness, the lack of hair, with cleanliness and purity.⁷ Indeed, in modern times, Mr. Clean's perfectly bald and gleaming head is intrinsically connected to and indicative of his cleanliness.

This intrinsic connection between hairlessness and cleanliness in general, is found in the beginning of next week's Torah reading which describes the purification process of a (spiritual) leper:

And it shall be, on the seventh day, that he shall shave off all his hair: his head, his beard, his eyebrows; indeed, all his hair, he shall shave off. He shall then immerse his garments and immerse his body in water, thus becoming clean.⁸

What exactly does baldness, and hairlessness in general, have to do with purity and cleanliness?

As we well know, the laws of purity/impurity, clean/unclean that the Torah discusses are, more than anything, spiritual states.

³ Readings 1-4 in this week's Parsha.

⁴ Readings 5-6.

⁵ That is, toward the back of the head (Negaim 10:10).

⁶ Leviticus 13:40.

⁷ See Rashi ad loc for a more depth explanation of this verse. See also Likkutei Sichot vol. XXVII, pp. 92-100.

⁸ Leviticus 14:9. See also Sotah 16a.

The Torah is not talking about getting physically clean, which would require a simple shower. The Torah is talking about reaching a state of spiritual purity and soulful cleanliness.⁹ What intrinsic connection can there possibly be between the lack of *physical* hair (baldness) and attaining *spiritual* cleanliness? And what lesson would such an intrinsic connection hold for us in our personal lives?

4. A Cryptic Talmud

The connection between physical hair and spiritual cleanliness may be explained by understanding a rather cryptic segment of the Talmud.

Rabbi Banaah used to mark [burial] caves.¹⁰ When he came upon the [burial] cave of Abraham,¹¹ he met Eliezer, Abraham's servant, who was standing at the entrance. He said to him: "What is Abraham doing?" Eliezer replied: "He is lying in the arms of Sarah, and she is gazing fondly at his head."¹²

This is cryptic indeed. What does it mean, Abraham, our grandfather, the first Jew, lying in the arms of his wife Sarah while she gazes fondly at his head? It sounds romantic, but the Talmud is no romance novel. What is the Talmud trying to teach us with this mysterious passage?

To understand this, it would behoove us to get a little mystical.

⁹ As the Rambam states (end of Laws of Mikvaot): It is a clear and apparent matter that the concepts of purity and impurity are... not mud or filth that can be washed away with water. Instead, the immersion is a Scriptural decree and requires the focusing the intent of one's heart... one who focuses his heart on purifying his soul from the impurities of the soul, which are wicked thoughts and bad character traits, becomes purified when he resolves within his heart to distance himself from such counsel and immerse his soul in the waters of knowledge.

¹⁰ Where people were buried, for purposes of purity.

¹¹ The Cave of Machpelah in Hebron.

¹² Bava Batra 58a.

5. Mystical Meaning

The mystics¹³ teach that the human being, created in the Divine Image, reflects the Divine structure of all of existence, which is shaped like a human being. Our makeup evolved from the spiritual makeup of the Primordial Man (*Adam Kadmon*) and the Supernal Man (*Atzilut*). By studying the structure of our own human form, we may come to understand and study the structure of the cosmos, and the very makeup of the Divine Image - as Job said, "From my flesh, I shall perceive God."¹⁴

Just as the human being has a physical brain and heart, arms and legs, intellect and emotions, so too does the cosmic structure of creation and existence have such characteristics, albeit in a metaphorical, abstract and ethereal sense. Our physical beings mirror their roots in their spiritual archetypes.

The human corpus reflects the cosmic corpus of existence completely, down the tiniest minutia. The head, brain and intellect possessed by a human being reflects the cosmic head, mind and intellect of existence. And so too with hair: a human being's hair reflects and is molded after the cosmic hair of existence.

What exactly is cosmic hair?

Metaphorically speaking, the mind is a nucleus, hair its outgrowth. Everything you do has a core nucleus, and every core nucleus naturally and indiscriminately gives off energy.

There are two types of energies in existence: 1) direct energy that flows from its source. This energy resembles and has a strong connection with its source; 2) indirect energy that is very constricted and has little resemblance and a weak connection to its source.

¹³ See Ohr Hatorah, Vayikra, vol IV, p. 1050; Derech Mitzvotcha, Mitzvat Teglachat Metzora (p. 104b).

¹⁴ Job 19:26.

Direct energy is analogous to the energy flow from the mainframe of the brain into the body's organs, its arms, legs, chest, etc. Because the brain is directly connected to (for example) the hand, the hand may do wondrous things, like writing, drawing, playing the piano, molding sublime sculptures, etc. For this reason also, when the hand is injured, the brain lights up and screams in pain. The connection is direct and intrinsic.

Indirect energy is analogous to the constricted energy flow from the mainframe that is the brain into the body's hair. The hair root growing out of one's head is alive (although the hair itself is not) and it causes hair to grow (as a matter of fact, hair never stops growing), as well as cause us to feel something when hair is pulled. Unlike a hand, however, hair could never write a novel, draw a painting, mold a sculpture, or play the piano. Why? Because the hair's energy comes from the brain in a very limited and contracted way. (This is why hair is dead.) The nerves in the hair, like thin strands, carry a minimalistic amount of energy. For this reason, when one gets a haircut, it is painless. Because the life force in the hair is very limited.

Direct energy is complete and acute. The nerves that travel from the brain to the limbs and organs flow freely. Therefore, a cut to a limb is registered in the brain and is extremely painful. Indirect energy is residual, a byproduct of the brain's natural energy. Therefore, a haircut is completely painless. The energy in hair is dull. Its nerves tiny.

Just as these two forms of energy are found in the human being - brain to limb; brain to hair - they are found as well in the cosmic human form of creation and existence.

There are things in life that are energized directly, like limbs which then may accomplish wondrous and magical things (write poetry, paint beauty, play music), but which also feel acute pain. But then there are also things in creation that are energized indirectly, like hair atop a head, which is unfeeling and numb, without the ability to create wonder, nor to feel pain.

Direct energy is, well, direct and predicable. It has the advantage of being focused and directed to its task. It does not waver, wander off, or end up in the "wrong neighborhood." Indirect energy, however,

is unpredictable – due to its weak connection to its source, it could (and does) end up anywhere, in clean places or unclean, in healthy places or unhealthy. It's like unprotected nuclear energy; it could end up in the right hands and become a nuclear power plant, or it could end up in the wrong hands and end up a dirty bomb.

How to control this unintended and indirect energy? Or, to put it another way: How to tame one's unruly hair? How to style one's wild locks?

This is what the Talmud is trying to teach us.

6. Abraham and Sarah

Abraham represents *chessed*, the infinite and unfettered flow of loving-kindness. When Abraham's energy flows directly to his Jewish descendants (born to him through Sarah), it is predictable and safe. But Abraham is also *av hamon goyim*, "the father of many nations," and his energy is flowing everywhere and to everyone indiscriminately. For example to Ishmael (born to him through his Egyptian concubine Hagar). Thus, the question arises: how to channel and focus that energy into positive places?

Says the Talmud: *Abraham is lying in the arms of Sarah and she is gazing fondly at his head.* Sarah, Abraham's wife and the mother of every Jew, cradles that energy, protects and guides it, focusing and gazing upon Abraham's head, his energy source, to ensure that its energy flows to clean and pure places.

The Talmud is teaching us here that we, Abraham's offspring, are blessed with infinite power and energy and potential. Our task is simple (though not at all easy) – to channel that vast power into all the right places.

And we do this by controlling our hair so to speak – our outgrowths, the unintended consequences of our thoughts, speech and actions.

We need to make sure that even our extremities – the small, seemingly inconsequential things we do (like our hair) is directed toward productive and virtuous objectives.

7. Personal Lesson: Be Mr. (Or Ms.) Clean

“Who you are” is not always “what you do.”

“Who you are” is analogous to your source energy, your brain. “What you do,” what you accomplish, is analogous to your hair, the outgrowths of “who you are.”

Perfect cleanliness and exquisite purity is when these two things – “who you are” and “what you do” – are one and the same.

In life, there are intended consequences and unintended consequences. The secret to remaining clean and pure is to focus and control your actions in such a way that the *unintended* consequences are few and far between. And those unintended consequences, if they do sprout, are positive, pure and productive.

This is baldness, so to speak – cutting and trimming the negative unintended outgrowths of “what you do” to reveal “who you are.”

This may best be articulated and internalized by looking at the baldness of a newborn child.

A newborn baby, the holiness with which our Torah portion opens, is purity squared, cleanliness personified. There is no duality of “who I am” and “what I do.” Even the little bit of fuzz upon the baby’s perfect little head is so soft as to be a part of the child itself; there is no schism between the baby and the baby’s consequences.

Only once we “grow up” (some may say, “grow down”), does “who I am” and “what I do” begin to fray and split into two different things.

When “what I do” becomes impure, unclean, different than “who I am,” it is time to get bald, to shave off everything residual and secondary.

This is called cleansing – erasing and deleting and removing everything that is not your core head, shaving off the proverbial hair to be reminded of the brain within.

The secret to purity, to being Mr. or Ms. Clean, lies in baldness.

[This, by the way, is not advocating going bald. May God bless all of us to keep our hair as long as possible. It simply is addressing the metaphorical benefits of a clean head].

Some things in life are energized directly, while others are energized indirectly.

When things are bald, with no hair covering the source, it is much easier to control the purity and cleanliness of the message. Like a newborn baby, there is very little, if anything, standing between its purity and the world.

But as the newborn child grows, so do residuals and outcomes. And that is when we need to take good care of our “hair,” keeping it clean and pure from spiritual dirt.

8. Conclusion

Grass doesn't grow on busy streets.

This saying, some claim, was conjured up by bald men to feel better about their insecure selves.

But it's true.

A great way to stay bald is to stay busy. A great way to stay clean is to be cleaning; to be proactive. The best way to ensure that your mind doesn't generate residual impurity is to use your mind constantly for good. The best defense and offense.

Grass doesn't grow on busy streets. Keep your streets busy and no unwanted grass, weeds, nor thorns will grow.

This, my dear friends, is what we can learn from a commercial cleaning product. This is why Mr. Clean is bald.

It is incumbent upon us to always be and remain Mr. or Ms. Clean.

It is time to clean up the world and make it shine like the bald orb that it is.

Yes, this is a bald statement.

Shabbat Shalom!

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