

INDIAN HAIR Still a Problem in Our Sheitels

(Source numbers are in parentheses, and listed at the end.)

Surprisingly, the issue with Indian hair used for idol worship is still a problem in Jewish wigs. Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l and Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch shlita have ruled that wearing wigs from idolatrous practices is forbidden for all Jews. This is because it's benefiting from a product used in avoda zarah, which the Gemara clearly states is forbidden (1). Frum researchers who recently looked into the topic estimate that 99.99% of natural hair wigs for sale contain Indian hair (13) Additionally, much of the hair that is not Indian comes from deceased people (6).

Source of the Hair:

India is the largest exporter of human hair in the world, selling 36,000 lbs of hair per year (3). Those sales bring in about 5 million dollars to the Hindu Indian Temples annually (4).

30 to 40 million people per year visit the Indian Hindu temples to sacrifice their hair. The largest of the Hindu temples, Tirumala, have 40,000 visitors each day coming to offer their hair as a thanksgiving offering to one of their Hindu gods (a process called tonsuring) (3). It says in the Hindu scriptures that one should sacrifice their hair at least once in their lifetime, and Hindus usually do it much more than that (9).

The Hindu worshipers kneel on the ground, bending their heads forward while their hair is shaved, and the hair is then sorted by length before it is bagged and safely stored under lock and key. This "black gold," as it is called, is very valuable and remains heavily guarded until it is sold by e-auction to wig and hair extension companies (4).

From there, the hair usually gets shipped to China first. It is dyed, bleached, curled, straightened, and otherwise processed in China (4,2). The wigs are often manufactured in Chinese factories commissioned by European wig companies (4). The product is then shipped to Europe where it goes through further processing before it is sold with a label saying "European made" or "European hair." The European hair companies do not publicize their products as "made in China" since it would be detrimental to the high-end image they strive for (4).

Logically, one can think about it this way: How many bald European women do you see? Hardly any. Women only shave their hair for one of two main reasons: as a religious offering or because they are starving and as a last resort will sell their hair to put food on the table. Europe is not a starving economy, therefore it doesn't make sense that millions of European woman would shave off their precious hair to make a little money. Yet, countless wigs are manufactured each year and all of them contain only European hair? How is that possible?

The Tirumala temple alone employs 9,500 full time workers and 10,000 additional laborers to help process the thousands of pounds of hair they collect (4). 85% of the Indian population are Hindu, so hair donation is not in short supply (11). Indian hair is very similar to Caucasian hair in texture and silkiness, making it a desirable material for European wigs (8).

To quote a non-Jewish news source on Indian wigs, "The long and uniformly trimmed hair is called remy hair, which has a big market in Europe and the US, where it is woven into wigs" (8).

To quote another article: "India exported \$190 million-worth of hair and related hair products in 2009-10 and could more than double that to \$470 million by 2013-14, the Department for Commerce and Industry says.

...The U.S. imported over \$900 million-worth of wigs, false beards, eyebrows, eyelashes and similar products in 2010, while the U.K. imported \$79 million-worth and China and Hong Kong \$71 million. Indian hair is in high demand for wig making and hair extensions because it is both 'thin and strong,' explains Chennai-based CurlsNWaves, one of the country's largest exporters of hair. The company also processes hair, stripping it of color and re-dying it"(9).

One must remember that avodah zarah is never batel, one hair in a wig containing thousands of hairs will render the whole wig forbidden (12).

It is a reality that India is supplying wig companies throughout the world with the raw material they require in the amount they need. No other country in the world shaves off their hair on a regular basis. Only starving countries might opt to do such a thing, but their citizens have to possess hair that is similar to Caucasian hair to be useful. China used to be a large supplier of hair from live people, but due to improvement in the Chinese economy in the last 20 years, it is less common to find women willing to part with their treasured hair (7). Hair from deceased people, however, is plentiful in China and throughout the world (6).

A second common source of hair is from deceased people (6). It is a way for people burying the body to make money on the side. Aside from the repulsive fact that the hair came from a dead person, halachicly speaking, using hair from a dead person is assur: "The Shulchan Aruch follows the stringent position of the Rashba, and forbids deriving benefit from hair taken from a human corpse"(6). Deceased people do not object when their hair is shaved before burial, making it a convenient source of wig hair.

How Do You Know the Wig is Kosher?

There is an important point to be made. We don't rely on non-Jews to reassure us that the meat we are buying is kosher, we personally slaughter and place a seal on the meat ourselves to guarantee its kashrus. In fact, non-sealed meat that was handled

by a non-Jew is forbidden to be eaten if a Jew wasn't present during that handling (10).

Why are we relying on a non-Jew's word that the hair is not Indian hair or corpse hair? It is known in the wig industry that hair traders commonly lie to buyers in order to make sales (4 and 5). Furthermore, it is known through first-person experience that the Chinese manufacturers will say anything to make a sale (2). They also paste on "rabbinically approved" labels to all types of shaitels, regardless of their origin (2).

The hair used in our wigs passes through many hands before it gets to a Lakewood or Brooklyn sheitel store. Anywhere along that line, a non-Jew could easily lie about the origins of the hair. Remember, all the sheitel stores will only want to purchase the hair if the non-Jewish hair seller assures them it doesn't contain even a little Indian hair.

As far as kosher certification of wigs are concerned, the buyers for wig manufacturers have the ability to easily fabricate where they obtained the hair from. Here is a quote from a book written in 2016 about the wig industry:

"Of course, rabbis are not hair specialists, and confronted by the disorienting sight of crates of hair of different length, shade and texture, they are reliant on what wig manufacturers tell them" (4).

Some of the kosher certifications may indeed be valid, meaning the rabbi traveled to the wig factory and saw all the hair being cut from the heads of living Chinese or Russian people with no other hair being mixed in to supplement the wig. But how is someone to know which kosher certification rabbis actually did that, and which are relying on the claim that it doesn't contain Indian hair?

Remember, only some of the wigs sold in sheitel shops have kosher certification to begin with. Many hold no certification of the hair contents, meaning there is no Jew overseeing any part of the production (4).

There is one more point to consider. Hair coming off of a person is not uniform in length (4). In a wig factory, the raw hair is organized in crates by color and length (4). That means that many people's hair ends up in one crate, and even one batch of Indian hair in that crate could end up in many wigs.

Synthetic wigs can be a problem because many also contain real hair to make the wig appear more natural (source #1, towards the end of the article).

Alternatives To Wigs:

There are very beautiful styles of scarves and hats available today. These are the traditional head coverings that all Jewish women wore throughout our generations until the last 200 years when sheitels entered the picture.

We are circulating this informational flier so Jews will gain knowledge about how today's wigs affect our mitzvah observance.

For more questions, please email: EmesOfWigs@gmail.com

To have this article sent to your inbox, or to view recorded Torah lectures about this topic, please contact us.

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Sources Listed:

Please see below this list for the actual articles without pictures.

- 1) "Wigs and Idolatry" by Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman, shlita for Ohr Somayach. <<https://ohr.edu/1698>>.
- 2) Interview with a shaitel macher with 18 years of experience.
- 3) Culture Unplugged Documentary video called: "Human Hair Trade" Filmed in 2005.
- 4) "Entanglement: The Secret Life of Hair," a non-fiction book by Emma Tarlo about the wig industry. Published in 2016.
- 5) "The Secret World of Black Market Hair Extensions" by Allie Flynn. [Website address link omitted because of immodest pictures].
- 6) "Wigs Made From the Hair of a Deceased Person" <<http://www.dailyhalacha.com/m/halacha.aspx?id=569>>
- 7) "The Market For Human Hair- Priceconomics" Online Article. Written by Alex Mayyasi. [Website address link omitted because of immodest pictures on it.]
- 8) "Tirumala temple earns nearly Rs200 crore from auctioning human hair in 2011-12" Online article. Website address link omitted because of immodest pictures on it.
- 9) Wall Street Journal Article excerpt, titled "Religion Journal: The Great Indian Hair Auction" online article. Written by Joanna Sugden. [Website address link omitted because of immodest picture at the end.]
- 10) "Kashrut: Deliveries of Fish" from [DailyHalacha.com](http://www.dailyhalacha.com). <<http://www.dailyhalacha.com/displayRead.asp?readID=3096>>.
- 11) "Older Population from Indian" By Inderjit Jaipaul, DSW <<http://www.mhaging.org/info/10-04-OIA.html>>.

12) "When It's Null and Void: Understanding Batel BShishim" by Rabbi Dovid Heber from the Star-K. <https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/611/when-its-null-and-void-understanding-batel-bshishim-one-sixtieth/#_ftn31>.

13) Video called "Wigs vs. Tichel" by Rabbi Yaron Reuven, shlita. <<http://tznius.tips/wigs-versus-tichel-by-rabbi-yaron-reuven.html>>.

Text of Articles:

SOURCE #1: Article from Ohr Somayach

Ohr Somayach <https://ohr.edu/1698>

Ask!

For the week ending 29 May 2004 / 9 Sivan 5764

Wigs and Idolatry

by Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman - www.rabbiullman.com

From: T. R. in Belgium

Dear T.R.

Dear Rabbi,

Could you please enlighten me on the controversy surrounding wearing wigs made of human hair from India, and also is it permissible to continue wearing one. Thank you in advance, T. R.

The Rabbis who oppose the use of Indian-hair wigs are not just splitting hairs. The root of the problem is that the hair from India seems to come from idolatrous ceremonies. Worshipers grow their hair in honor of a certain god, pledging to cut the hair at the temple of the god as a sacrificial thank-offering when their prayer is answered. Of the 20 million annual pilgrims to the Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh, millions offer their hair.

Six hundred barbers are employed by the temple to shave the pilgrims' hair 24 hours a day. Inside the "tonsuring" room, devotees sit cross-legged on the floor, and bend their head forward to let a temple barber shave their scalp with a straight razor blade. Attendants collect the bundles of hair in dustpans and deposit them in large bins.

The hair is then auctioned to wigmakers, earning the temple a hair-raising 5.6 million dollars. Although India is a small part of the global hair business compared to China, Indian temple-hair heads the industry in price. Indian hair is generally finer than Chinese and more similar to European and American hair. After being processed, Tirupati hair longer than 16 inches sells for as much as \$165 a kilogram (2.2 pounds). Shorter hair goes for about \$100 a kilogram. Some strands bought at auction are made into hair extensions that are sold to Western women for as much as \$3,000 for a full head of hair.

The problem is that the Torah not only forbids idolatry itself, but also prohibits deriving benefit from any accessory, decoration or sacrifice to idol worship. Primarily, such a sacrifice is forbidden only when it is similar to the Jewish Temple offerings of meat, flour, oil, wine and water. However, when this object of idolatrous sacrifice (*tikrovet avoda zara*) is what's normally offered, and is cut or broken in honor of the god, it is also forbidden to derive benefit from it in any way. Furthermore, the sacrificed object can never be nullified, even if it's been changed or altered by some process, and even if it's been indiscernibly mixed with some other permitted material.

According to this, the Indian woman who tilts her head to have her hair cut, as well as the idolatrous barber who cuts it, are both actively offering a sacrifice to the god (even if the hair is discarded), prohibiting the hair from being used in any way, even if it's eventually processed and mixed with other, permitted hair. [In fact, L-Cysteine, a certain food ingredient that can be produced from human hair, would also prohibit an entire food if the hair is from India, for the above reason that anything which is sacrificed to idolatry can never be nullified.] This means that any wig with human hair would be forbidden to wear unless it could be ascertained for certain that none of the hair originated in India.

A leading Torah authority, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, asserts that there are other problems than just wearing such a wig. Rambam writes that the prohibition against deriving benefit from offerings to idol worship is from the verse, "Nor shall you bring an abhorrence into your house" (Deut. 7:26). Accordingly, he writes, it should be forbidden to keep such a wig in the home even without wearing it. Also, since the actual money received for objects sacrificed in idol worship becomes forbidden, one must be careful not to receive money from one who sells or otherwise works with such wigs. He suggests that one who buys a synthetic wig or other permitted item from a person who profits from such wigs should pay the exact price in cash, or with a check or credit card, in order to avoid receiving change from money that may have been paid for them.

Maran HaGaon Rabbi Elyashiv has also recently prohibited Indian wigs. After sending Rabbi A. D. Dunner from England to India to witness the Tirupati temple ceremony first hand, he ruled as follows: Regarding human hair wigs in Israel, since most are from Indian hair, all are forbidden unless the origin is known. Regarding wigs in other countries, if the majority of wigs are from a permitted source, all wigs are technically permitted, but one must clarify the source of each specific wig. Regarding wigs made from synthetic hair, if they contain human hair as well (which is often the case), they must be treated as other human hair wigs as above. In a case of doubt whether they contain human hair, they are permitted. Rabbi Elyashiv concludes that since objects associated with idol worship are to be burnt in fire, wigs from hair generally known to originate in India (but not specifically from the temple) *should* be burned, while wigs specifically known to be from the Tirupati temple *must* be burned.

Since the mitzvah of womens hair covering is a highly individual issue, this is not a personal ruling. Rather one must consult a local halachic expert who is able to ascertain the origin of the wigs available in ones community. Also, it should be clear that we are not taking sides on the issue, but merely presenting the opinions currently available. This controversy has been explored in the past, and, as then, lenient opinions may be forthcoming.

Sources:

Avoda Zara 50a,b

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 139:1,2,3

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, Daat vHalacha; Teshuvot vHanhagot 2:414, 3:265; Public letter of Iyar 5764

Rabbi Mordechai Gross, in Teshuvot MBeit Levi (regarding L-Cysteine)

Rambam, Avoda Zara 7:2, also see Rashi, Avoda Zara 64a, s.v. "Rabbanan"

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 133:1

Public letter of Rabbi Yoseph Efrati in the name of Maran HaGaon Rabbi Elyashiv, 22 Iyar 5764. In a letter of 5 Sivan, Rabbi Elyashiv confirmed Rabbi Efratis account of his ruling.

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SOURCE #2: Interview with a shaitel macher with 18 years experience:

“I would like people to know... that myself first hand can attest to the utter misrepresentation we are handed with our shaitels. I have been a shaitel macher for almost 18 years. I have learned from some of the industry's leading members how to identify hair, physically hand tie hair into a wig, how to construct a wig from scratch, as well as cutting, coloring, and washing techniques only know to the top artist. Approximately 8 years ago I began the difficult process of starting my own line of wigs. Making contacts and having representatives in China is not an easy process. I learned quickly that there are no morals in business in China. Hair which was hand selected here from brokers coming straight from Ukraine would be sent to China only to return blended and processed with other hair which I did not send or request. The factories always offered tags for my wigs which stated "100% European hair" even if we had just negotiated using Brazilian, Mongolian, or Uzbekistan hair. They also always offered the "kashrus" label with the blessings from "the rabbi" which of course they told me didn't exist. At that point I realized that there was no way that I could create a product which I really believed in or stood by. I myself who was dealing directly with the factories would never really know if the hair which I sometimes cut from a woman here in the states would actually return unadulterated or blended with something else. The fact that the factories clearly had no scruples regarding misrepresentation to my customers meant that they would most likely swindle me too. I decided to forgo manufacturing my own line and the money that would come with it.

It's important for women to know that factories will insert any tag necessary to make a sale. Many shaitel machers have no clue that they are being duped. They are told it's European hair and that it has a hashgacha, but the reality is far from such. They simply don't know.”

-Quoted directly word for word on June 11th, 2017. Shaitel macher chose to remain anonymous in this report.

SOURCE #3: Video can be viewed by clicking on this link. It shows the process of the Indians getting their head shaved: <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/831/The-Human-Hair-Trade>

SOURCE #4: A book called "Entanglement:The Secret Lives Of Hair" by Emma Tarlo. It's available on Amazon or Amazon Kindle. Because of copyright laws, I cannot copy the text in large amounts, but you can buy the book and read it. I included several quotes and the page numbers to give an idea of the shocking content.

You can purchase it here: https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01C9O377W/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1

"This question is as pertinent today as it was in 1874. The mass gathering of human hair has always been a backstage business about which little is known to those outside the trade. Even many of the shopkeepers and traders who sell hair extensions and wigs today know very little about the sources of hair and how it has been gathered unless they go to the considerable trouble of collecting it themselves or work for a major hair-manufacturing company with a department dedicated to hair procurement. Labels such as 'Brazilian', 'Peruvian', 'Indian', 'European', 'Euro-Asian' and 'Mongolian' that adorn packets of hair often operate more as exotic promises of variety than indicators of hair origin." (pgs 38-39).

"Picking up a weft of 24-inch (61cm) 'blonde remy hair' (hair with the scaly cuticles aligned from root to point) from the showroom table, I ask George if it is actually sold as Indian hair or whether its identity gets transformed in the market. 'Whatever we sell, we sell as Indian remy hair,' he tells me, pointing to the label. His company places an emphasis on transparency. However, this does not mean that buyers necessarily operate on the same principle. As another Indian trader tells me, 'I sell the hair as Indian but what the buyers do in their own countries, we cannot say. Those rabbis made it very difficult for Jewish women when they introduced the ban on Indian hair. Nowadays, hair has to travel a very long way before it gets to them!'" (pgs 102-103).

"For many it [sacrificing their hair] is performed in fulfillment of a vow, in gratitude and recognition that the deity has protected them or helped them achieve a specific desired goal. Since Mariamman is a dangerous and vengeful goddess with the power not only to cure but also to cause disease, some of the devotees who get tonsured at Samayapuram do so in the hope of placating her anger and activating her healing powers...When a woman requests 'flower hair', she instructs the temple barber to tie flowers halfway down her long hair and to cut just above them. The flowers drop to the floor and become part of the offering before being swept away with the fallen hair." (pgs 65-67)

SOURCE #5. This article is very much worth reading. Although this article is about hair extensions, the process for procuring the natural hair is the same. The only difference is that once it gets to the Chinese factory, the hair is either packaged in a bundle to make hair extensions, or is it sewn onto a wig cap to make a "European" wig.

"The Secret World of Black Market Hair Extensions" by Allie Flynn

Hair extensions usually bring to mind images of long, flowing, Rapunzel-style locks, but often overlooked are the women who actually donate the hair. After all, the real human hair in your extensions had to come from someone.

Who are these women? What brings them to give up something that, for many of them (and us), is a defining characteristic? We asked Arin Brahma, CEO of RebelleUSA, and Riqua Hailes, owner of Just Extensions in LA (they've both travelled all over the world

to find out where their hair is sourced, and to fully understand the industry), to shed some light on the global hair extension industry.

A Brief Background On Hair Types

To understand where most hair extensions come from, it's first important to understand different types of hair. Asian hair has a round cross-section, and is usually thick and straight. African hair has a more rectangular shape at the cross-section, which Brahma says results in kinky, curly hair, while Caucasian hair is oval at the cross-section. The reason why Indian hair is so sought-after in the Western market is because the cross-section is very similar to that of Caucasian hair.

Fair Trade vs. Ethically Sourced

These terms are often used interchangeably. Brahma says that fair trade refers more to financial aspects, while ethically sourced means the hair was obtained in an ethical manner. Hailes adds that she believes the terms are interchangeable: "For example, some women sell their hair for money while others donate for religious reasons, either way there is a fair exchange and both parties are willing."

Where Does It Come From?

"The highest quality sourced hair is virgin remi, unprocessed hair that is cut from a human's head with the hair cuticle going in the same direction," Hailes explains. Remi hair is the same in regards to the manner in which it's obtained, though it may be color-treated or permed. It's also another term for high-quality hair, but doesn't specifically refer to Indian hair (though the majority of it is).

You may have also heard the term "temple hair," which is hair that's been offered by Indian men, women, and children who go to their temple and offer their hair as a religious experience to God.

About 15 or 20 years ago, Brahma says that the temples had so much hair they would end up having to burn it since they had nothing else to do with it. Then, thanks to the extensions industry, non-profit temples discovered that they could raise money by selling the hair and turning the profits into benefits for their communities, like better education and health centers.

But [the expensive] remi hair only makes up around 20 percent of the hair extensions market, so where does the rest of it come from?

Whereas temple hair is bundled into a ponytail before it's shaved, then packaged and sold that way, non-remi, low-quality hair extensions are made up of hair that's been mixed. While this may not seem like a big deal, think of it this way: Your hair cuticles all grow in a certain direction. If hair gets mixed together and not all the strands are laid out the same way, the cuticles will catch on each other; meaning, it'll tangle easily. And once hair is mixed up, there's no way to sort it back, which begs the questions: How come most extensions aren't super tangly? And how does the hair get mixed up in the first place?

Sources of Bad Hair

Brahma says that vendors gather hair that falls on the floor at places like Indian temples or salons. Vendors also go door to door in poverty-stricken areas, especially in China, and trade women hair clips, utensils, and sometimes money in exchange for their fallen hair (think: hair that's fallen onto the floor, or stuck in a brush). Hailes confirms this, saying, "What I have learned during my visits that I find truly unethical are vendors, mainly in China, using fallen hair (dead hair collected from hair combs, brushes, or the floor) and marketing it as remi or virgin remi hair."

Since there's no way all the cuticles will point in the same direction, vendors send these balls of hair off to factories, where they're given an acid bath that removes the cuticle, Brahma says. This solves the tangling issue. But since the cuticle helps sustain the hair and keep it shiny and healthy, removing it leaves the hair lackluster and dull. Both Brahma and Hailes say that the factory then gives hair a silicone wash and a coating, mimicking the look of shiny, healthy tresses. But, Hailes notes, this coating will only last six to eight shampoos before hair begins to matt.

As stated above, after they process the hair, vendors turn around and sell it as remi hair. Brahma says that the profit margins are better when selling this lower quality hair. "Women pay thousands of dollars for fallen hair because vendors lead consumers or distributors to believe that the fallen hair is authentic virgin remi," Hailes says. Brahma agrees, saying that the biggest problem in the industry is lying. He bets you can't find a single company that labels their products non-remi. Vendors take advantage of the fact that it can be impossible to tell the difference, through touch and sight, between true remi and non-remi hair.

Vendors don't just lie about the quality of the hair, but also where it was sourced. For example, you may see a package marked as "Brazilian hair," but it's just as likely that the hair was actually sourced from China or India and only packaged in Brazil. "The industry isn't regulated. Vendors can label their hair as they please and there is no way to know what's going on," Hailes says. "As an entrepreneur it was important for me to take this journey around the world to see firsthand how the hair is sourced and what kind of hair it really is."

What Ethical Issues Are at Stake?

There's a lot of misconception about the ethical issue, Brahma says. Crimes like kidnapping women for hair or stealing hair off of dead bodies sound unsavory, but they also simply aren't viable as a business plan, he explains. Hailes seems to agree: "I've heard stories of hair collectors kidnapping women or girls and cutting their hair. I haven't dealt with or seen any evidence of the vendors I've met doing so. The vendors I spoke with mentioned it was an issue of the past but not so much anymore."

She also says that the international industry has "changed dramatically" in the past six years, and that's because distributors have learned how to effectively dupe people into paying thousands of dollars for low-quality extensions. Distributors have learned to manipulate hair textures to keep cost low and meet the demand of women throughout the world. "In the past the black market was hair collectors stealing hair from the poor to sell, but now the black market of hair extensions is 'fallen hair' known as trash, which is cleaned [and] then marketed as high-quality hair," she says.

There are "alarmists" in the industry, Brahma says. Not just about various unsavory, sensationalist stories, but also about the men, women, and children shaving their heads in the temples, whom he says would still offer their hair even if it wasn't being sold for extensions. "People make a big deal about the cultural aspect," he says. Another thing to keep in mind? Hair has to be very long to be used in extensions. Gross beauty fact: Brahma says that hair between three and 10 inches (too short to be used for extensions) often end up in factories in Germany, where they convert it into an amino acid (L-Cysteine) that's used in baking and chocolate.

The tradition of offering their hair in temples "has been around for 5,000 years," Brahma explains. And it will continue, whether the hair extensions industry keeps booming or not.

Does this make you think differently about hair extensions? --end of article.

SOURCE #6 "Wigs Made from A Deceased Person" from DailyHalacha.org

Halacha forbids deriving any sort of benefit from the remains of a deceased person. The Rishonim (Medieval Halachic authorities) debate the question of whether or not this prohibition applies to the hair of a deceased individual. The Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Maimonides, Spain-Egypt, 1135-1204) maintained that hair should be seen as something that grows from the body, rather than part of the body itself. As such, it is not subject to the prohibition against deriving benefit from a human corpse, and one may make personal use of hair taken from a deceased person. The Rashba (Rabbi Shlomo Ben Aderet of Barcelona, 1235-1310), by contrast, held that hair is considered part of the corpse, and one may therefore not derive any benefit from hair taken from a human corpse.

The Shulchan Aruch follows the stringent position of the Rashba, and forbids deriving benefit from hair taken from a human corpse.

This issue is practically relevant with regard to the use of wigs or toupees. Very often, wigs are manufactured from hair taken from the remains of deceased people. Therefore, it is preferable when purchasing a wig or toupee to inquire as to the origins of the hair, and ensure that the hair was not taken from a human corpse. If it is discovered that the hair came from a corpse, one should not wear the wig or toupee.

If, however, there is no possibility of determining the source of the hair, then the wig or toupee may be worn despite the likelihood that it was produced from the remains of a deceased person. In such a case, we may apply the rule of "Sefek Sefeka" ("double doubt"). With regard to the hair used in making wigs, we have two factors that combine to result in a lenient ruling. First, as we saw, it is questionable whether hair from a corpse is forbidden for use in the first place. Second, even if we assume that hair does fall under this prohibition, there is a debate among the authorities as to whether this prohibition applies to the remains of gentiles, or only to Jewish corpses. Since two different points of uncertainty are involved, we may allow one to purchase and use a wig or toupee even if its source cannot be determined.

Preferably, however, one should inquire as to whether the hair was taken from the remains of a deceased person.

This is the ruling of Rav Shemuel Pinhasi (contemporary scholar in Jerusalem).

Summary: One who purchases a wig or toupee should inquire as to whether it was made from hair taken from a human corpse, and, if it was, it should not be worn. If the hair's origin cannot be determined, then one may nevertheless purchase and wear the wig or toupee.

SOURCE #7: Article: "The Market for Human Hair - Priceconomics "

By Alex Mayyasi

The Venkateswara Temple in Tirumala, India, had a problem.

Thirty to forty million pilgrims visit the temple each year, and in a gesture of humility and sacrifice, 10% to 25% of them, men and women both, have their heads shaven. Every day, the Venkateswara Temple staff fills giant vats with human hair, and for a long time, its staff burned thousands of pounds of hair—a noxious process that produces toxic gases like ammonia and was eventually banned by the Indian government in the 1990s.

By then, however, they had discovered a new way to get rid of the hair: sell it for millions.

When fashion companies make wigs—and when stylists tape or weave hair extensions into customers' hair in salons—they want to use real human hair. To get it, they rely on places like the Venkateswara Temple, which sells its hair in annual auctions. In 2014, fashion companies bid almost \$12 million for what temple employees call "black gold."

The Tirumala Temple auction is part of a multi billion dollar market for human hair—a global endeavor that includes collecting long locks to make fashionable hairpieces and its more industrial counterpart of turning hair into fertilizers, stuffing for clothes, and even amino acids used in pizza dough.

Nearly everyone has hair they discard without a thought. Yet it can also be one of the world's most precious resources, and businesses can't get enough of it.

From Tirumala to the Salon

A quality wig made of human hair sells for thousands of dollars in the United States, and hair extensions made of real hair can sell for several hundred or thousand dollars. But it takes a lot of work to turn the hair of Venkateswara pilgrims into a luxury product.

When companies buy hair from the temple for as much as \$700 dollars per pound it contains sweat, blood, and lice. The temple warehouses reek from mildew and fungus. Investigative journalist Scott Carney visited Tirumala and called the hair a "foul-smelling heap." As 600 barbers each shave a head every 5 minutes, they leave bloody scalps and hair balls littering the floor.

It takes someone in the industry to recognize why the hair is so valuable. Only long women's hair is sold at auction—the temple sells men's hair at a pittance for industrial uses—and since many pilgrims come from humble, rural towns, they have not used shampoos or styled and treated their hair in ways that damage it .

To transform the best (longest) hair from trash into treasure, teams of workers untangle the hair, sort it by length, pick out lice and other particles, wash and dry it, and dye it a variety of colors. Companies then either ship the hair out to salons where stylists will sew, tape, or bond the extensions into customers' hair, or sew the hair into wigs.

The process is incredibly labor intensive. "To make a high-end wig," says Mo Hefnawy of Lori's Wigsite, one of many retailers of wigs made by Indian and Chinese manufacturers, "someone sat there with a needle and sewed a few hairs at a time. It takes 3 or 4 days."

Retailers like Lori's Wigsite sell wigs made of fake, synthetic hair, and they cost \$250 where a human hair wig would cost \$1,500. But synthetic wigs don't last as long, can't be styled, and look and feel less natural. Most people want wigs made of real hair, Hefnawy says, but Lori's sells more synthetic wigs than human hair wigs because they are more affordable.

The majority of Lori's customers suffer hair loss from chemotherapy or conditions like alopecia. A minority are religious women who buy wigs as an alternative to modestly hiding their hair, and some older men and women buy wigs to cover thinning hair.

For the moment, though, hair extensions are increasingly popular among young women who want to quickly change their hairstyle or buy the long, thick hair celebrated in shampoo commercials. Among other celebrities, Victoria Beckham, Beyonce, and Kylie Jenner of Kardashian fame are known for wearing extensions.

Prices have increased with popularity. In several burglaries thieves ignored cash registers and went straight for hair extensions worth tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars.

When nonprofits like Locks of Love ask people to donate their hair (to make hairpieces for children suffering from hair loss), they are not asking because long hair is hard to find. The human hair market is well established, and anyone can go online and instantly order hair by the pound.

Locks of Love asks for donations because hair is so expensive that many patients can't afford thousand dollar wigs.

The Secret Life of Hair

The market for human hair has always been a mechanism for getting hair from people in poor areas to those who need or want it in wealthier ones.

History is full of examples of human hair being treated as a valuable commodity. Archeologists have discovered human hair wigs held together with resin and beeswax in Ancient Egyptian tombs. Upper class men in 18th century Europe wore long periwigs made of human or horse hair, and thieves commonly worked in teams to steal and resell

them. An observer of an annual “hair harvest” in a poor Italian village in the 19th century described seeing girls “sheared, one after the other, like sheep.” Their hair went to Parisian markets that sold 200,000 pounds of human hair each year.

The difference today is that the market has changed with globalization. Hair does not move from provincial Europe to capital cities; it moves from poor countries to wealthy ones. The vast majority of hair and hair products come from India and China and are sold in the United States and Europe.

In the hair industry, no one bothers to equally celebrate each and every person’s hair. For them, hair is a product, and the way they talk about hair reflects economic and social realities—and made us squirm.

“Indian hair is best,” retailers and manufacturers told us without hesitation. They cite the strength of Indian hair and how plentiful it is thanks to places like the Venkateswara Temple. But its most valuable attribute is that it closely resembles caucasian hair. “Oriental hair is used,” one industry expert bluntly added, “because there is a lot of it.”

Hair flows from poor countries to rich countries, but when a woman with blond hair is willing to sell her hair, the market pays incredibly well. Destitute Russian women regularly sell their blond hair for fifty to several hundred dollars. Mo Hefnawy says he knows a young woman whom wig makers flew out from Indiana and paid \$1,500 for her hair, which they made into an \$8,000 wig.

Africa also bucks global trends: despite the prevalence of poverty in many countries, Africa is an importer of hair. Elaborate wigs may no longer separate royalty from commoners, but hair has not lost its political and economic relevance.

Projects like MyNappyRoots and Good Hair have explored the efforts that black people, especially women, go through to style their hair, and in particular the time and expense of straightening their curly hair—often with the help of hair extensions. Responding to this question of why “women adopt a concept of ‘beauty’ that is not based on the natural characteristics of their hair,” Al Sharpton says in *Good Hair*, “We wear our economic oppression on our heads.”

As a result, hair extensions and products are popular among African Americans and wealthy Africans, but hair traders have little interest in black hair.
...[I left some of the article out]...

Collecting Hair at Scale

So far, the hair industry has not had its ethically-sourced moment. American customers are typically unconcerned about the origins of extensions, the founder of a hair extensions trade group told the *New York Times*, other than to ask if they are hygienic. For retailers and manufacturers, the demand for hair makes it a financial necessity not to ask too many questions.

"The hair business is unlike any other," the owner of an Indian hair-exporting business told journalist Scott Carney. "In any other business, buying a commodity is easy; it's the

selling it to retailers that is difficult. Here it's all reversed. It's simple to sell hair, just difficult to buy it."

Better synthetic hair is coming. As China and India's economic growth has reduced poverty, hair donors have been harder to find, which has increased prices and pushed companies to research alternatives. In the last 5 years, Mo Hefnawy of Lori's Wigsite tells us, progress has been made on making synthetic wigs thicker and more heat-resistant. "I'd give it a few more years and they will have it," he says.

Until then, though, a resource everyone has growing on the top of their head will remain a secretively lucrative commodity.

SOURCE #8: IndiaToday Article:

"Tirumala temple earns nearly Rs 200 crore from auctioning human hair in 2011-12"

By A. Srinivasa Rao

Here's a hair-raising statistic for you. The Lord Venkateshwara in Tirumala, Andhra Pradesh - the richest Indian temple in terms of the revenue generated - earns as much as one-tenth of its annual revenue from the sale of hair offered by devotees. Every year, thousands of people who visit the temple get tonsured to offer their hair to Lord Venkateshwara, in keeping with a centuries-old tradition.

And in a world increasingly fascinated with vanity, their modest offering has spawned a multi- crore business - that of human hair export - what with an ever-growing demand for human hair for wigs and the latest celebrity fad of hair extensions.

Factor this: In 2011-12, the Tirumala temple earned nearly Rs 200 crore out of its total revenue of Rs 1,949 crore, from auctioning human hair.

According to L. V. Subrahmanyam, executive officer of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) that manages the temple affairs, the projected revenue for 2012-13 from auctioning hair is around Rs 150 crore, but going by the ever-increasing number number of pilgrims flooding the temple, it is expected to surpass last year's. In 2011, the temple authorities took to e-auctioning, courtesy of a spike in demand from traders across the world.

"As many as 49 traders participated in last year's auction and bid huge amounts for various categories of hair," TTD financial adviser and chief accounts officer L. V. Bhaskar Reddy said.

The auction was held in two phases - first in September 2011 and then in March 2012. While 466 tonnes of hair was auctioned in Phase I, another 95 tonnes of hair was sold in the second phase.

According to another TTD official, human hair is broadly divided into five categories depending on the length and texture - hair longer than 31 inches; 16- 30 inches; 10-15

inches; five-nine inches; and that of less than five inches. There is also a sixth variety, grey hair, donated by senior citizens, albeit of zero-demand.

"The long and uniformly trimmed hair is called remy hair, which has a big market in Europe and the US, where it is woven into wigs. The non-remy hair, broken and short, has a huge demand in China, which in turn makes wigs and sells it in the American or African market, especially Nigeria. In the domestic market, Tirumala hair is popular in Mumbai for making wigs for filmstars," he said.

SOURCE #9: Article Excerpt from the Wall Street Journal, titled "Religion Journal: The Great Indian Hair Auction." By Joanna Sugden

The whole article was not included due to copyright laws.

May 31, 2012 10:00 am IST

By Joanna Sugden

...According to their scriptures, Hindus should shave their heads at least once during their lifetime...

There are 500 barbers who work on rotation at the Kalyana Katta building, located to the west of the main Venkateswara Temple, and 16 other smaller locations in the town. At peak times, 100 additional hairdressers are employed to speed up the process of shaving pilgrims' heads...

The TTD says revenue from the sale of hair generated 200 million rupees (\$3.6 million) last financial year, up from 54 million rupees the previous year. Mr. Srinivasarao attributes the increase to the introduction of the e-auction, which has replaced traditional open bidding. Hair has been sold via auctions for the last 20 years, according to Mr. Srinivasarao...

India exported \$190 million-worth of hair and related hair products in 2009-10 and could more than double that to \$470 million by 2013-14, the Department for Commerce and Industry says. According to approximate figures from U.N. Comtrade, the U.S. imported over \$900 million-worth of wigs, false beards, eyebrows, eyelashes and similar products in 2010, while the U.K. imported \$79 million-worth and China and Hong Kong \$71 million.

Indian hair is in high demand for wig making and hair extensions because it is both "thin and strong," explains Chennai-based CurlsnWaves one of the country's largest exporters of hair. The company also processes hair, stripping it of color and re-dying it.

Mr. Srinivasarao adds that south Indian hair is particularly good quality because women who offer it at the temple take very good care of it...The main buyers are companies..."

SOURCE #10 Article describes how Jews cannot eat meat that an unsupervised Non-Jew handled.

From DailyHalacha.org <<http://www.dailyhalacha.com/displayRead.asp?readID=3096>>.

"Kashrut: Deliveries of Fish"

The Gemara in Masechet Avoda Zara (p.39) states that kosher meat handled by a non-Jew, without the presence of a Jew, requires a “Chotam B’toch Chotam” (double seal) to insure that the meat received is the original kosher meat and has not been switched by the non-Jew with the more inexpensive non-kosher meat. The question is raised whether fish also requires a double seal. For example, if a non-Jewish courier delivers a fish order to a Jew.

When it comes to fish, The Halacha is more lenient, since kosher fish are easily identifiable. Therefore, if the fish still has the scales on it, it is kosher. Even if the second identifying sign, fins, has been removed, it is permitted, since the Shulhan Aruch (YD 83) rules that one sign is sufficient. However, if the scales have been removed, the fish reverts to the same status as meat and requires a double seal.

SUMMARY

Fish handled by a non-Jew does not need a double seal, if the scales are still present.

SOURCE #11: This article talks about how India has an 85% Hindu population. Only a short excerpt of the article is included to verify the Hindu population statistics.

Whole article available here: <<http://www.mhaging.org/info/10-04-OIA.html>>.

“...2. Among Indians here, the majority are Hindus- 1 million of them are Hindus. In India, 85% are Hindus. Hindu culture has influenced the majority of Indians- including members of other religions. In health matters, even here, you can expect 100% involvement of family. Family and spiritual beliefs are strong. Churches, mosques, and temples play important roles. They facilitate group meeting on various aspects of living. Women play a greater role in the care of the elderly. Interdependence and interconnectedness is the foundation of well being. Hindus call it "Dharma." Dharma has both a religious context and a societal context the sacred order...”

SOURCE #12: Article from the Star K on Batel B'Shishim and it states that Avoda Zora is never batel. Just the part of the article that applies is included.

You can see the full article here: https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/611/when-its-null-and-void-understanding-batel-bshishim-one-sixtieth/#_ftn31

“WHEN IT’S NULL AND VOID: UNDERSTANDING BATEL BSHISHIM (ONE-SIXTIETH)”
 BY: RABBI DOVID HEBER PUBLISHED SPRING 2011

...II. ITEMS THAT ARE NOT BATEL

There are various cases when we do not apply the *din* of *bitul*, where Chazal say “*afilu b’elef lo batul*” – these non-kosher items are not nullified even if mixed in one thousand, and the entire mixture is not kosher:

A ***Davar Hama’amid*** is something that “creates” a particular product. A classic example of this is non-kosher animal rennet used to make cheese.¹⁵ Without the enzymatic reaction caused by the rennet, there would be no cheese. Hence, even if the milk is sixty times the rennet, the finished product is not kosher.

...(some of article omitted)...

Nikker – If the non-kosher item is detectable (e.g. one can see and notice a small non-kosher piece of meat in vegetable soup), one may not eat the food until the non-kosher item is removed. This is true, even if the non-kosher item is less than one-sixtieth.²⁶

Chometz on Pesach – If *chometz* was mixed into Kosher for *Pesach* food on *Pesach*, the food is considered *chometz* even if the kosher for *Pesach* food is 60 times the non-kosher for *Pesach* food.²⁷

Davar She'bminyan – If something is usually sold individually, it does not become *batel*.²⁸ For example, pomegranates are a *davar she'bminyan* since they are sold in supermarkets only by the piece, not by weight or by the dozen.²⁹

Chaticha Re'uya L'hischabed– A prominent piece of food, such as a piece of chicken (e.g. a top or bottom), fit to be prepared (e.g. ready to be baked) for a guest is “important.” If a non-kosher piece of this chicken became mixed with many kosher pieces, all of the pieces would be *assur* (forbidden).³⁰

Avoda Zara – An idol, or anything used in the service of idolatry including wine,³¹ is not *batel*.³²

Chazusa – According to some opinions, something that is not kosher that adds color to a food is not *batel b'shishim*. An example of this is carmine, derived from an insect. Carmine used at even less than one-sixtieth would render the product not kosher.³³ Other opinions disagree.³⁴ One should consult a *Rav*...” (article continues.)

SOURCE #13: This video can be viewed by clicking on the link below or entering the website address. Rabbi Yaron Reuven shlita discusses the wig industry and his research about shaitels.

<http://tznius.tips/wigs-versus-tichel-by-rabbi-yaron-reuven.html>

May this report be a zechus for a complete healing for all the cholei Yisroel.

You can contact us at emesofwigs@gmail.com or call us at 732-806-7674 for extra copies of this report.