HAIR IN *TaNaKh*: THE SYMBOLISM OF GENDER AND CONTROL

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Abstract

This paper will explore the symbolic meanings of hair in the Hebrew Bible, or *TaNaKh*.[1] It will deal only with head hair, highlighting a few important examples which give insight into the symbolic role of hair in these texts.

The theories of Edmund Leach, C.R. Hallpike, and Gananath Obeyesekere will be examined in light of the debate over the relative merits of psychoanalytical versus sociological understandings of hair symbolism. I claim that the division which both Leach and Obeyesekere make between individual and social symbols is an arbitrary one, and that hair symbolism may be understood by including the individual within a broad sociologically framework. I will show that hair can be seen as a key to the symbolic language of the *TaNaKh*, and stands at the center of a cultural dialectic between order and control on the one hand, and freedom and spontaneity on the other. I will also demonstrate how hair is especially important for understanding the *TaNaKh*'s symbolism of gender.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1950s scholars have been debating the symbolic meaning of hair. A purely psychoanalytic position is first taken up by Charles Berg (Berg 1951) and later carried over into the ethnographic context by Gananath Obeyesekere (Obeyesekere 1981). This position states that head hair is a symbol of the phallus, and that cutting of head hair invokes castration. A position intermediate between the psychoanalytical and the sociological is represented by Edmond Leach. Like Obeyesekere, Leach accepts the Freudian paradigm as an explanation of the origins of hair symbolism. However, in his article "Magical Hair" (Leach 1958), Leach claimed that the anthropologist as anthropologist has no access to the "private" symbolism of the psyche, but must limit anthropological discourse to the realm of "the social." The most purely sociological position is articulated by C.R. Hallpike (Hallpike 1978). Hallpike argues that the meaning of hair symbolism is related to a persons being "inside" versus "outside" of society. As such, his argument comes very close to that of Mary Douglas, who correlates body symbolism with issues of social structure (Douglas 1973). I will argue that Hallpike and Douglas's argument, which expands the "social" to include the body and its symbolism, is the most fruitful.

By rejecting the reliance on the inaccessible workings of the psyche Hallpike and Douglas open up the possibility of understanding body symbolism in the context of observable factors "in the world" (Hallpike 1978: 135). In our case, where the main evidence of the cultural context is an ancient text, exploring "the world" means uncovering the linguistic and metaphoric patterns found in this text. I will claim, for example, that exploring hair symbolism in the *TaNaKh* leads us to discover a parallelism between women and priests, with priests playing a culturally "feminine" role. My argument will be that by following the symbolic role given to head hair in the *TaNaKh*, one may unravel a central cultural dialectic: control versus freedom. This dialectic is especially important in relation to fertility. Women and priests each have responsibility for fertility in their respective realms. Women are to bring offspring to the family, and priests, through their service in the Temple, bring general prosperity and fruitfulness to the nation as a whole. As such, they are both under the injunction to maintain control over their bodies, with hair being the prime symbolic locus of this control. On the other hand, the texts hint that fertility can never be the result of control alone: life can only spring from something which is itself alive, moving and free.

SPLITTING HAIRS: THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEBATE

The anthropological debate over the interpretation of hair may be summed up as "whose turf is it on?" Psychoanalytically oriented interpreters have claimed specific and universal meanings for hair, such as hair = phallus (Berg 1951, Obeyesekere 1981). British social anthropologists (Leach 1958, Hallpike 1978) have maintained that as long as hair is used as a social symbol, a purely social or cultural explanation is required.

Hair is part of the body, and the interpretation of the body is a messy endeavor. Ted Polhemus writes about theories of body symbolism: "...psychoanalytic and sociological theories approach the subject of body symbolism from such radically different perspectives that it will be a long time before a common, 'ecumenical' framework of research can be elaborated for the study of body symbolism" (Polhemus 1978:134). This inter-disciplinary competition comes about because the body occupies a unique, multi-levelled place in human consciousness. The body has been called "the

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[1] The Hebrew term referring to the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Writings.

place where our individual, social, political, spiritual, and perhaps other levels of self, converge" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:7) and "...the site of a profound interconnection of ideology and subjectivity..." (Stallybras and White 1986:90).

While I would agree that a rapprochement between psychoanalytic and sociological theories is not on the horizon, I believe it is possible to find a framework within which to discuss the body in both its individual and its social aspects. In this paper I will argue against the psychoanalytical approaches. Through positing a universal symbolic system for the human psyche, they seem to me to mystify rather than explain. I will rather propose that the individual can be looked at as one level of the social, physical, "outside" world, and is therefore open to analysis according to variations and conditions in this observable world.[2] Through the example of hair symbolism, I will show that the *TaNaKh* includes the individual body as one level within an integrated physical, social, and spiritual cosmos.

We will first examine the approach of Edmond Leach as seen in his 1957 lecture, "Magical Hair" (Leach 1958:147-64). Framing his lecture as a commentary on the work of the psychoanalyst Charles Berg, Leach was attempting to deal with what he saw as the convergence of psychoanalytic interpretation and the ethnographic data. He claimed that this data showed hair to be a universal symbol of the phallus. This universality posed a challenge to the sociological point of view that social phenomena are determined by social factors and will vary from society to society.

Leach's point of departure is that of British structural anthropology, which posits a strong distinction between public and private symbols. According to this school, anthropology is on home ground when interpreting public symbols, which derive their meaning solely in relationship to other elements in the symbol system. The elements themselves are arbitrary. Private symbols, on the other hand, derive their meaning from the murky depths of the subconscious, and have emotional as opposed to linguistic meanings (Leach 1958:149). Leach finds himself in a dilemma in that hair as a symbol seems to be working as the psychoanalysts say, arising with intrinsic meaning from the human subconscious, yet it appears in the ethnographic data, especially in ritual, as a public symbol. He finds himself agreeing with the equation that:

> head = phallus,
> hair = semen,
> hair cutting = castration;

and that:

> long hair = unrestrained sexuality
> short hair = restricted sexuality
> close-shaven head = celibacy,

but he has no framework as an anthropologist to explain this. He states:

> ...ethnography indicates a persistent link between hair as a symbol and the phallus as a symbol and to this extent it is appropriate that hair should be prominent in rites denoting a change in social-sexual status; but the anthropologists alone have no theory which would explain why the symbolization should take the form it does (Leach 1958:160).

Though committed to this split between public and private symbols, Leach is aware that public symbols may carry emotional as well as linguistic value. Thus he expands his question to a broader plane, asking, "Just where does the emotional content of symbols come from, and how is it that some symbols are more emotionally loaded than others?" (Leach 1958:147).

Leach's solution was to accept the psychoanalytical interpretation of the origin of hair symbolism in the subconscious, but then to insist on its transformation into a public symbol once it reaches the ritual or social stage. He disputes Dr. Berg and the psychoanalysts' claim that the meaning of hair symbolism even in public ritual derives from the subconscious. Rather he states, "it is the ritual situation which makes the hair 'powerful,' not the hair which makes the ritual powerful" (Leach 1958:159). His claim is that the phallic symbolism of hair, whatever its origin, is transformed into a social fact and works as part of culture. Why, then, does it appear to be universal, to possess meaning independent of socially specific conditions?

> Surely the answer is that ritual makes explicit and conscious those powerful and dangerous thoughts which are *liable to become* repressed. Phallicism in ritual is thus a form of cathartic prophylaxis; it is not an expression of the repressed unconscious of the collective individual, it is a social process which serves to prevent the individual from developing sexual repressions at all (Leach 1958:161).

For Leach, the psychological origins are valid, but they are taken up and pre-empted by the needs of the social.

As is to be expected whenever someone tries to integrate two sets of ideas, Leach has been upbraided by the defenders of both sides. Another English structuralist, C.R. Hallpike, has criticized Leach's use of psychoanalytic theories to explain cultural phenomena (Hallpike 1978:178). He insists that the ethnographic data does not justify Leach's claims that head = phallus, hair cutting = castration, long hair = unrestrained

[2] Of course, I am not proposing that this is the only way to look at the individual or the body. Only that for the purposes of interpreting public, cultural symbols, one may allow the social to reach into the arena of the body.

sexuality, etc. He points, for example, to Leach's strained claim that in cultures where the head represents soul, soul can be thought of as another way of saying libido. How, he asks, in cases where women cut their hair in ritual, can this be interpreted as castration? Countering the claim that long hair is a symbol of unrestricted sexuality, he notes that ascetics very commonly have long hair (Hallpike 1978:137).

Despite these criticisms and others, Hallpike himself must admit that there exists a greater degree of cross-cultural consistency of symbols than anthropological theory would predict, and that this calls for some explanation. He writes:

> Two different hypotheses suggest themselves. The first is that the meanings ascribed to symbols are related to the workings of the subconscious, which are assumed to be similar in members of every culture and, more specifically, to the mechanisms of the repression and sublimation of the sexual impulses. The second is that, given the common concern of all societies with survival, the nature of the physical environment, procreation, the social role of the sexes, youth and age, order and disorder, and similar basic concepts, there are certain symbols and symbolic acts which are inherently appropriate in expressing these concepts, and that this is why these symbols are so commonly found and often have the same meaning in different cultures (Hallpike 1978:134-5).

Whereas Leach chose the first option, in which symbols are "about" the subconscious, he prefers the second, in which symbols are "about" the world (Hallpike 1978:134-5). Following along these lines, Hallpike suggests that the commonalities in hair symbolism can be explained according to a correlation "...that long hair is associated with being outside society and that the cutting of hair symbolizes re-entering society, or living under a particular disciplinary regime within society...cutting hair equals social control" (Hallpike 1978:141). He further claims there is frequently an association between being outside society and animality. Conveniently for my interests, he backs up his hypothesis with examples from the Bible: Esau's hairiness and association with hunting and animality; the leper who grows his hair long and must sit outside the city (and who shaves his hair upon returning); the Nazirites' long hair and separation from society in order to be closer to God. These, and the other examples he brings, all fit more easily into his social explanation than into Leach's psychoanalytical one.

In addressing the question of the similarity of symbols across cultures, Hallpike must cross some of the lines which Leach dared not cross. With the assertion that hairiness = outside society = animality, Hallpike argues that an anthropologist, as an anthropologist, can talk about the origin of symbols. While he is careful to make the distinction that public symbols are not "about the subconscious," but rather "about the world," and therefore verifiable, he does fall back on a list of very general "common concerns" (procreation, youth and age, sex roles, etc.) which would apply to all societies. He is thus able to talk about the origin of symbols within an *expanded social framework* which includes such generalities as 'loose social control will often be reflected in long hair'.

This seems to me to be a valuable step in that it goes far in breaking down the arbitrary division between public (social, verifiable, culturally variable, "Culture") and private (psychological, universal, "Nature"). Logically, this opens up the possibility that one does not need to leave the emotions and body to the dogmas of psychoanalysis or bio-medical determinism or some other determinism, and then attempt, as Leach does, a somewhat contorted "integration." Rather, one may be free to test commonalities or variations in symbols or behavior according to commonalities and variations in the "world" of physical and social life.

Clearly, Hallpike's hypothesis foreshadows the ideas of Mary Douglas.[3] Douglas builds a comprehensive theory of body symbolism, "natural symbols," by breaking down this dichotomy between linguistic, cultural *meaning* and mysterious *origins*. She posits "universals," but only in the general sense of abstract correlations such as the "purity rule," which basically states: the more social control, the more bodily control (Douglas 1973:101).[4] While Douglas has not explicitly entered into the debate over the meaning of hair, her theories support Hallpike's thesis of "social hair."

Douglas has elaborated on the Durkheimian idea that variations in structures of thought and cosmology are related to variations in social structure (Douglas 1966), and has pushed this idea one step further by applying it to the aesthetics of the body:

> I have argued before that there are pressures to create consonance between the perception of social and physiological levels of experience (Douglas 1966: 114-28). Some of my friends still find it unconvincing. I hope to bring them round by going much further, following Mauss in maintaining that the human body is always treated as an image of society and that there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension. Interest in its apertures depends on the preoccupation with social exits and entrances, escape routes and invasions...
>
> This approach takes the vertical dimension of experience more seriously than the current trend in

[3] Hallpike's paper was published in 1969, Mary Douglas' *Natural Symbols* was first published in 1970. I do not know what, if any, was the contact between them. Douglas does not cite this paper.

[4] "The more complex the system of classification and the stronger the pressure to maintain it, the more social intercourse pretends to take place between disembodied spirits."

> the structural analysis of symbolism which requires meaning to be found horizontally, as it were, by the relation of elements in a given pattern (Douglas 1973:98-9).

Thus she is able to talk about levels of experience, and the relationships between these levels. In other words, she talks about the "origin" of body symbols by relating them to the social structure, while avoiding the pitfalls of mystifying and universalist appeals to psychological or biological "Nature." She states:

> Natural symbols will not be found in individual lexical items. The physical body can have universal meaning only as a system which responds to the social system, expressing it as a system. What it symbolizes naturally is the relation of parts of an organism to the whole (Douglas 1973:112).

Before going on to discuss the symbolic use of hair in *TaNaKh*, we will briefly examine the work of the other major participant in this debate over hair symbolism, Gananath Obeyesekere. In his 1981 book *Medusa's Hair*, Obeyesekere uses the specific case of hair symbolism to try to bridge the gap between psychoanalysis and anthropology (Obeyesekere 1981). As did Hallpike a decade earlier, Obeyesekere takes exception to Leach, this time, however, accusing Leach of being *too much* the structural anthropologist. We noted that for Leach, the psychological origins are valid, but they are taken up and incorporated into the social. One feels with Leach that the dynamic elements with regard to hair symbolism are the structural/functional needs of society. Psychoanalysis only provides raw material. Obeyesekere's approach is the exact opposite in that he takes the psychoanalytic as the dynamic element and largely ignores the workings of society.

Obeyesekere criticizes Leach for maintaining the divide between culture and emotions, between public and private symbols, and for minimizing the role of the individual in culture (Obeyesekere 1981:17-18). While these are valid criticisms, his own analysis also falls short in that he tends to collapse everything into a Freudian explanatory framework. He spends the bulk of the ethnographic sections of his book discussing the family histories of his informants. His claim is that this should not be seen as separate from culture. He writes, for example:

> Underlying all is the core unconscious meaning of the sublated penis emerging via the head as the god's penis...that the symbol is related to the life experience of the ascetic does not mean that it is a private symbol: it only means that we have to reject the conventional wisdom that there is a radical hiatus between custom and emotion (Obeyesekere 1981:37).

This type of analysis runs into the problem of universalizing a theoretical framework (Freudian psychoanalysis) perhaps most applicable to Victorian Europe.

In terms of my analysis, Obeyesekere is really in the same group as Leach in that he feels that emotions and personal symbols can only be understood through a psychoanalytic framework. I would suggest that the more useful approach is taken by Hallpike and Douglas: expanding our idea of the social to include the emotions, the body, and its symbolism.[5]

HAIR 'N *TaNaKh*

I will now examine a few examples in order to tease out the symbolic meanings of hair. The first example is the story of the suspected adulteress, the *sotah*. I believe this to be a pivotal text for the question of hair symbolism in *TaNaKh*:

> And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, If any man's wife go aside, and commit a trespass against him, and a man lie with her carnally, and it be hid from the eyes of her husband,...and the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be defiled: or if the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be not defiled: then shall the man bring his wife to the priest...And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord: and the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle shall the priest take, and put it into the water: and the priest shall set the woman before the Lord, and loosen the hair of the woman's head,...And when he has made her drink the water, then it shall come to pass, that, if she be defiled, and have done trespass against her husband, that the water that causes the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall fall away: and the woman shall be a curse among her people. And if the woman be not defiled, but be clean; then she shall be free, and shall conceive seed' (Numbers 5:11-28).

The principal claim I want to make about this text is that the woman's body, specifically her sexual and reproductive body, is a symbol for the integrity of the family unit. Penetration by another man is an intrusion, a rupture in this unit. The text seems to imply that even

[5] Other anthropologists, of course, have followed this line, although in diverse ways. Michele Rosaldo, for example, in her book, *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life* (1980) used anthropological linguistics to get at the emotional world of the Ilongot. Writers such as Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Thomas Czordas (1990) have put forward theoretical frameworks which differ from Douglas' but nonetheless have in common the goal of analyzing personal experience and the body in relation to the social.

if she is not guilty, but only "goes aside"—arousing her husband's suspicions—she has somehow damaged the integrity of the family, has "betrayed her husband."[6] As a central aspect of this ordeal the priest "loosens her hair." In the light of Hallpike and Douglas's theories of body symbolism, we may read this loosening of the hair as symbolic of her perceived "loose" sexual behavior, and its fragmenting effect on the family.[7]

The text is concerned about the adulterous *woman*. No parallel ordeal exists for the man. Thus, in order to understand this text we need to elucidate the symbolism of gender. This, I suggest, centers around the woman's role as a child bearer.[8] (Thus I referred in the previous paragraph to the "family unit," and not simply the "marriage.") We see, for example, something of the importance of children from such institutions as the levirate marriage, in which a man is required to marry his brother's widow in cases where the brother left no children, in order that the first born of the levirate marriage be "in the name of his brother who is dead, that his name not be wiped out in Israel." If the brother refuses his duty, he is publicly shamed, as the widow will "...approach him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, 'Thus shall be done to that man who will not build up his brother's house...'" (Deuteronomy 25:6,9).[9] This and many other examples indicate that children were not considered merely a prosaic, practical matter. While rabbinic texts begin to make the afterlife a central focus, for the *TaNaKh* the idea of "building a house" or "continuing one's name in Israel" was tantamount to a man's stake in eternity.

A man's name, his house, needed not only to exist, but needed to *be in order*. In this society, to a large extent, family or lineage came to represent the principle of order as opposed to chaos, and life as opposed to death. This idea is seen in the placement of the *sotah* text in the middle of the long introduction to Numbers, which has up to this point been concerned with an elaborate census and ordering of the Children of Israel, beginning "...Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the houses of their fathers, by the number of names, every male by their polls..." (Numbers 1:2). The success of this group as it starts its journey towards the Promised Land is directly related to the establishment of order in the family, tribe and nation.

Thus, women played a pivotal and dangerous role: they were the vital (weak?) link between the orderly patrilinial families. (See Gayle Rubin "The Traffic in Women" in Reiter 1975:192.) As child bearers they represented life, but only when they upheld the principle of order. The woman's body must be "whole," unblemished by contact with a man other than her husband, and her hair must be in order if she is to represent the fertility, the "life" of the family. The particular death brought upon the guilty woman in the *sotah* ordeal, the "thigh" (a euphemism for the genitals) falling and the belly swelling, points to the illegitimate sexuality and the loss of fertility which she has brought into this unit.

One way to untangle the symbolism of hair in *TaNaKh* is to follow the root פ־ר־ע. This root is the basis of the word translated as "loosened" in the *sotah* text. In the *TaNaKh* פ־ר־ע can have the meanings "wild," "uncontrolled" or "without order." Given Hallpike and Douglas's predictions about the correlation between social control and body (in our case, hair) control, this suggests a promising line of inquiry. We will examine a few examples.

One of the interesting places the root פ־ר־ע shows up is in the description of the incident of the Golden Calf:

> ...when Moshe saw that the people were in disorder (פרוע); (for Aharon had made them disorderly [לפרעה] to the scandal of their enemies:) then Moshe stood up in the gate... (Exodus 32:25).

The striking parallel to the ordeal of the suspected adulteress is not simply the use of the same word, but the fact that Aharon, the High Priest, *made the people disorderly*, as does the priest to the woman's hair in the *sotah* ordeal. The analogous relationship of the Golden Calf text to the *sotah* text is confirmed in another parallel:

> And it came to pass, as soon as he came near to the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moshe's anger burned, and he threw the tablets out of his hands, and broke them at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and *ground it to powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the children of Yisra'el drink of it* (Exodus 32:19-20) (italics mine).

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[6] That is, the text explicitly states that even if "she be not defiled," the embarrassing and painful ritual of the bitter waters is still appropriate if the husband's suspicion is sufficiently aroused.

[7] The Rabbis concluded from this passage that married women must cover their hair (Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 72a), and this does seem to have been the custom at least in the 2nd century C.E., and probably earlier (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3).

[8] See Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* for archeological and textual evidence of the importance of women's child bearing for Israelite society. Relevant to our present concern, she writes: "The implications of gender differentiation are enormous when property inheritance is reckoned patrilineally. The problem of establishing proper heirs becomes critical, and the sexual behavior of females becomes restricted. The double standard in treatment of females in terms of extramarital or premarital sexual activity is first a pragmatic response to this situation of inheritance legalities and only later a matter of morality" (Meyers 1988:194).

[9] It would be interesting to explore the symbols of the shoe, spitting, etc., but this would take us beyond the framework of this paper. The terms translated "loosed" is not the same Hebrew word as the "loosen" in the *sotah* text.

The children of Israel are put through an ordeal of bitter waters as a result of their "adultery" with the Golden Calf! The disorder they brought to their relationship to God brought them death through drinking water mixed with the ground up Calf. The metaphor of the Israelites as the (usually faithless) wife of God is central throughout the *TaNaKh* (see for example Hosea, chap. 1,2). Rabbinic interpreters hardly needed to go beyond the text itself when they picture the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai as the wedding of God and the Israelites, and the incident of the Golden Calf as the first act of betrayal (e.g., Devarim Rabbah 3:12, TB Avodah Zarah 44a[10]).

This is important for us is that it takes the symbolism of order and disorder, life and death, and male and female, onto the national and the cosmic levels. Whereas the woman's covered or braided hair is a symbol for legitimate sexuality and the fertility of the family unit, and loosened, disheveled hair a symbol for death, we now see the same equation, order = life, disorder = death, as applied to the entire nation. God's feminine partner Israel must be faithful and "in order" (as opposed to פרוץ disorderly, unfaithful) if the "couple" is to live and prosper together.

One common element in both stories is the priest. It is therefore interesting to see the root פ"ר"ע appear in another context in connection with the priest's hair. In Leviticus 10:6 and 21:10, we see injunctions prohibiting a priest from allowing his hair to become wild:

> And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, took each of them his censer, and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And a fire went out from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord...And Moshe said to Aharon, and to El'azar and to Itamar, his sons, 'Let the hair of your heads not grow long (על תפרעו), neither rend your clothes; lest you die, and lest anger come upon all the people' (Leviticus 10:1-6).

> And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not suffer the hair of his head to grow long (לא יפרע), nor rend his clothes; neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother; neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the Lord (Leviticus 21:10-12).

The growing of long hair is associated with death and mourning. As the Rabbis concluded from these passages, the customs for mourning involved letting one's hair grow long and rending one's clothes (Babylonian Talmud, Moed Katan 14b). That these should be the symbols of mourning in this society is not surprising given our hypothesis that order was associated with life and disorder with death.[11] The priests were specifically prohibited both from contact with death and from the symbols of mourning: long hair and rent clothing. These prohibitions point to two interrelated aspects of the priests' role: as embodiments of the order within the nation, and as guardians of the Sanctuary, from which the nation drew its life.

A great deal of attention is paid to the physical appearance of the priests. In the Book of Exodus a large amount of space is devoted to describing the detailed requirements for the priests' clothing. The High Priest especially had clothing which symbolized the unity of the Israelite tribes. For example, the name of each tribe was engraved on his breast plate. The priests were required to be free of physical defects, especially with regard to their genitals, and they had strict rules as to which women they could marry. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz points out that the priests were the sector of Israelite society which was most dedicated to the principle of ascribed status (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990:175). They functioned primarily *as bodies*, as living exemplars of Mary Douglas's theory that bodily control and integrity signals control and integrity in the society.[12]

It is not hard to see the parallels between the married woman and the priest. One could almost say the women played the priest's role within the family by symbolizing the integrity of the family through her body as the priest symbolized the integrity of the society in the order and wholeness of his. Both were restricted in their sexuality and, to a certain extent, even their movements (the High Priest was not to leave the Sanctuary; the woman was not to "go aside" or, in other places, "go out"). Or, one could perhaps say that the priest played a feminine role. His avoidance of death can be seen as reflecting his role as one who serves in the Sanctuary, which was the source of life for the Israelite nation. Once a year, the High Priest would enter the Holy of

[10] For more references to Mount Sinai as the wedding of God and the Jews, see Louis Ginzberg 1968:36, n.200. I thank Rabbi Eliezer Finkelman, Ph.D., for pointing out this source.

[11] Mary Douglas has, of course, already pointed out the concern for borders and clear categories which characterized this society. I am elaborating on this theme by emphasizing the importance of the notions of life and death. Jacob Milgrom has criticized Douglas's work on the pollution system in ancient Israel as too focused on the idea of order/disorder. He favors the symbolism of life/death. I argue that the two metaphors work together (Douglas 1969 and Milgrom 1991).

[12] Less visible in their roles than the priests were the Levites, who were, nevertheless, perhaps even more exemplary of the idea of bodily control reflecting social control. The Levites were in a sense the soldiers, the guardians of the Sanctuary and the orderly hierarchy of the Israelite's encampment as described in the first four chapters of Numbers. In Numbers 8:5-22 the initiation of the Levites is described. In it the Levites shave off *all* of their body hair.

Holies, and bring out (as a midwife?) atonement from sin, and, therefore, life for the nation.

Both the priest and the married woman seem to carry symbolic meaning as bodies, representing in their physical appearance, sexual behavior, and genealogical purity the wholeness and order deemed necessary for the nation and the family respectively. The priest closely aligns with Mary Douglas's idea of the body reflecting society. He, the High Priest especially, is the public symbol of society. He is at the top of a hierarchy by which the nation is ordered. This is a hierarchy based on bodies, on birth. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz attributes this concern with physical integrity and genealogy to the Priestly Writer, or the priestly class of society. He opposes this to the writings of the prophets, who saw holiness more in terms of moral uprightness. It seems clear from the texts, though, that these "factions" were constantly in interaction, so that it is difficult to neatly separate them one from another. It is also not so easy to make a tidy distinction between morality and the priestly concern for physical order. This point may be illustrated with a few other examples, also having to do with the symbolism of hair.

The Book of Leviticus describes the plague of *tzara'at*, commonly translated as leprosy. In fact, it is clear that this is not the disease which we know of today as leprosy (see Milgrom 1991:817). *Tzara'at* includes a variety of swellings, or various colored sores of the skin or scalp. It also, however, may affect one's cloths, or even one's house.

For our purposes we should note that one who is affected by *tzara'at* lets his or her hair grow long or wild, tears his clothes and sits outside the encampment (or the city). When re-entering society the *metzorah* (one affected by *tzara'at*), does an elaborate ritual including shaving of the hair:

> And the diseased man in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and the hair of his head shall grow long, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days during which the plague shall be in him he shall be unclean; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; outside the camp shall be his habitation (Leviticus 13:45-6).
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> And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water, and be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, but he shall remain outside his tent seven days. And it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall bathe his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean (Leviticus 14:8-9).

Again we have our textual link, the root פ"ר"ע referring to wild or long hair. It is interesting to see its appearance here in the case of the *metzorah*. The *metzorah* goes through the rituals of one in mourning, tearing the clothes and letting the hair grow long—both symbols of breaking, loosening control. But even beyond the "mourning" rituals required of the *metzorah*, his or her flesh itself is "broken" with the sores and swellings. The ritual tearings and loosenings are extensions of the symbolism of the plague itself. It seems we are dealing with concentric layers of "skin," covering, or protection—the physical skin, clothing, houses, the city: all carry symbolic meaning having to do with the protection, cohesion, wholeness (or lack thereof) of society in its various levels.

Milgrom has written that in *TaNaKh* the plague of *tzara'at* is related to both *ma'al* (trespass against God, sacrilege), and also to moral sins. He also mentions that "scale disease" is commonly seen in ancient Near Eastern texts as a punishment for breach of treaties (Milgrom 1991:820-822). The Rabbis understood the plague of *tzara'at* as caused by social and especially verbal sins (see Babylonian Talmud, Arachin 16a). This was not simply homiletics on the part of the rabbis, but based on evidence of the various texts were *tzara'at* is mentioned. The clearest example is that of Miriam, who is punished for her slander of Moshe with *tzara'at* (Numbers 12:10-13):

> And Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe because of the Kushite woman whom he had taken, for he had taken a Kushite woman...And the anger of the Lord was inflamed against them; and he departed. And the cloud was removed from the tent; and, behold, Miriam was snow white, stricken with *tzara'at*; and Aharon looked upon Miriam, and behold, she was diseased...

I would argue that in all these cases the common factor is social "tearing": breaking of categories and breaches of trust. The moral offenses such as slander and broken treaties are subsumed (as Milgrom points out) under religious law, and the breaches of sacred categories are seen as offending the "personal" relationship between the Israelites and God. (We saw this parallelism in the comparison between the suspected adulterous and the incident of the Golden Calf. It should be noted that the suspected adulteress is accused of *ma'al*, "sacrilege," in compromising the sacred category of sex within marriage.) Thus, the plague of *tzara'at* follows the symbolic logic which we have been discussing. When one breaks the social bonds of trust within the society, either by speaking slander or by committing sacrilege, one literally breaks the "fabric of society," and this brings death. The very life of Israelite society is revealed outwardly as coherence; its inner aspect is trust and faithfulness.

It is interesting to compare the *metzorah* with the priests in whom we associated "order" and "wholeness" with an almost purely physical integrity. In the case of the *metzorah* the verbal, moral order is the more

emphasized. Upon re-examination, however, we see that the sense of order required of the priests was not strictly limited to the body; their sexual and marriage restrictions cross the line into the "moral" realm. The line between the symbolic, "physical body" and the acting "moral body" was fluid; their sexual behavior could fall under both categories. As noted above in the case of the suspected adulteress, the problem is not phrased as a strictly physical issue of her allowing her body to be penetrated, but is couched in terms of betrayal of trust. This is certainly the moral sense of faithfulness which is so emphasized in the metaphor of the marriage of the Jewish people to God in the prophets. Thus, one cannot draw any clear line between the purely physical or genealogical, "priestly" order, and the "prophetic" moral order as they are represented in the bodies of the Israelites.

One final example in this section will be the *nazir*, one who takes a Nazirite vow. Becoming a *nazir* involves three prohibitions: against wine (or any grape product), against contact with the dead, and against cutting one's hair:

> When either a man or woman shall pronounce a special vow of a Nazir to separate themselves to the Lord: he (or she)[13] shall abstain from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink...All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come on his head: until the days are fulfilled, during which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days that he separates himself to the Lord he shall come at no dead body...because the crown of his God is upon his head... (Numbers 6:2-7).

The similarities as well as the contrasts to the priest are striking. Like the priest, the *nazir* avoids wine and contact with the dead; like the priest he or she is dedicated in holiness to God. In both cases special attention is paid to the head and hair. The priest must not let his hair grow wild, must wear a special head-covering, and the High Priest must anoint his head with oil. The *nazir's* holiness seems centered, by contrast, in his or her long hair. However (and we will return to this point shortly), both are described as having a "crown" on their heads: the *nazir's* long, wild hair is called *nezer*, and the High Priest's anointing oil is, oddly enough, also given the appellation *nezer* (Leviticus 21:12).

One might say that the *nazir* is one who is attempting, as it were, to be a priest, to ascend the ladder of holiness, not though the genealogically based hierarchy of the priesthood, but through individual behavior. This would explain the contrast with the priest in the matter of hair. Long, wild hair seems to symbolize the *nazir's* separation from society, his or her separate and lonely quest for holiness. That this is looked upon with ambivalence is shown by the fact that at the conclusion of the period of the vow the *nazir* must offer up his or her shaven hair to the *priest*, who waves it as with a sacrifice and throws it into the fire on the altar.

Long hair means lack of order on several different levels: the sexual, the social, the physical-genealogical. It is usually looked at as a negative thing, linked with death and chaos and impurity. But it is also given at least an ambivalent approval in the case of the *nazir*. It could be that this is not a small or insignificant exception, but rather the key to an altogether different approach to holiness, a more spontaneous, charismatic holiness contrasting with the hierarchical, orderly holiness of the priests. It is this type of holiness which is represented by prophets such as Elijah, who was described as a hairy man, and of course, by Samson (who complicates matters by being born a *nazir*)![14]

However, there is still one loose strand. The priest is not simply opposed and contrasted to his individualistic counterpart, the *nazir*, but as we noted, is himself described as having a *nezer* on his head. The word *nezer* also can refer to grape vines. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz discusses grape vines in the context of the symbolism of circumcision:

> There is no direct evidence that the priestly writer say an analogy between circumcision and pruning. But the priestly work does make an explicit comparison between pruning and the act of cutting another part of the body, namely the hair. During the Sabbatical year, Israelites are instructed not to carry out any horticultural activity, including the pruning of grape vines. These untrimmed vines the priests call 'your nazirites' (*nezireka*) or the 'nazirites' of the fields (*nezireha*) (Lev. 25:5,11)...The extension of the term 'nazirite' to untrimmed vines rests on a metaphoric association between an unpruned vineyard (which is being dedicated to God) and a man who has untrimmed hair (because he has consecrated himself to God) (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990:151).

The word *nezer* points to a general association between long hair, untrimmed vines, and, possibly, the anointing oil on the head of the High Priest. These all have some relationship to the Holy. The hair of the *nazir* and the untrimmed vines are holy in their wildness, abandoned and dedicated to God; the anointing oil is holy and as such seems to point to a hidden, untamed, aspect to the priest's holiness. It seems that the holiness of strict hierarchy cannot exist in complete isolation. It is not enough that the hierarchical order of the priests is balanced by the lonely dedication of the *nazir*, but the

[13] The parenthetic addition is mine. It should be considered as applying to the rest of this paragraph as well.

[14] Cf. Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (1987:37-67). She gives a psychoanalytic, feminist analysis of Samson which I believe could be enriched by a more fine-grained cultural analysis.

priest himself must have an association with the wild, the untrimmed, if he is to truly be a guardian of the life of the nation. This is perhaps the same dynamic as Stallybras and White refer to when they write of the dependence of the top on the bottom, or self on the Other (Stallybras and White 1986:4-5). As much as a culture seeks to equate life with order, it cannot make a braid without first letting its hair down.

CONCLUSION

The subject of the symbolic meaning of hair poses difficult questions of interpretation. Hair, along with the body in general, stands on the border between individual, subjective experience and social facts. I have shown that one does not need to leave the interpretation of such bodily symbols to a mystifying and universalist psychoanalytical approach. Rather, following Hallpike and Douglas, I have related the hair requirements seen in several examples from *TaNaKh* to problems of society, such as a concern for order, control of sexuality, relationship of the individual and community, and others. I have shown that the body may not always symbolize society as a whole, but rather a complex set of relations between the individual, the family, clan, etc. One does not have to reify the family structure imagined by Freud, but instead may allow that the family is part of what Hallpike calls "the world" and observe its effect on symbolic acts or ideas along with the other complex, personal and communal, physical and ideological, relations which make up social life. The hair symbolism in *TaNaKh* provides important evidence that there is no intrinsic reason to maintain a hiatus between the personal and the social.

I have gone beyond the useful but sketchy interpretations of Biblical material given by both Hallpike and Douglas to give a richer account of the pattern of symbols of which hair forms a small but vital part. I have, for example, noted the interaction between the concern for order, and the symbolism of life/death. This touches on the symbolism of the masculine and feminine, and the interweaving of both in the culture of the *TaNaKh*.

The married woman's hair is to be kept in order because she represents the "life" of the family. In a society where kinship was primary in organizing the world, and especially in an agrarian, patriarchal society in which farms are passed on from father to (usually) son, true human "life" means going beyond biological fertility to the creation of orderly generations of families, lineages, and tribes. Women were the vital link between physical reproduction and this concern for orderly descent. The "wholeness" and orderliness of the women's body represented the integrity of the family unit. We have noted how this symbolism is not limited to actual female humans, but is extended metaphorically to the Jewish nation as a whole, as shown by the negative case of the Golden Calf. In this national context, the marriage between God and the Jewish people, the (male) priests play a "feminine" role. Their physical wholeness, represented by their immaculate genealogies, strict marriage laws, and bodily integrity (including orderly, trimmed hair), symbolizes the blessed, fertile status of the nation. The association of disorder with death is seen most clearly in the case of "leprosy" (*tzara'at*). Here, one who breaks the social fabric confronts disintegration of his or her own external coverings: skin, clothing, even houses. They don the symbols of the mourner: tearing cloths and letting the hair grow. The examples of the *sotah*, who breaks the trust within the marriage, and the *metzorah*, who tears the harmony and unity of society, demonstrate that the "priestly" concern for order is not to be neatly separated from the "prophetic" call for social justice and morality. Trust, faithfulness, social cohesion were the inner meanings of the external order associated with the priests. Finally, the example of the *nazir* introduces an ambiguity in the meaning of order, and especially orderly hair. The *nazir* is the spiritual parallel to the priest, equal in their laws of death and wine avoidance, but exactly opposite in laws concerning orderly hair. The wild hair of the *nazir* can be seen as a symbol of the individual quest, of the alternative path to holiness outside and separate from the official hierarchy. This would seem to represent the cultural dialectic between the priest and the prophet; between the establishment and the critic. But, we noted, the *nezer*, the untamed, finds its way even into the crown of the high priest. There is a recognition that order cannot exist on its own. Without a vital, unbounded life force the controlled hierarchical order cannot produce blessed fruit.

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