

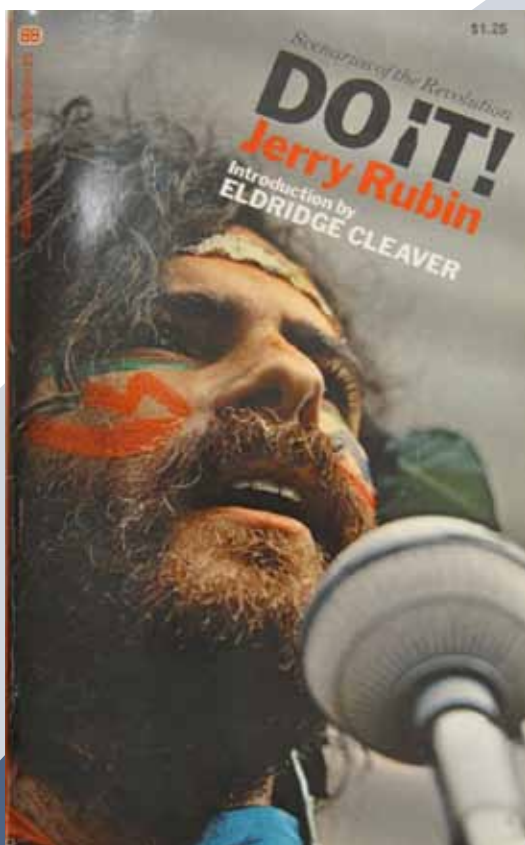
Sacred Stories

A Living Commentary on American Jewish History and the Hebrew Bible

NASSO MAY 18, 2013

Nasso, The Nazirite

By Rabbi Darby Leigh



Artifact:

DO IT! Scenarios of the Revolution

Jerry Rubin, New York: Ballantine Books, 1970

National Museum of American Jewish History

Located on the second floor in the case in front of the large film screens

Nasso, The Nazirite

Sacred Stories **NASSO**

What kind of hair do you have? Do you have long hair, short hair, or no hair at all? If you have hair, what color is it? Is it brown, blonde, white, black, green, red, purple, or something else? What style is your hair? Is it thin, thick, wavy, straight, or curly? Do you have dreadlocks, a mohawk, *peyos*? Do you show your hair or keep it covered?

To what extent does your hairstyle demonstrate affiliation with a particular social/cultural group, or distinction from a group? How much of your identity is connected with your hair? Put another way, if you were to wake up tomorrow with a radically different hairstyle, how might you feel?

How much of your identity is connected with your hair?

As you look at Jerry Rubin's book *Do It: Scenarios of the Revolution*, it is striking to note that one of the things Rubin and so many activists from the 1960s shared was an affinity for wearing long hair. The long hair of the "hippies" encapsulated a rejection of mainstream, normative attitudes about appearance, ideology, and values. Images of people with long hair have become iconic symbols of the 1960s, perhaps best captured in the Broadway play *Hair*.

In fact one of the most famous lines about hair in the play, "Swing it, flow it, long as God can grow it, my hair," has roots (pun intended) in this week's Torah portion. In the book of Numbers, chapter 6, we read of a figure called the Nazirite. A Nazirite could be a man or a woman and was essentially a solitary spiritual seeker, one who took a radical step in dedicating him/herself to developing a closer relationship to God by separating from the community. On this spiritual path, a Nazirite took three vows, including a vow to not cut his/her hair for the duration of being a Nazirite.

Why was growing long hair one of the Nazirite vows? Why was the same act such a powerful statement for young people in the 1960s, thousands of years later? Our hair – or lack of hair – is something that we often take for granted. We are not in control of our hair before it sprouts from our head, and we can only manipulate it once it has appeared. Perhaps a decision to not cut one’s hair signifies an acceptance of things beyond human control and an appreciation of the Energy that makes our hair grow, as well as our hearts beat and our lungs breathe – an appreciation of the Energy in which some may see God.

A life-long “truth seeker,” Rabbi Darby Jared Leigh is a native New Yorker who loves mountains. Rabbi Leigh is a fire-juggling Generation Xer who toured as a leading actor with the Tony award-winning National Theater of the Deaf and has educated others on deafness through his work with organizations such as the New York City Fire Department, the American Musical and Dramatic Academy, and the New York City Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities. Rabbi Leigh earned his bachelor of arts in religion, summa cum laude, from the University of Rochester—where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa—and a master of arts in religion from Columbia University before attending the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. He currently serves as Associate Rabbi at Congregation Bnai Keshet.

ARTIFACT

DO IT! Scenarios of the Revolution

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About this partnership:

Both the Jewish People and the United States of America are rooted in a quest for greater freedom and human dignity. Inspired by this parallelism, the National Museum of American Jewish History is collaborating with Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership and its Rabbis Without Borders program to launch a new initiative, **Sacred Stories: A Living Commentary on the Hebrew Bible and American Jewish History**.

Sacred Stories weaves together Judaism's foundational sacred text, the Torah, with one of the most successful expressions of freedom in human history, the story of Jewish life in America. **Sacred Stories** explores our shared values by linking these two vital and compelling stories through contemporary commentary and 21st century media.

The **Torah** is a central feature of Jewish tradition. Used to refer generally to Jewish wisdom, it also refers specifically to the 5 Books of Moses which makes up the Hebrew Bible. A portion of the Torah text, a **Parsha**, is read on **Shabbat** (Sabbath). The whole Torah is read sequentially over the course of the year. Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest and begins on Friday evenings and ends Saturday night. Many Jews observe Shabbat to emulate God's resting on the seventh day of Creation. The fourth commandment is to keep Shabbat holy which Jews do with festive meals, resting, and learning.



The National Museum of American Jewish History, on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, presents educational programs and experiences that preserve, explore and celebrate the history of Jews in America. Its purpose is to connect Jews more closely to their heritage and to inspire in people of all backgrounds a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American Jewish experience and the freedoms to which Americans aspire.



Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership is a think tank, leadership training institute, and resource center. Bringing Jewish insights to a wide American audience, Clal makes Jewish wisdom an accessible public resource. A leader in religious pluralism, Clal builds bridges across communities to encourage diversity and openness. Linking Jewish texts and tradition with innovative scholarship, Clal promotes Jewish participation in American civic and spiritual life, reinvigorating communities and enhancing leadership development.