

Beheadings, The Three Weeks and...Mesiras Nefesh to have a Beard

מדרש רבה (איכה ה,ה):

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ולז"א על צוארנו נרדפנו. יפה ענף שם).

Chazal write in *Midrash Rabba*:

“Upon our necks we are pursued” (*Eicha* 5:5). The accursed [Roman emperor] Hadrian decreed: “If I come and find a single hair upon a Jew, I will cut off his head.” This is what is alluded to in the verse, “Upon our necks we are pursued.”

[What hair is referred to here? The commentary *Yefeh Anaf*, which appears in all standard editions of *Midrash Rabba*, offers the following explanation:] Hadrian ordered the Jews to remove their beard and *peyos*, but the Jews “hardened their necks” — a Biblical idiom for stubbornness — and defied him, despite his decree that those who disobeyed would be beheaded.

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For a comprehensive treatment of this subject, see:

Sefer Hadras Ponim Zokon / by Rabbi Moshe Wiener / The Cutting and Growth of the Beard in Halachic Perspective / Published with the Endorsements of the Leading Halachic Authorities of our Times / 900 pages
(in expanded third edition)