

Why Did the Litvishe Yeshiva Bochurim Start Shaving their Beards?

— *for reasons of Yiras Shomayim* — or just the opposite? —
— *Did the great Litvishe Roshei Yeshiva of Europe discourage Bochurim
from growing a beard?* —

The following response to this question was published in:
Visions of the Rov

Highlights from the Life and Times of Moreinu Hagaon Harav
Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz ZT"L, Chapter I, pg. 28:



“In Slobodka... Western influences had infiltrated the Yeshivos of that time, making .. beardless faces the norm...” *

“He [young Rav Avrohom Kalmonowitz, who never shaved his beard] even earned the respect of his rebbeim, Roshei Yeshiva and friends for his strength of character and his ability to adhere to his convictions.”

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* Additional sources documenting why the Litvishe Yeshiva Bochurim started shaving their beards: In Kovetz Igros (volume I, #197) our teacher, the **Chazon Ish**, writes about removing the beard with “sam” [depilatory cream]: “...I find this matter very painful.. [Jews] have learned it from the non-Jews during their exile.” In another letter (#198) he writes: “I have never accepted the behavior of those who remove their beards.. for I am accustomed to this being prohibited since the previous generations, and [the prohibition] was very severe..Although this sickness has spread even among Torah scholars [“Bnei Torah”], may they be well, the issue has not changed as a result of this, and therefore my soul burns with rage because of this practice.” See also HaGaon R’ Chayim Kanievsky, shlita, (in his sefer Orchos Yosher, pg. 19): “Throughout our history, it has been a disgrace for anyone not to have a beard. It is only in recent generations that some have started to treat this irreverently, having learned this from the non-Jews.”

For similar statements (from our teacher the Chofetz Chaim and many other Gedolim) regarding the (non Yiras Shomayim) reasons shaving started in Litvishe and other circles, and for a comprehensive treatment concerning the growth and cutting of the beard in Halachic perspective, see sefer Hadrass Ponim Zokon by Rabbi Moshe Wiener (1,000 pages in expanded third edition and published with the Haskamos of the greatest Gedolim of our times).