

Shelach - Rabbi Lerner - May 26, 2013

The Mitzvah of Tzitzis

When was the mitzvah of Tzitzis given to Bnei Yisrael? It appears in the Torah in the aftermath of the story of the Meraglim, but also after the story of the Mekoshesh Etzim - the wood gatherer on Shabbos. Moshe did not know what punishment he deserved, and Hashem then told him that he must be stoned - Bnei Yisrael then follows through and executes him.

Immediately following this is the parsha of tzitzis. **Rashi**: this story of the Mekoshesh was a tremendous shame to Bnei Yisrael, that from the time we were given the mitzvah of Shabbos at Marah, we kept only the very first Shabbos - according to the Sifri, the Mekoshesh was mechalel Shabbos on the second Shabbos. **Sifri**: Shabbos, civil laws and Parah Aduma were given to Bnei Yisrael at Marah. After Hashem saw what happened, with the people falling apart so quickly after Marah, and with the Mekoshesh being mechalel Shabbos, He gave us the mitzvah of tzitzis. So this story is completely out of place, having occurred so much earlier. **Da'as Zekanim**: why was the parsha of the wood gatherer placed next to tzitzis? Tefillin are not worn on Shabbos (this mitzvah given in Bo) because it is an Os, a sign for us; Shabbos itself is an Os and therefore we do not require a second Os, that of Tefillin; if the wood gatherer had been wearing his Tefillin, he would have been kept in check and would not have been mechalel Shabbos; therefore, this led to the mitzvah of tzitzis, which is a mitzvah that is around the clock - it was given as a response to the wood gatherer, so that it would remind people not to be mechalel Shabbos. **Ramban**: this event happened now, after the story of the Meraglim - it is in its proper order.

Abarbanel: this did happen after the story of the Meraglim, in the order of the parshios presented in the Torah - just as Bnei Yisrael began to doubt Moshe as seen with the story of the Meraglim - there it was a national tragedy - this story is similar, but it was a personal tragedy, with only one person sinning. Another interpretation: the mitzvah of tzitzis was one of the earliest mitzvos given to Bnei Yisrael, because it was an important mitzvah of being an Os for them; but Moshe did not transmit the mitzvah to Bnei Yisrael until this point in time for some reason - he held back, but what made him tell it now was the incident of the wood gatherer, when he realized that had they had this mitzvah as an Os, maybe he would not have sinned on Shabbos.

15:39: *It shall constitute tzitzis for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them; and not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray.* **Ba'al Haturim**: Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to dress up like angels, in pure garments; therefore, we dress with this garment that has Techayles, the blue color which makes us think of the seas and the heavens; we are God's angels on earth; this mitzvah will remind us we are a holy people on a completely different plane. **Sforno**: the tzitzis are a mark of Avdus - as if we are branded as an Eved Hashem - we are His servants and have to constantly be reminded of this; if we remember that God owns us, it will stop us from going after the impulses and desires of our hearts; we will not go after the tempting physical pleasures. It is like a mark of bondage. **Rashi**: quoting a Midrash: the gematria of tzitzis is 600; if we add the eight strings and 5 knots it adds up to 613, the Taryag mitzvos. **Ramban**: doesn't understand this gematria - tzitzis in the Torah here is written without the second yud three times (twice in 15:38, once in 15:39) - it only adds up to 590, not 600. Other Rishonim defend Rashi - one of these words has *Letzitzis* - the lamed is 30 which adds 10 to each of the three mentioning of tzitzis.

Ibn Ezra: those who pray with a big Talis during davening go all out in their kavanah, particularly when they read the Shema. While this might be appropriate, his personal opinion is that the Talis katon - the tzitzis - are more important because they are worn the entire day, when there is much more concern about sinning; during davening you are less likely to sin - wearing the talis katon would be more important during the day when the temptation to sin is greater. It would seem less important to wear the Talis gadol during davening.

Or HaChayim: the tzitzis is a sign that we are servants of Hashem - they are almost like chains, knotted around us - like we are tied down to Hashem, we don't have the ability to do whatever we want, just like a servant. We are tied in restraints like a servant. When one wears them he realizes that he is not like a free person - we always have the fear of our master, and it serves as a control over us. The Gemorrah in Menachos tells a story of a person intent on sinning, who is climbing a ladder to consort with a prostitute, and suddenly as he climbs one of the strands of tzitzis smacks him in the face, reminding him not to sin. The tzitzis makes one holy, it helps to control our sexual desires, reminding one that he is an eved Hashem. This is why it is on a four cornered garment, because it reminds us of Hashem who created the four corners of the world; it helps keep us in line.

Oznayim LaTorah: the word *ledorosum* in 15:38 means for all generations. It tells us that the mitzvah is for all times - the Rambam counts as mitzvos only those that are for all time; mitzvos must be eternal. Does the Torah need to go out of its way to point out that tzitzis is for all generations? It is necessary so that it should not be said that Hashem is commanding us to wear tzitzis on our garments to be different from the goyim in only certain circumstances; we shouldn't think that we are commanded to wear this just in the desert when we are in isolation and no one sees us, and no one will ridicule us; and we shouldn't think it is only when we are an independent nation in Eretz Yisrael where we will set up our own laws and fashion of what we wear. We might then think that for the majority of Jewish history, when we are in galus, in foreign lands amongst strangers, and they will ridicule us for wearing this - we might think that in those generations we are pator, free from the mitzvah of tzitzis - or that maybe we should just hide our tzitzis when we wear them - this pasuk emphasizes that we should not be afraid of showing how we wear them outwardly - we should not be ashamed of them; that is why the Torah says Bedorosom, so we should always be proud of our Jewish identity.

Meshech Chachmah: Hashem, whose wisdom is part of His essence, created our world; but in creating our world, He created it in a fluid, dangerous state; He created human beings with free will - we have the power to perfect the world, but also to destroy the world; heaven is perfect, but the earth was turned over to man who is not perfect. He threw the obligation of perfecting the world to us - we can make something incredibly great. Hashem created the world for Avraham and his descendants, for us to perfect. Hashem's name of Shakai meant that it was enough - Dy - He did enough and it was our job to finish the job. The first two trials of mankind - with the children of Adam and Noach - failed; it was Avraham's job to finish it and to perfect the world. The Torah says Hashem created the world - *Behiboram* - meaning BeAvraham. The symbol of this was circumcision - a job we have to do because man is born incomplete - we have to perfect this imperfect world, just as we do when we circumsize an infant. Therefore, Hashem also gave us the mitzvah of tzitzis. The world is similar to a garment - He spread out the light of the world like a beged (as we say in Borchi Nafshi) - when it comes to the beged of the tzitzis, it is created as something weird - it is incomplete - there are loose fringes hanging down from a completed garment, and this garment now become incomplete. It is our job to complete the world. That is why the power of tzitzis is so amazing; this mitzvah is seven days a week - it is

our full time job to fix His world, to perfect His world; that is what tzitzis symbolizes. **Rav Simon**: the **Rav** used to say there is a difference between Gayvah and Gai'us - one is arrogance, one majesty. Hashem is not arrogant, He is majestic. He wants us to be like Him, to balance Anivus and Gay'us - we each are unique with different talents, and have different jobs to fulfill on this earth. We bring our unique talents to our role to conquer the world. We have tremendous power, but we also need to be Anovim, even in our majesty. The **Chasam Sofer** says that the symbol of this is seen from adding the first letter of the words Tzitzis Al Confei Bigdehem, which adds up to 182, which equals the name of Yaakov - he was the lesson of humility, as in his name Ekev, but also Yisrael, the name of one who contended with angels. On the Kisai Hakavod in the heavens is the image of Yaakov because he represents the essence of being great and humble at the same time. The Techayles reminds one of the heavens, and the Kisai Hakavod, the image of Yaakov, who is both Yaakov and Yisrael at the same time. The Tefillin is most visible, worn on our forehead for all to see - this is the mighty, the majesty - but at the same time we wear the tzitzis which is low down, to remind us to be humble.