

# חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

## Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

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### Parashas Shelach

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#### I

#### The sending of the spies was at Moshe's direction

In our parashah (Bamidbar 13:1-3), Hakadosh Baruch Hu speaks to Moshe Rabbeinu, as it says:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: שְׁלַח־לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיְחַרְוּ אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִטֵּה אַבְתָּיו תִּשְׁלְחוּ כָל נָשִׂיא בְקִהֶם:

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: 'Send for yourself men, and let them spy out the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to Bnei Yisrael; one man, one man from each tribe of his fathers shall you send, everyone a prince among them.'"

And in the following verse:

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה מִמִּדְבַּר פָּאֵרָן עַל־פִּי ה' כְּלָם אַנְשִׁים רֵאשֵׁי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל  
הַמָּה:

"And Moshe sent them from the Wilderness of Paran at the command of Hashem; all of them were distinguished men, heads of Bnei Yisrael."

Rashi explains the words "Send for yourself" as follows: "According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you. If you wish, send them." In other words, Hakadosh Baruch Hu did not command Moshe to send the spies, but granted him permission to decide according to his own discretion. Moshe, in his wisdom,

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chose to send them, as the verse states, "And Moshe sent them"—and not just ordinary people, but "*anashim*" ("men")—the great spiritual leaders of the generation, the princes of the tribes, the heads of Bnei Yisrael.

### **Moshe sent them, but to whom did they deliver their report?**

When the spies returned after forty days (verses 25–26), the Torah states:

וַיָּשׁוּבוּ מִתּוֹר הָאֶרֶץ מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים  
 יוֹם: וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיְבִאוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן  
 וְאֶל-כָּל-עֵדוּת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-מִדְבַּר  
 פָּאֲרוֹ קִדְשָׁה וַיֵּשִׁיבוּ אֲתָם דְּבַר וְאֵת-  
 כָּל-הָעֵדוּה וַיִּרְאוּם אֶת-פְּרֵי הָאֶרֶץ:

"And they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days. They went and came to Moshe and to Aharon and to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh, and they brought back a report to them and to the entire congregation, and they showed them the fruit of the land."

Who was the one who sent them? Moshe Rabbeinu. The *halacha* regarding an agent is that he should return and report directly to the one who sent him (*Maseches Gittin* 24a). Yet the spies did not stop with Moshe. They

continued on to Aharon, and afterward to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael. In the next verse (13:27) it says: "And they told him and said: 'We came to the land to which you sent us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.'"

The Torah emphasizes "they told *him*," Moshe, because he was the one who had sent them. In fact, they themselves emphasize that they are reporting specifically to him as the sender, saying in the singular, "the land to which you sent us." Yet in practice, they delivered their words before the entire congregation.

### **The slanderous report of the Spies**

The testimony of the spies began on a positive note: "Indeed it flows with milk and honey." But once they began describing the giants and the fortified cities, fear descended upon the congregation. And even though Bnei Yisrael had witnessed tremendous miracles, the Ten Plagues, the Splitting of the Sea, the descent of the *mahn*, and the Exodus from Egypt, they recoiled and lost confidence, as it says (14:3): "Why is Hashem bringing us to this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our children will become prey. Would it

not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

That night, the night of Tishah B'Av, was established as a night of weeping and calamity for future generations, a measure for measure response to their complaints. As the Sages teach: "You wept a weeping for naught; therefore, I will establish for you a weeping for generations" (*Maseches Taanis* 29a). The *lashon hara* (slander) of the spies influenced the congregation, and the congregation accepted their words. *Lashon hara* involves two parties, the speaker and the listener, and the sin of the listener is even greater than that of the speaker (Rambam, *Hilchos De'os* 7:3). Yet here, when the entire congregation accepted the *lashon hara*, they entered a state of a "mass crowd," where the individual is nullified by the perception of the collective, and the truth becomes completely distorted.

Only two men remained steadfast in their faith: Yehoshua bin Nun and Kalev ben Yefuneh. They proclaimed (14:8): "If Hashem desires us, then He will bring us to this land and give it to us, a land flowing with milk and

honey." But the congregation responded with violence, threatening to stone them.

### **What was Moshe's reasoning?**

The sending of the spies took place at Moshe's initiative and direction, as we explained above. What, then, was Moshe thinking? How did he expect events to unfold?

Had the spies conducted themselves in accordance with the laws governing agents and reported only to Moshe and his Sanhedrin, the seventy elders appointed in parashas Behaaloscha (Bamidbar 11), the outcome would likely have been entirely different. Had they gone to the *Beis Din* (rabbinical court of law), their testimony would have been subject to proper examination and cross-examination. The spies would have been required to testify as witnesses, and their words of *lashon hara* could have been rejected or invalidated. And even if not, the testimony of Yehoshua and Kalev would have contradicted that of the spies, because in the laws of testimony, two witnesses carry the same weight as one hundred witnesses, and opposing testimonies can neutralize one another. The result?

The scheme of the spies would have been thwarted and nullified. In such a scenario, Bnei Yisrael would have entered Eretz Yisrael in the second year after the Exodus of Egypt, together with Moshe Rabbeinu, without forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

### **Why did they report to Aharon?**

The verse states that the spies came to Moshe, to Aharon, and afterward to the entire congregation. Why Aharon? He wasn't the one who sent them! Possibly, the spies wished to ensure that Moshe and Aharon, being brothers, would not be able to judge the matter as a *Beis Din*, since close relatives may not serve together as judges (see *Choshen Mishpat* 7:9). This may have been part of the spies' strategy to prevent a proper halachic investigation.

### **The power of the congregation and the sin of *lashon hara***

In our parashah, all of Bnei Yisrael are called an *eidah* (congregation), but the slanderous spies are likewise called an *eidah*. From here the Sages derive that an *eidah* consists of ten people, since there were ten spies. Similarly, in parashas Korach, the rebels are called

an *eidah*. However, both the spies and Korach's followers are called an *eidah ra'ah*, an evil congregation, teaching us the tremendous power of a congregation to influence both for good and for evil. The spies spread *lashon hara* to the entire congregation, and the congregation accepted their words. *Lashon hara* is a grave sin, and once it spreads among the masses it can no longer be retrieved. Here, however, the sin was even more severe. The spies disparaged the land promised by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, denied Hashem's ability to protect them, and caused a *chilul Hashem* (desecration of the Divine Name), a sin that is not fully atoned for through repentance, Yom Kippur, and suffering alone, but only through death (see Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 1:4).

### **The merit of the minyan**

The Sages derive from the spies that a minyan (quorum) consists of ten people. It is within a minyan that the Shechinah (Divine presence) dwells, as it is said: "And I shall be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael."

The spies were originally righteous men,

and even after their sin they wished to repent. However, since their sin was committed publicly and caused a *chilul Hashem*, this is why they did not merit complete atonement during their lifetime. Every prayer recited with a minyan, one may say, is a merit for the spies, for they taught us the power of ten Jews gathered together. May it be the will of Hashem that our communal prayers serve as a rectification for them and for us.



## **II**

### **The mitzvah of tzitzis: a rectification for the sin of the spies**

Parashas Shelach (15:38) concludes with the section of tzitzis (fringes):

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם  
וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית...

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them that they shall make for themselves tzitzis..."

The verse opens with "*daber*" ("speak"), an expression of firm speech, and concludes with *ve'amarta* ("say"), an expression of gentle speech. What is the significance of this change from a firm expression to a gentle one? It seems to me that the

mitzvah of tzitzis comes to rectify the sin of the spies that preceded it in our parashah. Therefore, the passage begins with a firm expression because of the rebuke and moral instruction it contains, but concludes with "*ve'amarta*," a gentle expression, to draw them close and give them hope for rectification. This idea is further reinforced by the Torah's inclusion of the word *aleihem*, "to them," indicating that these words should penetrate deeply within their hearts.

The hope for rectification lies in the mitzvah of tzitzis. The mitzvah of tzitzis causes a person to remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and "not straying after your hearts and after your eyes." In truth, the spies sinned in both of these faculties: the heart and the eyes. They harbored thoughts of personal bias and heresy in their hearts, and this affected their eyes, causing them not to perceive correctly all that they saw in the Land of Israel. The sin of Bnei Yisrael was that they believed the words of the spies, thereby becoming partners in those same corruptions of the heart and the eyes. The rectification of the eyes comes through the proper seeing implied by "and you shall see it and remember all the mitzvos of

Hashem" (see below), and also through the fact that "the *techeles* (blue string of the tzitzis) resembles the sea, the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the *Kisei HaKavod* (Throne of Glory)." Through proper vision one rectifies the heart and brings himself to the state of "you shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes," the exact opposite of the sin of the spies. However, Bnei Yisrael added yet another sin to the transgression of the spies, the nature and rectification of which will be explained later, G-d willing. (See below, the idea we bring from the *Sfas Emes* on "daber... ve'amarta.")

### **Tzitzis allusions**

וְרֵאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וְזָכַרְתֶּם אֶת-קְלֵי-מִצְוֹת  
ה'

"And you shall see it and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem" (Bamidbar 15:39).

Through seeing the tzitzis, a Jew is reminded to observe all the mitzvos. Tzitzis consists of knots and windings, which the Torah (Devarim 22:12) calls "*gedil*," and at the ends are the loose strands, which our parashah calls "tzitzis." There are various opinions explaining how tzitzis symbolizes all 613 mitzvos. On the words "and remember all the mitzvos of

Hashem," Rashi explains that the numerical value of the word tzitzis is 600, and together with the eight strings and five knots, the total is 613. In the course of many years of davening (praying) and concentrating on these words during the kissing of the tzitzis, another idea occurred to me regarding the connection between tzitzis and remembering all the mitzvos.

### **The secret of the knots and the loose threads**

The Torah says: "And it shall be for you as tzitzis, and you shall see it and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and perform them, and you shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes, after which you go astray." The Torah then repeats itself and continues: "So that you shall remember and perform all My mitzvos and be holy to your G-d" (ibid., verse 40).

As I contemplated the knots, they brought to mind the negative commandments, the prohibitions that bind and restrict us in order to restrain our inclinations: do not steal, do not covet, do not murder, do not desecrate the Shabbos. The knots symbolize the bonds of discipline, reminding us

to remain tied to the boundaries of Hashem's will. "And you shall not stray..." essentially refers to all the negative commandments and is alluded to by the knots. Indeed, it is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* (holy books) that the literal meaning of the word "*assur*" ("forbidden") is "bound," as in "he harnessed his chariot" ("*vaya'asor es richbo*") or "bind the festival offering with cords" ("*isru chag ba'avosim*"). In other words, when something is forbidden, it is bound, restricted, unavailable for our benefit. By contrast, "*mutar*" ("permissible") is from the expression "*lehatir es hakesher*," meaning "to untie a knot," as in the forbidden labor of untying on Shabbos, which is called "*matir*." Something that is *mutar* is "free" for our taking and enjoyment.

By contrast, the loose threads (tzitzis), which are called an *anaf* ("branch"), symbolize the positive commandments: "and you shall perform them." Positive commandments require the Jew to be proactive, active, and engaged in performing mitzvos to draw closer to Hashem. The flowing strands remind us to advance in spiritual growth

out of abundant love of Hashem, while the knots awaken fear of Hashem, the boundaries and fences of the Torah that may not be crossed. The prohibitions are always binding and unchanging and, for the most part, apply equally to every Jew, whereas the positive commandments are more open and are not identical for every individual. For example, women are exempt from positive commandments that are time bound. At times, positive commandments also allow a degree of discretion for those obligated in them. For example, a person may choose when, how much, and in what manner to give *tzedakah* (charity).

This duality within the mitzvos is reflected in tzitzis: the knots, fixed and unmoving, represent the negative commandments, while the open strands, separated and free to move, represent the positive commandments.

This idea, which arose in my mind and heart as I looked daily at the tzitzis while reciting the parashah of tzitzis in Krias Shema, has helped me for more than a decade focus my intention on remembering all the mitzvos whenever I see and kiss the tzitzis. Over the

years, I have shared this thought with others, and it resonated deeply within their hearts.

### **The secret of the white and the *techeles***

Until now, I had not been privileged to find this idea in the sources. However, after more than a decade, I found in the *Sfas Emes* (5647-5648) a parallel idea in a different form that adds another layer to it. He says as follows: "Behold, it is written, '*Daber... ve'amarta...*' ('Speak... and say...'). This appears to be because tzitzis, said the Sages, is equivalent to all the mitzvos. It seems that the white and the *techeles* correspond to the positive and negative commandments, respectively. Therefore, the Torah uses both expressions, '*daber* and *ve'amarta.*' It says, 'And you shall remember,' and afterwards 'do not stray,' which is the aspect of turning away from evil, corresponding to the negative commandments. Then it says, 'So that you shall remember,' in accordance with what the Sages hinted at: "Whoever is included in '*shamor*' is

included in '*zachor.*'" These two aspects, love and fear, both bring a person to remembrance, and through this itself, the prevailing over the evil inclination, one merits 'so that you shall remember'..."

How great was my joy when I saw that I had been walking along a straight and established path, and that there is a foundation for my idea in the words of the holy *Sfas Emes*. The only difference is that he associates the positive commandments and love of Hashem with the white threads, and the negative commandments and fear of Hashem with the *techeles*, whereas I associated the positive commandments and love of Hashem with the branch-like loose strands, and the negative commandments with the knots. There is no contradiction here, only complementarity.

### **Tzitzis as a model for the integration of tradition and innovation**

With time, it occurred to me to expand this to the continuation of our lineage and tradition. The words "upon the corners of their garments throughout their generations" point to the continuity of our lineage and tradition. According to halacha, the *anaf*, the loose

strands, should be twice the length of the *gedil*, the knotted portion. To verify this proportion, one folds the loose strands over the *gedil*. This ratio led me to an additional symbolism: The *gedil* represents our tradition, transmitted to us unchanged from our fathers and grandfathers, all the way back to our ancestors who stood at Sinai. The halachos and customs handed down to us form the foundation of our Torah, they are "tied," meaning fixed and unchanging.

By contrast, one may view the *anaf*, the loose strands, as symbolizing "new branches," namely, new halachic questions that arise in every generation due to new technologies, changing circumstances, the challenges of exile, and the conditions of the times. Every generation has new questions to confront. For example, the advent of electricity and refrigerators raised new halachic discussions regarding Shabbos. These new questions are not part of the fixed and "tied" halachos. Yet the rabbanim cannot answer such questions without basing it in the Torah tradition that has been transmitted to us. Rather, just as the loose strands are measured

against the knots, they must find precedent within our "tied" tradition. In other words, the new questions must be measured against the *gedil*, the fixed and unchanging tradition. Only then, as symbolized by the freely flowing strands, may they be resolved by applying creative thinking. Rabbanim are allowed broad room for creativity, alluded to by the fact that the "branch" is twice the size of the *gedil*, but only on condition that they remain permanently connected to the tradition of the generations.

Exactly *how* we remember the mitzvot of Hashem when seeing the tzitzis is not that important. What is important is that "you shall see it and remember all the mitzvot of Hashem", that through the tzitzis we remember all the mitzvot of Hashem, whatever the path that leads us to that remembrance. The Sages say that the mitzvah of tzitzis is equivalent to all the mitzvot. The parashah of tzitzis forms part of Krias Shema, which is the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven and the yoke of the mitzvot, and its goal is "You shall be holy to your G-d," meaning that the tzitzis should lead to the performance of mitzvot

and to holiness. When kissing the tzitzis, we remember not only the 613 mitzvot, but also why we observe them: because of our faith in Hashem, Who took us out of Egypt and revealed Himself to us at Sinai, and Who commanded us to observe the mitzvot, as we shall now explain.

### **The aspect of the threefold cord in the strings of tzitzis and in Shabbos**

It is written: "Speak to the children of Israel and they shall make for themselves tzitzis on the corners of their garments throughout their generations (לדורותם) , and they shall place upon the tzitzis of the corner a thread of blue. And it shall be to you for tzitzis, and you shall see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem."

There are several observations here: Why is tzitzis mentioned three times? After all, it is obvious that we are dealing with tzitzis, so why did the text need to repeat over and over again that the threads on the corners are called tzitzis?

It should also be noted that the structure of these verses closely

resembles the structure of the verses concerning the observance of Shabbos in Parashas Ki Sisa. There it says: "And Bnei Yisrael shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos throughout their generations (לדורותם) as an everlasting covenant. Between Me and Bnei Yisrael it is a sign forever, for in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested (שבת) and was refreshed" (Shemos 31:16-17). There too, Shabbos is mentioned three times, and there too the concept of "throughout their generations" is emphasized. What do tzitzis and Shabbos have in common in that both are mentioned three times and both involve an observance "throughout the generations"?

It seems to me that the reason both tzitzis and Shabbos are mentioned three times in their respective parashiyos is to hint at the three Avos (Patriarchs), in the spirit of "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Koheles 4:12). For through the observance of these two mitzvos, we possess an enduring bond with Hashem, a strong connection capable of lasting throughout the

generations. All the generations remain connected to Hashem through the mystery of the "threefold cord that cannot be severed."

And this is the meaning of "throughout their generations": to create an unbroken chain between Israel throughout its generations and Hashem. This is the great *os* (sign) borne by the Jewish nation, identifying them as belonging to Hashem. There is the *os* of Shabbos that binds them to Hashem, and there is *os* of tzitzis, the *os* of "ur'issem *oso*", "'You shall see it' and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem," so that one never forgets Hashem and His mitzvos. Despite the length of the exile and all the tribulations we endure from generation to generation, we remain connected to Hashem. And this is the sign produced by tzitzis, an unforgettable sign, in the spirit of: "And you shall remember... so that you shall remember..."

It seems possible to suggest by way of homiletic wordplay that in the words: "And you shall see "*oso*" ("it") the word *oso* may be understood as "*os shelo*" ("His sign"), the sign of Hashem, namely, the tzitzis He gave us so that we remain connected to Him, just as Shabbos connects us

to Him through: "Between Me and Bnei Yisrael it is an *os* forever."

When I presented these ideas to the renowned gaon and author of *Shu"t Daas Yisrael*, Rabbi Yisrael Schwartz *shlita*, he was delighted by them and immediately brought support from the words of the Sages cited in *Daas Zekeinim MiBaalei HaTosafos* (Bamidbar 15:32): "Why was the section of the wood-gatherer ("*mekoshesh*") juxtaposed to the section of tzitzis? Because when the wood-gatherer desecrated Shabbos, Moshe said before Hakadosh Baruch Hu: 'Master of the Universe, it is written regarding tefillin, "so that the Torah of Hashem shall be in your mouth," yet You commanded that tefillin not be worn on Shabbos. Had he been wearing them, he would have remembered and would not have desecrated Shabbos!' Hakadosh Baruch Hu replied: 'I shall establish and command them a mitzvah through which they will remember the mitzvos just as through tefillin, and it will apply on Shabbos as well.' This is the mitzvah of tzitzis."

Thus, we see that tzitzis functions as an *os*, a sign, just like tefillin, except

that not only is it permitted on Shabbos, it actually unites with and supports the *os* of Shabbos. These ideas shine brightly and are sweet as when they were given at Sinai. (See further below.)

### **Kissing the tzitzis and seeing them**

We have mentioned many times the concepts of seeing the tzitzis and kissing them, a custom accepted among our people from generation to generation: to hold the tzitzis in our hands throughout Krias Shema and kiss them each of the three times that we say the word "tzitzis" in the parashah of tzitzis. We look at the tzitzis in order to fulfill the mitzvah of, "You shall see it," and we draw them close to our faces and kiss them. In the words of our masters who authored the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Code of Jewish Law*), the Mechaber and the Rema (*Orach Chaim* 24:4): "There are those who have the custom to look at the tzitzis when they reach the words 'and you shall see it,' and to place them upon their eyes. It is a beautiful custom and an expression of affection for the mitzvah." The Rema adds: "Some also have the custom to kiss the tzitzis when they look at them, and all of this is an

expression of affection for the mitzvah."

The Mekubalim (Kabbalists), foremost among them the Arizal, reinforced and emphasized the practice of holding the tzitzis and gazing upon them. Thus writes *Nagid U'Mitzvah*, by the students of the Arizal: "A person should look at the tzitzis at every moment, as the verse says, 'And you shall see it and remember...' This is of great benefit to the soul, so that sin will not come near it, and also to attain great benefit..." Throughout the generations, this custom of bringing the tzitzis close to our faces, looking at them, and kissing them became the heritage of all the entire Jewish nation. It resembles the manner in which we kiss the Torah, as an expression of love for holiness, for the mitzvos, and for closeness to Hashem.

In the beloved popular halachic work *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (*Abridged Code of Jewish Law*) (Siman 17, *Hilchos Krias Shema*), it is written: "Before Krias Shema, when one says "*v'havi'einu*," he takes the tzitzis in his hand and holds them during Krias Shema in his left hand, between the ring finger and the small finger, opposite his heart. When he reaches

"*Vayomer*," which is the section of tzitzis, he holds them in his right hand as well, and when he says, 'And you shall see it,' he kisses them. The custom is to kiss them every time he says the word 'tzitzis.' He continues holding them until the words '*venechemadim la'ad*,' at which point he kisses them and releases them from his hands."

Let us examine this more deeply. The central principle of the parashah of tzitzis is the instruction: "And you shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes," that is, not to be misled by our emotions, desires, and visual temptations. The custom of kissing the tzitzis enables us to guard our eyes and hearts in a deliberate and active manner. The Torah commands us: "And you shall see it," to look upon the tzitzis with our eyes. When we gaze at them three times, we attain a *segulah* (a mystical aid) for guarding our eyes and controlling where our vision wanders. Looking at the tzitzis reminds us of the Torah of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His mitzvos, and thereby we do not stray after our eyes.

When we kiss the tzitzis, we are demonstrating the love

within our hearts, as it says: "And you shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart." We are demonstrating our affection for the mitzvos, and especially for the mitzvah of tzitzis, which is equivalent to all the mitzvos together. Expressing our love through holding and kissing the tzitzis serves as a spiritual safeguard, helping us remain firm in our faith and not stray after our hearts. This simple custom is both beautiful and profound. It is intentional, protective, and fulfills the command of "You shall see it."

We repeat it three times every morning. Three times establishes a *chazakah* (pattern; deep impression), a threefold cord that is not easily broken, strengthening us for the entire day. We can then proceed through the rest of our day with this protection, which follows Krias Shema, our daily declaration of faith. Kissing the tzitzis is a beautiful custom stemming from the Torah's command of "You shall see it," within which deep secrets are embedded. May it be Hashem's will that we merit to actualize all the powers of the great *segulos* of the mitzvah of

tzitzis, which is equivalent to all the mitzvos. Amen.

**In tzitzis, remembrance of the Exodus of Egypt can lead to remembrance of the Giving of the Torah**

לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ

"So that you shall remember the day of your departure from the Land of Egypt all the days of your life" (Devarim 16:3).

In order to fulfill this halachah, the Sages established that we recite the parashah of tzitzis twice daily as part of the mitzvah of Krias Shema, whose purpose is the acceptance of the yoke of His sovereignty and His mitzvos. Indeed, acceptance of the yoke of Heaven is not complete without remembering the Exodus of Egypt, as we shall explain. The parashah of tzitzis concludes with the words: "I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d; I am Hashem your G-d." These words echo the opening of the giving of the *Aseres HaDibros* (Ten Commandments), the foundation of our faith: "I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt..."

**The remembrance of the Exodus of Egypt and the remembrance of the Giving of the Torah are interconnected**

Indeed, remembering the Giving of the Torah is itself a mitzvah of the Torah: "Only beware for yourself and guard your soul exceedingly, lest you forget the things your eyes saw... the day that you stood before Hashem your G-d at Chorev" (Devarim 4:9-10). This is the mitzvah of remembering the event at Sinai. Ramban counts it among the 248 positive commandments. Although the Rambam does not include it in his enumeration of the mitzvos, he nevertheless holds that it is an absolute obligation, as he writes in *Iggeres Teiman*. See there.

In truth, the Exodus of Egypt is the beginning and root of accepting the yoke of Heaven. The mitzvah of remembering the Exodus of Egypt reminds us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu brought us from slavery to freedom in order that we become His people, meaning His servants, instead of being servants of Pharaoh in Egypt. It keeps us always remembering and acknowledging His kingship in the world and

the yoke of His sovereignty that rests upon us.

The completion of accepting the yoke of Heaven took place at the Giving of the Torah at Sinai as a continuation of the Exodus of Egypt, as the Sages said: "It is analogous to a king who entered a province. His servants said to him: 'Issue decrees upon them.' He replied, 'When they accept my kingship, I will issue decrees. For if they do not accept my kingship, they will not accept my decrees.' So did the Omnipresent say to the Jewish people: 'I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Did you accept My kingship in Egypt?' They replied: 'Yes.' He said to them: 'Just as you accepted My kingship, so too accept My decrees: You shall have no other gods before Me.'" (*Mechilta*, parashas Bachodesh, Parashah 6). Thus, remembering the Exodus of Egypt connects us to the foundation and root of accepting the yoke of Heaven, while remembering the Giving of the Torah at Sinai connects us to its completion and actual implementation.

### **The mitzvah of tzitzis contains within it to recall the event of the encounter and standing at Mount Sinai**

The first two commandments, "I am the Hashem" and "You shall have no other gods," were heard directly from the mouth of the Almighty. But we not only heard His voice, we saw it, as it says: "And all the people saw the voices" (Shemos 20:15). Part of our obligation in the mitzvah of tzitzis, beyond remembering the mitzvos, is the command: "And you shall see it." The Ramban explains that this refers to contemplating the Shechinah through gazing at the strand of techeles. Through contemplating the tzitzis and its meaning, we experience an encounter with the revelation of the Shechinah similar to that which occurred at Mount Sinai.

### **The unification of the two remembrances**

It seems to me, in my humble opinion, that at the conclusion of the parashah of tzitzis we are presented with an opportunity to fulfill not one, but two mitzvos of remembrance: the remembrance of the Exodus of Egypt and the remembrance of the

revelation at Sinai. Krias Shema begins with the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven: "Hear, O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One," and concludes with: "And you shall be holy to your G-d." This progression brings us closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu through contemplation of the mitzvos of remembering the Exodus of Egypt and the event at Sinai, both of which are represented in the tzitzis. When we recite, "And you shall see it," we draw close to the Shechinah, and when we conclude, "I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the Land of Egypt," we can envision the event at Sinai alongside the remembrance of the Exodus, when our ancestors saw with their own eyes the words of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the Land of Egypt." In this way, we fulfill the Torah commandment of remembering the giving of the Torah at Sinai, which is related to the mitzvah of remembering the Exodus of Egypt.

## The remembrance of the Exodus of Egypt as a rectification for the sin that Bnei Yisrael added to the sin of the spies

וַיִּלְלוּ עַל־מִצְוַת וְעַל־אֲהֲרֹן כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם כְּלִי־הַעֲדָה לֹדִי מִתַּנּוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אוֹ בַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לֹדִי־מִתַּנּוּ:

וְלָמָּה הִ' מְבִיא אֹתָנוּ אֶל־הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְנַפֵּל בְּחָרֹב בְּחָרֹב וְנִשְׁכַּנּוּ וְנִשְׁפָּנוּ יְהוָה לָבוֹי הָלוֹא טוֹב לָנוּ שׁוּב מִצְרַיִם:

“And all Bnei Yisrael complained against Moshe and against Aharon, and the entire congregation said to them: ‘If only we had died in the Land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why is Hashem bringing us to this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our children will become prey. Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’” (Bamidbar 14:2-3)

וַיֹּאמֶר הִ' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עַד־אֲנִי וְנִאֲמָנִי הָעָם הַזֶּה וְעַד־אֲנִי לֹא־יִאֱמִינוּ בִּי בְּכָל־הָאֲתוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ:

“And Hashem said to Moshe: ‘How long will this people provoke Me, and how long will they refuse to believe in Me despite all the signs that I have performed among them?’” (ibid. 14:11)

We explained above that beyond the fact that Bnei Yisrael shared in the spies’ corruption of the

heart and eyes by accepting and believing their words, which were spoken as a result of that corruption, the Bnei Yisrael added an additional sin by falling into a double faint-heartedness to the point that they not only feared entering the Land of Israel, but even resolved to return to Egypt. It seems to me that this is hinted to by the rare (only five in the Torah) cantillation mark “*mercha kefulah*” (“**double mercha**”) on the word “*to*” (“*better*”) in the verse, “הָלוֹא טוֹב לָנוּ שׁוּב , מִצְרַיִם , ‘Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’” Their double faint-heartedness caused them to become doubly ungrateful. Not only did they reject the goodness of the desirable Land, but they also denied the goodness of the Exodus of Egypt. Concerning this, Hashem says to Moshe: “How long will they refuse to believe in Me despite all the signs that I have performed among them?” This includes the miracles of the Exodus of Egypt, which should have been sufficient to instill within Bnei Yisrael the faith necessary to trust Hashem to bring them into the Land. Such a deficiency in faith requires complete teshuvah and an appropriate means of rectification.

The parashah of tzitzis, which is entirely devoted to strengthening faith, concludes with the mitzvah of remembering the Exodus of Egypt: “I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you out of the Land of Egypt to be your G-d; I am Hashem your G-d.”

Through these words, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is commanding us: “Accept upon yourselves the yoke of Heaven because I redeemed you with all the signs, miracles, wonders, and acts of goodness that I performed for you.” These favors are enumerated in the *piyut* (poem) “*Dayeinu*” that we sing on the night of the Seder, beginning with the goodness of the miracles of the Exodus of Egypt and culminating with “and He brought us into the Land of Israel” as a direct continuation of the Exodus, and ultimately reaching “and He built for us the Beis Hamikdash,” speedily in our days!

## The remembrance of the Exodus of Egypt is a precious treasure

The essence and purpose of the mitzvah of remembering the Exodus of Egypt is to deepen our faith in Hakadosh Baruch Hu and bring us to gratitude for all that He does for us. This is also the reason we

are commanded to juxtapose redemption to prayer סמיכה גאולה לתפילה, linking the blessing of redemption with our prayer. Through recognizing that Hakadosh Baruch Hu redeemed us, we become aware of His constant kindness and His individual providence.

This awareness arouses praise and thanksgiving, enabling us to stand before Hakadosh Baruch Hu in prayer with hearts filled with faith and gratitude, proclaiming, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers..." and to conclude the Shemoneh

Esreh (the "Amidah" prayer) with the knowledge that the One Who redeemed us from Egypt continues to redeem and sustain us every day, and will yet redeem us with a complete redemption, speedily in our days!

## Maharal Tzintz ב-י-ל-א ואמן

PEARLS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE GAON FROM PLOTZK

It is stated in the parashah of tzitzis:

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them that they shall make for themselves tzitzis."

Rabbeinu, the Maharal, notes that as is well known, *dibbur* is an expression of severity, whereas *amirah* is an expression of gentleness. We must therefore understand why the verse begins with the language of *dibbur* "daber!" ("speak!") and concludes with the language of *amirah* "ve'amarta aleihem" ("And you shall say to them.")

Our masters, the Baalei HaTosafos, in *Maseches Bava Basra* (74a, s.v. *Piskei*), discuss whether one provides tzitzis for the deceased. Tosafos brings proof from an incident related by Rabbah bar bar Chanah. He said: "He (an Ishmaelite merchant) said to me: 'Come, and I will show you those (the generation) who died in the wilderness.' I went and saw them. They appeared like people who had drunk wine, and their faces were radiant. They were lying on their backs, and one of them had a raised knee. The [leg was so tall that the] merchant passed beneath his knee while riding a camel with an upright spear in his hand, yet he did not touch it. I cut off one corner containing *techeles* from one of them, and afterward we were unable to leave. The merchant said to me: 'Did you perhaps take something from them? Return it! We have a tradition that whoever takes anything from them cannot depart.' I went and returned it, and then we were able to leave."

When I came before the Sages, they said: "Every Abba is a donkey, and every bar bar Chanah is a fool! For what [halachic] purpose did you do this? [Surely it was] to determine whether the tzitzis in the wilderness were made according to Beis Shammai or according to Beis Hillel" [who were in a disagreement regarding the number and length of the strings]. "You should have counted the strings and counted the windings [without taking the corner itself!]" From here, Tosafos initially brings proof that the dead wear tzitzis.

However, Tosafos ultimately rejects this proof. It is possible that the dead do not wear tzitzis at all. Rather, the generation of the wilderness was unique, for they entered their graves while still alive, as the Midrash relates: Every year on the eve of Tishah B'Av, they would go into their graves while still alive, and a Heavenly Voice would proclaim: "Let the living separate from the dead." Whoever did not [later] rise, remained in his grave. Since they entered their graves alive, they still had tzitzis upon them even after their passing.

Based upon these words of Tosafos, Rabbeinu explains our passage. The section of tzitzis was given after the decree resulting from the sin of the spies, namely, that Bnei Yisrael would remain in the wilderness for forty years and would all die there. This is precisely what the Torah alludes to. On the one hand, the decree is a harsh *dibbur*: they would die in the wilderness and not enter the Land. On the other hand, there is also *ve'amarta*, a gentle expression. For the manner of their passing would be that they entered their graves while still alive, and through this they would attain a unique distinction: They would "make for themselves tzitzis upon the corners of their garments throughout their generations" ("ya'asu lahem tzitzis al kanfei vigdeihem ledorosam"). Forever! For they would continue to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzis even after their passing, for generations without end. This is the *amirah*, the gentle aspect within their death in the wilderness.

Rabbeinu concludes that this idea is hinted to in the verse itself. If we take the phrase: *tzitzis al kanfei bigdehem ledorosum* ("tzitzis upon the corners of their garments throughout their generations"), the final letters spell *lamesim* ("for the dead"). In other words, those who died in the wilderness too would possess the mitzvah of tzitzis.

This is how to console Jews who love mitzvos!



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