

A Taste of Torah

Fringe Benefits

By: Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

If you wear tzitzis and live in Denver, it's probably happened to you.

That's right, I mean one of those encounters in the supermarket where someone stops you and says, "Excuse me, do you mind if I ask you a question?" (*You just did, so go ahead, ask me a few more!*)

"Sure."

"I was just, umm, you know, wondering, umm... What are those strings hanging from your waist?" (*They're just that – strings. Oh, you mean you want to know what they're for? Well, here goes...*)

"Well, these strings are meant to remind us of G-d's commandments."

"Oh."

"Uh-huh!" (*So sorry, I'd love to chat some more, but I've got three kids hanging on me, a shopping cart full of stuff that needs to be checked out, and a really tight schedule.*)

"Well, I hope I didn't offend you or anything, I've just always been curious..."

"Sure, sure, no problem. Have a great day!"

Well, it is an accurate explanation – it's what the Torah says about tzitzis. And maybe if I wasn't balancing three kids (all with their own tzitzis), a shopping cart full of stuff that needs to be checked out and a tight schedule, I'd give the lengthier explanation I'm about to give you.

Because it really is odd.

How do a bunch of strings remind us of G-d's commandments?!

The Talmud (Menachos 43b) states that since ideally, tzitzis are supposed to contain strands dyed with *techeiles* (turquoise dye extracted from the *chilazon*, an aquatic sea creature which, according to many, we do not have access to today), one ought to make the following association: Turquoise is the color of the sea, the sea is similar in color to the sky, and the color of the sky is similar to the Divine Throne up in Heaven. Bingo. You remembered G-d and His mitzvos.

Rashi states that the numerical value of

the word tzitzis in Hebrew is 600. Add to that the eight strings dangling from every corner, and the five knots every corner has, and you have 613 – the exact number of mitzvos the Torah obligates us in!

I've no doubt you are wondering the same thing I am. That's a lot of association (and mathematical calculating) to be making every time you look at those strings!

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) explains that association is a matter of where the mind is. Remember a couple years back when your favorite team lost the championship game? It was really depressing, wasn't it? And everything you saw reminded you of the terrible, life-altering traumatic loss. Even though what you were seeing was very mildly associated. (There's a car! Cars go in parking lots. Parking lots can be found outside stadiums. My favorite team plays in a stadium. Waaaah!) Because it's in the forefront of your mind, everything you experience or see reminds you of it.

Our minds are supposed to be focused on G-d and his mitzvos. But, in case you get distracted and start thinking about something else not nearly as worthwhile (like that depressing loss your favorite team suffered in the championship a few years back), the Torah has a great way to get your focus back on track: You'll see your tzitzis! And because your Judaism is the focal point of your life, you will instantaneously and immediately re-focus on G-d and His mitzvos.

Bottom line: Tzitzis work – if you've done your work beforehand. If you've made mitzvos a part of your life, something that really matters, than tzitzis will help you maintain and strengthen that focus. But if you're going through life with a vague awareness of your Judaism, wearing tzitzis is a wonderful mitzvah to take on – but don't expect to suddenly feel inspired to keep all the commandments. (*Strings! I see the first string, the second string, the third string... my favorite team had first string players, second string, third string... siiiigh...*)

Stories For The Soul

A Blessing in Disguise

A soldier in the IDF related the following story that occurred to him during last summer's Gaza War:

I asked my commander if I could take some sweets that had been sent by citizens from all over the country, and he agreed. I took a package of Argaliot (chocolate-filled cookies).

After a day-and-a-half of fighting with minimal amounts of food, we were enclosed in a house, and I recalled that I had cookies packed with my gear. I opened up the box and saw a note in it from a young child. It was written in exactly these words: "I know that you are protecting me, and this is a small token of my appreciation to you. I am still young, but I have one request: That you say a blessing over the food."

I didn't know how to make a blessing over the food, but there was a soldier in another corner of the house who was religious. I crawled toward him and asked him to help me make the proper blessing. As I finished saying the blessing, there was a huge explosion. An RPG rocket had exploded in the exact spot where I had been just moments earlier! Although I was slightly injured, had I remained in my original place, the results would far more gruesome.

Eretz Yisroel merits special Divine protection. The spies in this week's parsha failed to appreciate the unique spiritual quality and connection Eretz Yisroel provides – but we, by seeing Hashem's special providence there, can help rectify that failure.

Kollel Happenings

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You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest.

For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

In Judaism, numbers are not simply a way to count things. Every number has a special significance. From gematria to *Who Knows One?* recited at the end of the Passover Seder, discover the world of numbers with Rabbi Moshe Heyman of the Denver Community Kollel. Every other Thursday from 2-3 pm at Marathon Investments, 6565 South Dayton St., #1200.

For more info, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When we recite the *tachanun* prayer, we say the words “*va’anachnu lo naidah*,” and then we stand up. Why is this done?

A: The words *va’anachnu lo naidah* are the opening words of a prayer where we declare, “We don’t know what we will do, for our eyes are upon You (G-d).” After we have recited the Shemoneh Esrei and the *tachanun* prayer, we declare that we did what we could, and we now depend on G-d to help us. After standing for Shemoneh Esrei and leaning downwards while sitting for the *tachanun* prayer, we sit upright for the first three words of

this prayer, thus having beseeched G-d in three distinct positions of prayer. Once having declared we did what we could, we rise to complete the prayer.

This week’s question: In between the *tachanun* prayer and the *va’anachnu lo naidah* prayer, we recite a prayer known as “*shomer Yisrael*” recited while sitting upright. Why does this not suffice for praying while in a sitting position, and obviate the need to sit for the start of *va’anachnu lo naidah*?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org

Ask the Rabbi

Land of Milk and Honey

Miriam from Montreal, Canada wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have known for some time that in the phrase “*eret zavat chalav u’dvash* - a land flowing with milk and honey,” the “*dvash*” refers to date honey (not bee honey). What is the *chalav*? Certainly it was not cow’s milk. Was it goat’s milk or could it be some other type of milk? Does this have some inference that honey and milk should be our main food sources?

Dear Miriam,

The milk referred to is cow’s or goat’s milk. The honey is fruit honey, such as from figs or dates.

This doesn’t mean that milk and honey should be our main food sources, but rather that the Land of Israel is overflowing with everything good.

The Talmud relates that our Sages saw goats eating from fig trees. The figs were so luscious that they were dripping with juice; the goats’ udders were so full that milk flowed out. These two liquids mingled into a sweet stream, and the land

was literally “flowing with milk and honey.”

Ramban notes that regions with good air, good pasture and good water, such as mountainous regions, produce the healthiest animals which give the best milk (witness Swiss cheese and Swiss chocolate). But these types of climates don’t usually produce top quality fruits (ever heard of Swiss plums?). The Torah stresses that the Land of Israel has both.

“Milk and honey” also allude to mother’s milk and bee honey. These are the only two kosher substances which are derived from a non-kosher source (bees and people are not kosher). The implication is that the Land of Israel has the spiritual energy to purify even the impure.

Sources

-*Ketubot 111b, Megilla 6a*

-*Ramban, Shmot 3:8*

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