Greatness of the Mitzvah

The Rambam commented at the very end of his presentation of the halakhot of tzitzit: ''One must always take care in fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzit, since the Torah accords it great significance and commented that all the mitzvot depend on it, as it states: ''When you see it you will remember all of God's commandments.''

Maran added in the *Shulhan Arukh* (24:6): ''The punishment for failing to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit is exceedingly harsh. Such a person is subject to the verse (*Iyov* 38:13), 'לֶאֱחֹז בְּכַנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ וְיִנָּעֲרוּ רְשָׁעִים מִמֶּנָּה – To seize the world by the corners so that the wicked would be shaken from it.' One the other end of the scale, someone who is careful to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit correctly will have the privilege of beholding the Face of the Shekhina.''

The *Yafe Lalev* (*Siman* 24) composed an entire booklet listing the rewards of fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzit and the punishments for failing to fulfill it. Here are some of the main points:

a) The holy *Zohar*, cited by *Yalkut haRe'uveni*, states that anyone who wears tzitzit has the status of Ehad (One), just as God is called Ehad. By fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzis, we testify that God is One.

b) The *Likute Etzot* states that through fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzit one will successfully evade the attacks of the wicked and those who battle against the truth.

c) The *Likute Etzot* adds that through this mitzvah one is likely to be privileged to come to the Land of Yisrael. This is because *tekhelet* is the color of humility and this mitzvah develops the trait of humility in one's heart. A humble person is given the privilege of coming to the Land of Yisrael.

d) The *Ene Ha'eda* states that through fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzit we will merit to have the *Bet Hamikdash* constructed.

e) The *Midrash Tehillim* (90:16) teaches that through the mitzvah of tzitzit we gain the status of God's children. This explains the holy *Zohar's* teaching (*Teruma* 69b) that when a Jew wraps himself in a garment with tzitzit, the angels announce, ''Give honor to the King's son!'' In another passage (*Pinehas* 228b) the *Zohar* teaches that *tzitzit* contain thirty-nine loops and thirteen groups of loops, for a total of fifty two, which equals the numerical value of the Hebrew word *ben* (son).

f) Another entry in *Likute Etzot* teaches that through fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzit one brings endless blessing and wealth.

g) The *Likute Etzot* adds that through this mitzvah, the Redemption will be hastened. This matches a teaching of the *Ru'ah Hayim* Palachi (24:2)

based on the verse (*Yehezkel* 7:2), ''כֹּה אָמַר ה' לְאַדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל קֵץ בָּא הַקֵּץ עַל (ארבעת) אַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ – God announced to the Land of Yisrael, 'The end will come on four corners....''' For this reason we gather the four corners of the tallit in our hand when reciting the words מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ [in the morning blessing of *Ahavat Olam*].

h) The *Ma'amar Mordekhai* (8:2) teaches that through fulfilling this mitzvah one will be spared from the sin of stealing. A possible source for this is the passage in *Sota* (17a): ''Avraham Avinu stated that he would not take even a thread of Sodom's possessions, since he suspected that it was stolen property, and as a reward his descendants were given the mitzvah of tzitzit.'' Since Avraham Avinu was so careful to distance himself from stealing, it makes sense that his descendants should be given an aid to avoid the sin of stealing. That aid is the mitzvah of tzitzit.

i) The *Kitzur Shene Luhot Haberit*, citing the *Matzat Shimurim*, demonstrated that the word tallit has the same numerical value as the word *galuyot* (exiles). In the merit of wearing a tallit and thinking about the mystical aspects of the mitzvah, we are redeemed from all sorts of exile, both spiritual and physical.

j) The *Midrash Hagadol* (page 271) teaches that our enemies will be vanquished through the merit of the mitzvah of tzitzit, suggesting that this is the meaning of the verse(*Iyov* 38:13), ''To seize the world by the corners so that the wicked would be shaken from it.''

k) Through the mitzvah of tzitzit, our nation will be supplemented by many converts, as related in the story recounted in *Menahot* 44a (with Rashi's comments).

l) The *Likute Etzot* states that we weaken all evil decrees through the mitzvah of tzitzit. We are likewise privileged to understand the secrets of the Kabbalah and to master all areas of Torah study. For this reason we must take great care to fulfill this mitzvah properly and to concentrate properly when we put on the tallit and recite the blessing.

m) Harav Moshe Alshikh (comment to *parashat Shelah*) taught that the mitzvah of tzitzit protects a person from sinful thoughts.

n) The *Mita'am Hamelekh* (Vol. VI, #797) teaches that the mitzvah of tzitzit helps to make a person happy. The Hebrew word for heart (*lev*) has the numerical value of thirty two, which is the number of strands used for tzitzit on each garment. The *tekhelet* in these strings bring happiness to the heart. For this reason the verse states *vehaya lakhem letzitzit*. Our Sages taught that the word *vehaya* always signifies happiness.

o) The mitzvah of tzitzit helps people avoid sin. The Talmud relates (*Menahot* 44a): Ribbi Natan taught that even the simplest mitzvah of the

Torah gives a person reward in this world besides an immeasurable reward in the World to Come. We can see this, he continued, from the mitzvah of tzitzit. There was once a man who chose to be stringent in fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzit. One day he heard about a [non-Jewish] prostitute who lived in a distant country who charged her clients 400 gold coins. He sent her 400 gold coins and made an appointment. On that day, he came to the entrance of the woman's residence and the maid announced his arrival to the prostitute. She told the maid to admit him, and he entered.

The harlot prepared seven beds, six made of silver and one made of gold. There was a ladder on which one could climb from one bed to the next. She ascended to the top bed and sat there naked, and he ascended as well, planning to sit naked with her. Suddenly, the four tzitzit tassels on his garment whipped him in the face. He then descended and sat down on the floor.

The woman descended as well, sat on the floor and exclaimed, ''I swear by the god of Rome, I will not allow you to leave until you tell me what blemish you saw in my appearance.''

''I swear that I have never seen a woman as beautiful as you,'' he replied. ''Our God, however, commanded us to fulfill a mitzvah called tzitzit, and in that command He stated twice the words, 'I am your God.' This means: 'I am the One Who will punish you for sinning, and I am the One Who will reward you for performing good deeds.' I feel now that my four tzitzit are four witnesses to the sin that I was about to perform.''

''I will not allow you to leave until you tell me your name, your home town, the name of your teacher and the name of the yeshivah where you study Torah,'' she exclaimed.

He wrote down the information that she requested and gave it to her. After he was gone, she liquidated all her possessions, giving one third to the king and distributing another third to the poor. She took the rest of her money, along with her silver and golden beds, and came to Ribbi Hiya's yeshivah. She introduced herself and asked to be converted to Judaism.

''My good woman,'' Ribbi Hiya questioned her, ''perhaps you wish to convert because you wish to marry one of my students?''

She then explained the background of her visit and showed Ribbi Hiya the note that her would-be client had written. Ribbi Hiya immediately converted her and told her that she is free to court that student. Now, she prepared her seven beds for her new husband, but this time it was perfectly permissible.