הלכות ברכת הטלית

ג. קודם שיברך ויתעטף, יכוין לקיים מצות עשה ללבוש ציצית מצויצת כהלכתו, שנאמר (במדבר טו, לח): "וְעָשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִת עַל כַּנְפֵי בִגְדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם". והיא מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא.

וגם צריך לכוין בעת שמתעטף בו, שציונו הקדוש ברוך הוא להתעטף בו, כדי שנזכור כל מצותיו לעשותם (כמ"ש בש"ע ס"ח). וכתבו האחרונים ז"ל, שמי שאינו עושה כך, עליו נאמר (ישעיה כט, יג): "בְּפִיו וּבִשְׂפָתָיו כִּבְּדוּנִי וְלִבּוֹ רִחַק מִמֶּנִּי, וַתְּהִי יִרְאָתָם אֹתִי מִצְוַת אֲנָשִׁים מְלֻמָּדָה". [בן איש חי פ' בראשית ה"א]

The Blessing Recited Over a Tallit

Day 36

What to think about

3) Before someone recites the blessing and putting on a tallit, he must think about the fact that he is about to fulfill the mitzvah of wearing a garment with tzitzit attached to it as the halakha prescribes. The Torah states, "וְעָשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִת עַל כַּנְפֵי בִגְדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם – they must make *tzitzit* for themselves on the corners of their garments for all their generations," and this mitzvah is in the category of "*mitzvat ase* that is subject to time" [meaning that there are times when there is no obligation to fulfill the mitzvah].

When putting the tallit on one's body, one must think of the concept that the Blessed Holy One commanded us to have tzitzit attached to it so that we will remember and fulfill all His commandments. The *Aḥaronim* added that if someone simply puts it on without thinking about this, he is in the category of those about whom God complained (*Yeshayahu* 29:13), "בְּפִיו וּבִשְׂפָתָיו כִּבְּדוּנִי וְלִבּוֹ רִחַק מִמֶּנִּי וַתְּהִי יִרְאָתָם אֹתִי מִצְוַת אֲנָשִׁים מְלֻמָּדָה – Each one honors Me with lip service, but he has distanced his heart from Me. Their fear of Me has become perfunctory and a matter of mindless habit."[1]

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1. This is taken from the *Ben Ish Ḥai* (introduction to *parashat Bereshit*). According to his teaching, we must think of two things before fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzit: a) the general idea that we are about to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit, and b) that God commanded us to wear tzitzit so that we will remember all His commandments and fulfill them. See the *Shulḥan Arukh* (8:8). The following is an expanded explanation of the halakha concerning these two thoughts:

a) Intending to Fulfill a Mitzvah

There is a general rule that applies to all mitzvot that a person must be aware that he is about to perform a mitzvah and he must intend to fulfill it with this act. Maran ruled in the *Shulḥan Arukh* (60:4) that we are obligated to be aware of the mitzvot we perform. If we are not aware of this, the act might not count and we will not be credited for fulfilling the mitzvah at all. For example, if someone wore a garment with tzitzit attached, but he had no specific intention to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit by wearing it, he might not be credited at all with fulfilling the mitzvah.

When someone puts on a *tallit gadol* and recites the blessing of אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהִתְעַטֵּף בְּצִיצִית, it is clear that he realizes that he is about to perform this mitzvah and that this is his intention. The blessing itself is a declaration of these intentions, as the Ritba (comment to *Pesaḥim* 7b) explained. We recite the blessing in order to sanctify our thoughts and actions, declaring that we are performing this act only because it is God's commandment.

According to this, anyone who puts on a *tallit gadol* and recites the blessing fulfills the mitzvah properly. When someone puts on a *tallit katan*, however, he does not recite any blessing [according to Sefardic custom]. Does this present a problem of failing to have the proper intentions and failing to fulfill the mitzvah?

Fortunately, there is good reason to say that it does not matter. Even though one does not recite a blessing or make any declaration when putting on a *tallit katan* he still fulfills the mitzvah correctly. The *Ḥaye Adam*, cited in the *Mishna Berura* (60:10), teaches that it is necessary to

declare one's intentions to fulfill a mitzvah only if otherwise it would appear that one is performing this act for some other reason and not for fulfilling a mitzvah. For example, if someone was practicing his Hebrew reading and recited several pages including the *Shema* without declaring that he intends to fulfill the mitzvah of reciting the *Shema*, it appears that he has no such intention. Therefore, he must consciously think or declare, "I am about to fulfill this mitzvah." If someone is praying with his prayer book with the congregation and recites the *Shema*, it is obvious that he means to fulfill the mitzvah even though he makes no such declaration.

When someone puts on a *tallit gadol*, it is obvious by this very act that he means to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit even if there would be no blessing to recite. Therefore, it is logical to say the same about someone who puts on a *tallit katan*. Although he recites no blessing and makes no declaration, it is obvious by the very act of putting it on that he means to fulfill the mitzvah. Otherwise, he would not be wearing such a garment. In times of antiquity, most garments were simply bolts of cloth that a person wrapped around himself. Therefore, although it had tzitzit attached to its corners, this did not mean necessarily that the person wearing it has intentions to fulfill the mitzvah. In our times, our regular clothing does not have four corners; we purposely put on a four-cornered *tallit katan* specifically to have the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit. Thus, although it is best to consciously think of the fact that one is about to fulfill the mitzvah when one puts it on, even if one does not it is obvious that this is one's intention.

Nowadays, one can purchase cotton undershirts that are fashioned with four corners so that one can fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit without wearing an extra garment. It seems that when putting on this type of undershirt it is very important to think consciously that one intends to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit. Otherwise, the act of putting it on does not display the person's intentions to fulfill the mitzvah and it is possible that he does not fulfill the mitzvah at all.

b) To Remember All the Mitzvot

Maran ruled in the *Shulhan Arukh* (8:8) that when putting on a tallit one must think of the fact that God commanded us to wear it in order to remember all His mitzvot and fulfill them. This is unique to the mitzvah of tzitzit.

There are two other mitzvot which require us to think of a specific intention while fulfilling them – the mitzvah of sukkah and the mitzvah of tefillin. Regarding tefillin, Maran ruled (25:5) that when donning them a person must think of the fact that God commanded us to place these boxes on our arms and heads. These boxes contain four scrolls stating that God is One and that He took us from Egypt. The *tefillin shel yad* is worn near the heart, while the *tefillin shel rosh* is worn near the brain. This signifies that God wants us to think about and appreciate the miracles He performed for our ancestors when He redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. This should inspire us to realize that God is the Almighty and therefore we are obligated to subject our minds and hearts to His service, even when it means minimizing our own physical pleasures and comforts.

The *Aharonim* ruled (*Siman* 625) that when sitting in a sukkah and eating, one must think about the fact that God redeemed our ancestors from Egypt and surrounded them with His clouds of glory while they wandered in the wilderness, thus protecting them from the extreme elements of the desert.

Regarding other mitzvot, it is sufficient simply to think that one wishes to fulfill that mitzvah. Regarding these three mitzvot, that is not enough. When fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzit, one must intend to remember and fulfill all the mitzvot through this act, as the Torah states (*Bemidbar* 15:40). When fulfilling the mitzvah of tefillin, one must intend "to have God's Torah in one's mouth," as the Torah states (*Shemot* 13:9). When fulfilling the mitzvah of sukkah, one must remember how God protected our ancestors in the wilderness, as the Torah states (*Vayikra* 23:43).

The *Aharonim* debated what the halakha is if someone performs any of these three mitzvot without these special intentions. Most of them come to the conclusion that although it is important to fulfill these mitzvot correctly by thinking of these intentions, one still fulfills the basic mitzvah even if one failed to have these special intentions.

It is important to point out that regarding these mitzvot we cannot rely on the leniency forwarded by the *Haye Adam* cited above, that as long as one performs the act of the mitzvah one probably intends to fulfill it. That leniency applies only to the basic intention to fulfill the mitzvah, but not to these specific intentions.

Is it a sin for someone to wear tzitzit without the proper intentions?

The *Mishna Berura* (60:4) discusses what the halakha should be according to those *Poskim* who ruled (unlike the ruling written above in this footnote) that if someone fulfills the mitzvot of tzitzit, tefillin or sukkah without thinking of its special intention he fails to fulfill the mitzvah altogether. If someone wears a tallit but does not think that it is supposed to make him remember all the mitzvot, is this the same as wearing a four-cornered garment without any tzitzit, which is a sin? The *Mishna Berura* appears to lean to this stringent opinion, but Harav Elhanan Wasserman (*Kovetz Shiurim Ketubot*, #250) remained undecided on this matter. The same issue applies to someone who ate in a sukkah without thinking about God's providing for our ancestors in the wilderness. It might be considered equal to eating outside the sukkah, which is forbidden.

Harav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach (*Minhat Shelomo* Vol. I, #1:1) disagreed with the position of the *Mishna Berura*. He ruled that even if someone failed to have

ובדיעבד כשכיון רק לקיים את המצוה בלבד, יצא. וגם אם לא כיון כלל לשם מצוה, אם מוכח שלובש הטלית לשם מצוה יצא ידי חובת המצוה, ועל כל פנים יכוין כך כשיזכר בעודו לבוש, ותועיל כוונתו מכאן ולהבא. [ילקו"י ה"ח, פסקי תשובות סוף אות יח]

ד. טוב לומר בפיו קודם הברכה: "לשם יחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה וכו', הריני מוכן ללבוש ציצית מצויצת כהלכה, כמו שציונו ה' אלהינו 'ועשו להם ציצית על כנפי בגדיהם'. ['וראיתם אותו וזכרתם את כל מצות ה' ועשיתם אותם'], כדי לעשות נחת רוח ליוצרינו וכו'". [באו"ח פ' בראשית ה"א]. (וכבר כתבנו לעיל בסימן ה' הלכה י"ז שמעיקר הדין אין חיוב לומר "לשם יחוד" קודם קיום המצוות).

As long as a person wore the tallit with the basic intention to fulfill this mitzvah of tzitzit, he has fulfilled it. In fact, even if he has no conscious intentions, the fact that he has put on a tallit demonstrates that he intends to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit. If he remembers later on, he should think of this intention at some time before taking off the tallit.[2]

Reciting *Leshem yihud*

4) Before reciting the blessing, it is commendable to declare, "For the sake of unifying *Kudsha Berikh Hu Ushkhinteh*... I am about to wear a tallit with tzitzit attached as the halakha prescribes, fulfilling God's commandment: 'they must make *tzitzit* for themselves on the corners of their garments ... you will see it and remember all of God's commandments and perform them,'[3] and in this way bring pleasure to our Creator...."

See above in *Siman* 5:17, where it is explained that there is no real obligation to preface a mitzvah with such a declaration.

intentions to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit and therefore will receive no credit for fulfilling it, he still has not sinned as if he wore a four-cornered garment without tzitzit. After all, the facts are that his tallit has tzitzit attached. In the *Yalkut Yosef Sukkot English Edition* (page 134), one can find the opinion of Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Hazon Ovadya Sukkot*, footnote on page 98), which is that although it is possible that this person did not fulfill the mitzvah, he has not sinned either. We cannot say that because he failed to think about God's protection of our ancestors in the wilderness that it is as if he ate outside the sukkah. Regardless of his intentions, the fact is that he was in a sukkah when he ate.

It is unclear whether the same argument applies to someone who wore a four-cornered garment without thinking of remembering all the mitzvot. Of course, this entire discussion assumes the position of the *Poskim* who ruled that these special intentions are essential in order to fulfill these mitzvot. According to the halakha, one fulfills these mitzvot even without thinking about these special intentions. See more about this in the *Mishmeret Hayim* (Vol. I, page 2).

2. This was explained in the previous footnote.

3. The *Ben Ish Hai* did not include the second verse in the text of the *leshem yihud*, although he did add that one should declare, "I intend for this blessing to cover my *tallit katan* as well." The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (8:33), however, recommended adding the second verse since it includes the concept that the mitzvah of tzitzit serves to remind us of all the mitzvot. The *Kaf Hahayim* added (24:10) that while one recites this verse he should gaze at the tzitzit two times. For more about this, see below in *Siman* 24:7 and the footnote there. The text in the *Tehillat Yitzhak* prayerbook states specifically that one should declare that the purpose of the mitzvah is "to remember and fulfill all of God's mitzvot."