ח. מצוה לאחוז הציצית ביד שמאלית כנגד לבו בשעת קריאת שמע, רמז לדבר והיו הדברים האלה וגו' על לבבך (דברים ו, ו). [ש"ע סי' כד ס"ב]

ט. יש נוהגין להסתכל בציצית כשמגיעים ל'וראיתם אותו' (במדבר טו, לט) וליתן אותם על העינים. ומנהג יפה הוא וחבובי מצוה. [ש"ע ס"ד].

During the *Shema*

8) As part of the mitzvah, one should grasp the tzitzit tassels in one's left hand and hold them against one's heart while reciting the *Shema*. This is alluded to in the verse (*Devarim* 6:6), "וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה...עַל לְבָבֶךָ – these words...should be on your heart."[291]

Gazing at the tzitzit

9) Some people have the custom of gazing at the tzitzit of their tallit when they reach the words וּרְאִיתֶם אותו in the *Shema*, and to pull them up to the eyes. This is a commendable practice that displays one's fondness toward the mitzvah of tzitzit.[292]

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implies that one should gaze at the tzitzit while reciting the blessing of *lehit'atef*. Rav Moshe Ga'on, however, taught that one should look at the tzitzit and then recite the blessing. The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (24:10) likewise instructs us to look at the four tzitzit tassels while reciting the passage of *leshem yihud* before reciting the blessing.

Whether or not a person adopts the practice of reciting *leshem yihud* before putting on the tallit, if he observes the practice of inspecting the tzitzit tassels each morning before putting on the tallit, as explained above in *Siman* 8:36), at the same time he will automatically fulfill the practice of looking at the tzitzit before reciting the blessing. Anyone who does not observe the practice of inspecting the tzitzit must at least look at the tzitzit before reciting the blessing.

The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (8:7; 24:13) cited the Arizal's practice of looking at the tzitzit tassels two times immediately after putting on the tallit. The custom in Yeshivat Bet El was that after reciting the blessing and performing the *atifa*, the scholars remained with the tallit covering their heads only, with two tassels hanging from the right shoulder and two hanging from the left one. Gathering the four tzitzit tassels together, they gazed at them two times. After that they lowered the tallit to cover their bodies.

The spiritual advantages of looking at the tzitzit

The *Sha'ar Hakavanot* (*Tzitzit, darush* 7, cited in the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer 24:11) teaches: "One must gaze at the tzitzit all the time, as the verse states, "You will see it." this is extremely beneficial to the soul, helping the person avoid situations of sin, besides other benefits. In the preface to *Siman* 8, the reader will find the story related in the Talmud (*Menahot* 44a) of a person who succeeded in fleeing from a grave sin thanks to his tzitzit.

Harav Yisrael Meir Kagan (the author of *Hafetz Hayim*) wrote (*Shemirat Halashon* Vol. II, chapter 3) that the verse implies that the mitzvah of tzitzit helps give a person the energy necessary to perform the mitzvot and to avert one's eyes from sinful sights. Therefore, it is advisable to take a moment several times a day to gaze at one's tzitzit. In this way, one will vanquish the evil inclination. Therefore, whenever someone begins to think sinful thoughts or when he feels that he is about to burst with anger, it is advisable that he gaze at his tzitzit in order to gain control. In the preface to *Siman* 8, it was explained that the mitzvah of tzitzit helps a person control his natural tendency to react with anger when displeased.

291. This halakha is explained in the following footnote.

292. Grasping the tzitzit while reciting the *Shema*

The *Arba'a Turim* (*Siman* 24) cited the *Sefer Ha'itur* who noted that it has been common for people to gather the tzitzit tassels in their hand and to place them momentarily on their eyes. Apparently, this custom is based on the verse, "You will see it." At other times they did not see the tzitzit at all since their tallit was covered by their other garments.

Maran in the *Bet Yosef* cited the *Hagahot Maimoniyot* (*Hilkhot Tzitzit* 3) quoting the *Midrash Shohar Tov* (35:10): "King David said to the Blessed Holy One, 'I praise You with every limb of my body...On my left hand I wind the tefillin and I grasp my tzitzit in my left hand while I recite the *Shema*. I praise You with my chest when I hold the tzitzit against my heart while reciting the *Shema*, fulfilling the verse, 'וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה...עַל לְבָבֶךָ – These words should be placed on your heart.' This is proof that there is a mitzvah to hold the tzitzit in one's left hand on one's chest over one's heart while reciting the *Shema*." The *Mordekhi* (*Sukkah*

ויכוין לקיים מצות עשה של "וראיתם אותו". [חסד לאלפים ס"ב, כה"ח ס"ק טו]

When practicing this custom, one should have in mind to fulfill the mitzvah of seeing the tzitzit.[293]

#763) cited a passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi stating that a child must be trained to wear tzitzit once he understands how to hold onto the tzitzit while reciting the *Shema*.

Opponents to this custom

In contrast, Rabbenu David Abudarham cited Rav Natrunai Ga'on asserting that "the practice of grasping the tzitzit in one's hand while reciting the *Shema* must not be observed since it displays haughtiness, as if this person considers himself to be more devout than others. People must never observe practices beyond the halakhic requirements in view of others unless everyone observes that practice." In the *Bet Yosef*, Maran declared that this is no longer an issue since it has become common for people to observe this practice.

The *Orhot Hayim* (*Hilkhot Tzitzit* #32) cited Rav Moshe Ga'on concurring with the ruling of Rav Natrunai Ga'on. The *Orhot Hayim* ruled quite forcefully in this matter, adding that it seems totally superfluous to grasp the tzitzit while reciting the *Shema* if one has already gazed at the tzitzit at the time one put on the tallit. If someone argues that it is necessary again since we are reciting the verses commanding us to wear tzitzit, then it should be necessary also to grasp the tefillin and to place a hand on the mezuzah while reciting the *Shema*. If we find that someone observes the practice of grasping the tzitzit, we must teach him to desist and in fact force him to swear that he will no longer observe this practice.

Gazing at the tzitzit while reciting the *Shema*

The *Orhot Hayim* then cited Rabbenu Yona in *Sefer Hayir'a* instructing us to gaze at the tzitzit while reciting the words וּרְאִיתֶם אוֹתוֹ. The *Bet Yosef* concluded that it is best to follow these instructions since the *Orhot Hayim* concluded his discussion of the subject with them. Maran distinguished between the mitzvah of tzitzit and that of mezuzah, explaining that tzitzit is a mitzvah that we perform personally and the tzitzit are readily available at all times, whereas a person might not necessarily have a doorpost with a mezuzah available while he prays.

The *Arba'a Turim* cited Rabbenu Yona's instructions in *Siman* 61. The *Manhig* (#39) likewise asserted that the custom is to pick up the corners of the tallit and display the tzitzit while reciting these words in the *Shema*, to enhance one's remembering of all mitzvot. The word tzitzit, he added, means to gaze, citing the verse (*Shir Hashirim* 2:9), "מְצִיץ מִן הַחֲרַכִּים – he peeks through the cracks." The *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* also ruled that it is commendable to gaze at the tzitzit, since the verse states, "You shall see it."

Grasping the tzitzit and gazing at them

Rabbenu Yitzhak ben Sheshat (responsa Vol. II, #486) addressed this issue. One person in his community adopted the custom of gazing at his tzitzit when reciting the words וּרְאִיתֶם אוֹתוֹ, following the instructions of the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* and Rabbenu Yona. A number of people were mocking him for this, since Rav Natrunai Ga'on ruled that people should be dissuaded from this practice (as mentioned above).

Rabbenu Yitzhak began by explaining that there is no distinct mitzvah to gaze at the tzitzit, unlike the ruling of the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*. The Torah's words וּרְאִיתֶם אוֹתוֹ are the reason for the mitzvah of tzitzit, and not an additional mitzvah regarding tzitzit. This is what the Talmud teaches (*Menahot* 43b): "Seeing the tzitzit reminds one of the mitzvot, and remembering the mitzvot brings one to fulfill them." Despite this, it is commendable to gaze at the tzitzit when putting on the tallit. Rabbenu Yitzhak testified that this was his personal custom.

Rabbenu Yitzhak told his questioner that he should continue his practice since it displays his love for the mitzvot. In fact, his mentor, Rabbenu Peretz Hakohen, also had that practice. As far as the question raised by Rav Natrunai why we do not grasp the tefillin when mentioning the corresponding words in the *Shema*, Rabbenu Yitzhak answered: "On the contrary, grasp the tefillin as well. This is one way of fulfilling our Sages' instructions (*Shabbat* 12a) to feel the tefillin every so often so that one will remain aware of them. In fact, Rabbenu Yona also instructed us to touch the tefillin when reciting the words וּקְשַׁרְתָּם וְכוּ'."

Regarding touching a mezuzah, Rabbenu Yitzhak made the same distinction as Maran in the *Bet Yosef*: "This practice applies to those mitzvot that are on one's garments and readily available. It does not apply to mitzvah objects attached to the wall, which might not be available at that very moment. Furthermore, it applies to the mitzvot of tzitzit and tefillin since there is merit in gazing at them, to remember the mitzvot and to remain aware of the tefillin. This concept does not apply to the mitzvah of mezuzah.

"Therefore," Rabbenu Yitzhak concluded, "continue as you have been doing. Pay no attention to the scoffers, for their attitude is incorrect."

י. יש נוהגים, לנשק הציצית בשעה שרואה בם, והכל הוא חיבוב מצוה. [רמ״א שם]. גם יש נוהגים שבכל פעם שמזכירים בקריאת שמע בפרשת ויאמר תיבת ״ציצית״, מנשקים הציציות. [כה״ח סופר ס״ק יח בשם החס״ל. וכ״ה ביפה ללב סי׳ כד ח״א אות יב]

יא. על פי דברי האר״י כך הנהגת הציצית בקריאת שמע: כשיאמר ״ברכה ושלום מהרה מארבע כנפות כל הארץ״, יקבץ כל ארבע כנפות הטלית, ויאחזם בידו השמאלית כנגד הלב שהוא בשמאל. ויניח

Kissing the tzitzit

10) Some people have a custom to kiss the tzitzit when they gaze at them to display their love for the mitzvah.[294] There is likewise a custom to kiss the tzitzit each time one recites the word *tzitzit* in the *Shema*.[295]

The Arizal's formula

11) The Arizal gave the following instructions: When a person reaches the words בְּרָכָה וְשָׁלוֹם מְהֵרָה מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ, he should gather all four corners of the tallit together and hold the tzitzit tassels in his left hand, between the pinkie and the ring finger, on his heart. He should hold the tzitzit in this position until he completes the *Shema* and reaches the words וּדְבָרָיו חַיִּים וְקַיָּמִים וְנֶאֱמָנִים וְנֶחְמָדִים לְעַד. (Illustration № 100a)

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The final ruling

The *Shulhan Arukh* states (24:4): "It is commendable to grasp the tzitzit in one's left hand and to hold them on one's heart while reciting the *Shema*. Some people have the custom of gazing at the tzitzit when they reach the words וּרְאִיתֶם אוֹתוֹ. This is a beautiful custom."

Why is the practice of grasping the tzitzit defined as "commendable" while the practice of gazing at the tzitzit is simply a beautiful custom? As explained above (*Hagahot Maimoniyot* citing *Midrash Shohar Tov*), our Sages mentioned the practice of grasping the tzitzit. There is no such Talmudic source for gazing at the tzitzit, and in fact Rav Natrunai Ga'on and Rav Moshe Ga'on opposed it. Although the practice is justified and appears to be commendable, it must be counted only as an acceptable custom.

293. The *Hesed La'alafim* (24:2, cited in the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer 24:15) instructed us to have in mind to fulfill the mitzvah of gazing at the tzitzit. This is in deference to the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*. According to other *Rishonim* there is no distinct mitzvah to gaze at the tzitzit, as explained in the previous footnote. Nevertheless, no harm is done by following these instructions.

294. Kissing the tzitzit

Maran did not mention the practice of kissing the tzitzit, not in the *Bet Yosef* nor in the *Shulhan Arukh*. Nevertheless, the Rama wrote (*Darkhe Moshe*): "I have witnessed people who have the custom of kissing the tzitzit and placing them on their eyes when they recite the words וּרְאִיתֶם אוֹתוֹ to display their love for the mitzvah." The Arizal likewise recommended kissing the tzitzit, as explained in the following halakha.

In connection with this, the *Mishna Berura* (477:5) cited the *Shene Luhot Haberit* testifying, "I have witnessed people who kiss their matzo and *maror* (before eating them at the Seder). They also kiss the sukkah whenever they enter or exit it, and they kiss the *lulav*, all to display their love for the mitzvot. Fortunate is he who feels joy in worshipping God." See also the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (24:19).

295. A number of *Aharonim* (*Hesed La'alafim* 24:2, *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer 24:18, *Yafe Lalev* Vol. I 24:12, *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* Ganzfried 17:7) mentioned the custom of kissing the tzitzit each time one mentions this word in the *Shema*. The *Damesek Eliezer* Papo (*ma'arekhet tzaddik* #5) complained about this custom, however, since the word *tzitzit* always appears in the middle of a phrase and it is incorrect to corrupt the reading of the verse by interrupting it with a kiss. He ignored the fact that great *Poskim* had endorsed this practice. The responsa *Hare Yehuda* (Vol. I, page 119) refuted the *Damesek Eliezer's* complaints, explaining that taking a moment to kiss the tzitzit is not considered an interruption at all. Furthermore, even if it would constitute an interruption, there is no source in the Talmud or *Poskim* that it is forbidden to interrupt one's reading of a verse and continue it after some time of silence. See more on this topic in responsa *Hemdat Avraham* Dayan (Vol. III, #5).