

It shall constitute Tzitzis for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them. (15:39)

We are to wear *Tzitzis*, so that when we look at them, we will remember all of the other *mitzvos* in the Torah. In other words, wearing *Tzitzis* generates *mitzvah* observance. "Seeing" catalyzes remembering, which engenders positive action via religious observance. Indeed, the *Rambam* writes that one should be diligent in his observance of *Tzitzis*, because of its compelling effect *vis-à-vis* all other *mitzvos*. In his commentary to the *Chumash*, *Rashi* writes: "The *parsha* of the *mekosheish eitzim*-- he who had transgressed *Shabbos* by picking twigs and carrying them in a public place-- is juxtaposed upon the *parsha* of *avodah zarah*, idol worship, because *Shabbos* desecration is tantamount to idol worship. It is equal to all *mitzvos*. Likewise, the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis* is compared to all *mitzvos*." We now have three *mitzvos* -- *avodah zarah* (*aveirah*); *Shabbos*; and *Tzitzis* -- which are each compared to all *mitzvos*. What is it about *Tzitzis* that grants it such significance?

In his *Mizmor L'David*, **Horav David Cohen, Shlita**, explains that the root of all sin can be traced back to the physical body's two "brokers": the eyes and the heart. This is indicated by the *pasuk* in the *parsha* of *Tzitzis*, *V'lo sasuru acharei levavchem v'acharei eineichem*, "And do not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray" (*Ibid.*). The Torah is teaching us that the primary motivation for sin is following the negative influence of the heart and eyes. *Tzitzis* reminds us of the *mitzvos* and is to be a preventive symbol to protect us from the influence of our roving eyes in consort with our straying heart.

Having established that *Tzitzis* is the protective agent which guards one from the wandering eye and seductive heart, thus reinforcing his commitment to all *mitzvos* of the Torah, we understand its part in his *mitzvah* observance. The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes the *Midrash* (*Shir Hashirim* 7:8), "Hashem created two *yetzarim*, inclinations: the evil-inclination to worship idols; the evil inclination toward moral turpitude. The evil inclination/tendency towards idol worship was basically abolished by our sages. The inclination toward immorality sadly is still in force. One who is able to withstand its effect, Hashem considers it as if he has triumphed over both -- idol worship and immorality."

Avodah zarah/heresy/sins generated by false misconceptions and perverted ideologies are products of the heart. The eyes, however, play a determinative role in leading us astray in areas of morality. While the focus is on morality, it is really a catch word that includes all sin which is the product of overactive passion -- from morality to gluttony, to any area in which one defers to his base desires. Pleasure has many guises and definitions, all of which fall under the category of *acharei einichem*, "after your (*yetzer hora* of the) eyes."

Man is confronted with two battlefields in life: *avodah zarah*, which wreaks havoc with his spiritual dimension, destroying his ability to think rationally and logically; *z'nus*, immorality, which plays on

his base sensual desires, in all areas of his physical dimension. The antidote/ protective agent to preserve his dignity and strengthen his ability to succeed in this war is the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis*, which serves as a reminder and a shield to keep him in check and maintains his commitment to Hashem.

Sounds great, but how does it work? How does the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis* achieve such lofty goals? Furthermore, what is the connection between *Tzitzis* and *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian exodus? *Chazal* (*Berachos* 12b) state that the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis* was placed in the *Krias Shema* because it includes within it five concepts: *Tzitzis/yetzias Mitzrayim*; the yoke of *mitzvos*; *daas minim*, to guard against heretics/heretical thoughts; *hirhur aveirah*, immoral thoughts which lead to sin; idolatrous thoughts leading to idol worship. While four of the above are— in one way or another -- somehow *mitzvah*/religious observance related, how does remembering the Egyptian exodus enter into the picture? It is not a *mitzvah*; it is the remembrance of a seminal, historical event.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (3:4) who explains the *mitzvah* of *Tekias Shofar*, sounding of the ram's horn, as an awakening/wake-up call to introspect our life, mull over our actions and behaviors, repent and return to Hashem. We should remember who we are and Who created us. He concludes: (he is addressing) "those who forget the truth as a result of the frivolities and nonsense of the times." In other words, we get caught up in the nonsensical behavior of contemporary society, so that we forget who we are and what our unique mission in life is.

The *yetzer hora*'s function is to engender forgetfulness, to cause spiritual amnesia. It uses the ploys of contemporary society's *mishigassen*, foolish, inane behaviors and cultural aberrations, to tempt us away from our goals and objectives. We get all caught up in these *nareshkeitin*, preposterous absurdities, that occupy the minds of the weak and immoral, and we feel that we have to act likewise. This is because we have lost track, forgotten who we are!

Tzitzis helps us to remember! It is the Jew's uniform. *Tzitzis* empowers us to remember the truth, what life is really about and our G-d-given mission while we are in this world, but sometimes we forget. *Sforno* (*pasuk* 39) comments that, by gazing upon the *Tzitzis* we will "remember that we are servants of Hashem and that we accepted all of His Torah and promised to perform His *mitzvos*. This is achieved when we look at the *Tzitzis*, which are similar to the *chosam ha'melech ba'avadav*, king's insignia upon his servants." The *Tzitzis* reminds us that we belong to Hashem. He is our king. We are His servants. When we remember to Whom we belong, we have just solved much of our problem in overcoming the *yetzer hora*.

I am reminded of a poignant story related by *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*. The *Maggid* was incarcerated in a Siberian prison together with prisoners of other nationalities. His cellmate was a Polish general who, together with his defeated Army, was taken prisoner of war by the Russians. Their treatment was, at best, miserable. Added to the long hours of hard labor of working in the most desolate location in the world, was the temperature. Siberia redefines freezing cold. While the guards wore heavy fur coats and multiple layers of underwear, the prisoners, most of whom were

Jewish, were wearing nothing more than a thin shirt and a cotton jacket. Without food, the body has difficulty producing heat. Those who survived this frozen purgatory did so with incredible *siyata diShmaya*, Divine assistance.

Let us return to *Rav* Galinsky's cellmate. Every night at approximately 2:00 am, the Polish general arose from his "bed" and removed a small box from beneath it. He took out his original uniform, complete with medals and stars, donned it, faced the mirror (large metal sheet) on the wall, saluted once – then took everything off and placed it back in the box.

Rav Galinsky watched this spectacle every night, assuming that defeat had done more to the Polish general than imprison him. This man had become unhinged. His irrational behavior was beginning to bother *Rav* Galinsky. Finally, he asked the man for an explanation. "My friend," the general began, "I want you to know that, prior to my capture, I was a distinguished Polish general, and I commanded thousands of troops. Alas, with the turn of events, I am now a prisoner of war. Lest I forget my true self, my real status in life, I don my uniform every night. The Russians will not succeed in making me a prisoner as long as I remember that I am a general!"

So, too, do we wear our *Tzitzis* as *chosam shel avdus*, to display our allegiance to Hashem. We are His servants, His soldiers, His People. The *Tzitzis* remind us that we belong to no one but Him.