

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

What is it about the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis* that the Torah – more so than for any other *mitzvah* – emphasizes that will engender the remembrance of all of the other *mitzvos*? The commentators render explanations, ranging from the simple *p'shat*, to the homiletic and even to the esoteric. Perhaps, we might suggest the following: *Tzitzis*, unlike any other *mitzvah*, also comprises the Jew's uniform. A *Tallis katan* (*Tzitzis*) is worn all day. The *Tallis gadol* is worn during *davening*, and some righteous Jews even sit in their *Tallis* and *Tefillin* throughout the day. In any event, the *Tallis* is the Jew's uniform, which he wears with pride. When a person speaks with Hashem during his moments of prayer, the *Tallis* ensconces him. When a person leaves this world, the *Tallis* covers his mortal remains. In other words, what greater witness to a person's *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, is there than the *Tallis/Tzitzis* which he wears constantly? What does this have to do with remembering all of the *mitzvos*? Simply, he needs the support of his *Tzitzis* when he stands before the Almighty. One does not “mess around” in front of his most critical witness. Therefore, the *Tzitzis* reinforces his commitment to all of the other *mitzvos*.

Horav Aharon Rokeach, zl, the *Belzer Rebbe*, would encourage *Bar-Mitzvah* boys, as they commenced observing the *mitzvah* of *Tefillin*, to accept upon themselves never to speak about *divrei chullin*, mundane matters, while wearing the *Tefillin*. Understandably, this is a powerful commitment to accept and even more difficult to maintain. One of the special young men, who with great resolution succeeded in keeping the *Rebbe's* entreaty, became a *chassan*. On the day of his wedding, he appeared before the *Rebbe* to ask for his blessing. The *Rebbe* asked, “Are you prepared to accept upon yourself never to speak mundane matters while you are wearing your *Tallis* – as you accepted with regard to your *Tefillin*?” The *chassan* replied in the affirmative.

The *Rebbe* then explained the reason for his request. “After one hundred and twenty years, when you will come before the Heavenly Tribunal, you will be judged for your actions in your mortal life. The *eimas ha'din*, fear/awe of judgment, will be compelling. You will stand there entirely overwhelmed. You will have one support, however, one merit in your behalf: you are standing wrapped in your *Tallis*, the *Tallis* that you wore all of your adult life. This *Tallis* will attest to the fact that you never spoke mundane speech the entire time that you wore it. You will say to the Tribunal: During my mortal years, I spoke nothing but words of Torah while I was wearing my *Tallis*. **This time** should be no different. Let us talk Torah!”

The *Taz* wrote in his will that when he died, he insists that he be buried in his old *Tallis*, because it would testify before Hashem that its wearer never had inappropriate thoughts during the *Shemoneh Esrai* prayer. Therefore, the *Tzitzis* garment, with the accompanying *Tallis*, spent the “day” with its wearer – a phenomenon not unknown to the wearer. He is acutely aware that the *Tzitzis* are with him for the duration of his physical journey – even serving as his “chaperone” and life witness as his soul stands before the Heavenly Tribunal. Thus, the *Tzitzis* is a perfect

reminder of his religious affiliation and concomitant responsibilities. One expects a witness to testify to the truth. In order to facilitate this, it is necessary to provide the witness with positive activity, so that his testimony will be in his behalf – not to his detriment.

Horav Yosef Berger, Shlita, relates a well-known story, which also found its way into an earlier edition of *Peninim*. It is one well-worth repeating for the lesson it imparts concerning the significance of the garments one wears in the performance of a *mitzvah*. In a small town, it was discovered that an individual whose reputation as a *tzaddik*, righteous person, preceded him, had been buried without the traditional *tachrichim*, shrouds, and *Tallis*. Instead, this saintly Jew had been buried wearing the vestments of a priest. After research into this anomaly, it was discovered that it was at the *tzaddik's* behest that he had been buried in such a strange uniform. The reason was based on an incident which had occurred during his life.

Apparently, aside from his spiritual devotion, this man was also very devoted to the poor of his community, seeing to it that those who had unfortunately been unable to put bread on the table would have the means to do so. He reached out to widows and orphans, young men and women who stood at the threshold of matrimony, without a cent to their name. He found ways to help them all. Not being a wealthy man himself, this meant dedicating a number of hours each day to knocking on doors, raising money for those in need. Over the years, he became the address for all those who were down-and-out.

One day, during his house-to-house collections, he chanced upon a group of men who were having what they perceived as a good time. The cards were out, and the whiskey was flowing. In the midst of this revelry, there was a knock on the door and a solemn-faced rabbi was standing there asking for alms to marry off a poor orphan girl. These men were perhaps fine people, but in their inebriated state they decided to have some “fun.” “We will give you what you want. In fact, we will pay for the wedding, if you don a priest’s vestments and walk through the city – all day.”

This was a pretty heavy request, but the *tzaddik* was unfazed. He went to the local monastery and borrowed a uniform of the church. He walked throughout the town all day, to the jeers and banter of all who beheld his strange costume. At the end of the day, he appeared at the house of “fun” and asked the men to pay up. Having sobered up a bit, they realized what they had promised, but they were true to their word and paid for the wedding.

Prior to his passing, the *tzaddik* asked the members of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society, to bury him in the priestly vestments, which he had saved: “They will be my protection before the Heavenly Tribunal. The shame which I sustained on behalf of a poor orphan girl will confirm my entrance into *Gan Eden*.”