



Partners Detroit Tuesday Night

Study Guide

&

Take home Dvar Torah

פרשת שלח

Parshas Shlach

June 13, 2017

By: Rabbi Avi Cohen

This coming week at Partners:

**June 14th 12:00 p.m. : Seven Wonders of the Jewish
History Lunch 'n Learn with Rabbi Leiby Burnham
at the West Bloomfield JCC**

**June 15th 12:00 p.m. : J-Attitude Lunch 'n Learn
with Rabbi Leiby Burnham
at the Pime 10 Foundation Room**

Partners Detroit Mission Statement:

The Jean and Theodore Weiss Partners Detroit strives to engage, enhance and promote Jewish identity and values by offering a wide variety of meaningful programs and inspirational classes. With a staff of world-class educators, Partners aims to help members of the Detroit Jewish Community connect to their own rich heritage. Through its many educational programs and community-wide service projects, Partners Detroit reaches thousands of Jewish Detroiters each year.

Parshas Shlach

The last paragraph of this week's Torah portion, contains the commandment to put *tzitzit* on any four-cornered garment that we wear. We fulfill this mitzvah by wearing a Talit when we pray shacharit the morning prayer, and by wearing the smaller pair of *tzitzit* under our shirt all day.

This mitzvah applies only during daylight hours. As the source for this law, the sages point to the words וראתם אותם "and you should see them". This indicates that you should be able to see them without the use of any artificial light. Therefore, at night when we cannot see them, we are exempt from having *tzitzit* on our garments.

This is also why women are exempt from putting *tzitzit* on their shawls and kerchiefs. The basic rule is, women need not do any mitzvah that has to be done at a specific time. Since *tzitzit* is a mitzvah that is only applicable during the daytime, women are not obligated. Women are innately more spiritual than men, and therefore do not require the external stimuli that men do.

At first glance, this commandment would seem to go into the category of a חק an edict without a logical or understandable reason behind it. Tie some strings to a four-cornered piece of cloth. What could possibly be the meaning in this?

The problem is, the Torah itself gives us the reason.

The verse says: (Numbers 15:39)

ספר במדבר פרק טו

וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹת יְיָ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם

“And you should see them and you will remember all the commandments of Hashem and do them.”

How is it that through seeing the *Tzitzit* we will remember to do all of the commandments? It’s going to take a little thinking to figure this out.



The word ציצית refers to the actual fringe. The numerical value of the word ציצית equals 600. (צ=90 + י=10 + צ=90 + י=10 + ת=400) Add to that the 8 strings and 5 knots, and you have the magic number 613, the number of commandments in the Torah. Thus, when you look at the fringes, if you think into it, you will be thinking about “all the mitzvot in the Torah.”

Also, the 5 knots correspond to the five books of the Chumash.

The Code of Jewish law teaches us that when a person holds the front two fringes of his Talit while reciting the *Shema*, he should think that the 10 knots plus the 16 strings add up to the numeric value of Hashem's name 26.

One of the strings wraps around the other seven in between the five knots. The configuration of the wraps is 7-8-11-13. Together they add up to 39 which is the same numeric value as "Hashem אהה" (26+13) Once again as we look at the ציצית we should be thinking into the meanings of the different facets that make up the ציצית.

The Torah also commands us to dye one of the 8 strings with תכלת, a sky-blue dye, extracted from a special fish which surfaces only once in seventy years. The Talmud wonders, why תכלת? The answer given is that the color of תכלת reminds us of the sea, and the sea reminds us of the sky, and the sky reminds us of the color of God's Throne of Honor. This way when we see the blue strand in the ציצית we are again reminded of God on His Throne of Honor.

(Recently, there has been a discovery of a mollusk that some feel is the original source of the blue dye used in the *Tzitzit*. However, since we are not sure that it is the exact fish, many people do not have the blue string.)

The obligation to place the ציצית is only on a garment that has four corners. Not a three or five cornered garment. In thinking of four corners, we cannot help but think of Hashem whose dominion covers all four corners of the earth. When we wrap ourselves in the טלית, we realize that we are always under the protective cover of the Almighty who is always there looking after us and protecting us. Hashem is swaddling us and we can feel very snug and secure in the security of His blanket.

Boy! That's a lot to think about! But when you look into it more deeply you will see that this is precisely what the ציצית is all about.

The continuation of the verse stated above says:

וְלֹא תִתּוּרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם:

“And do not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray”.

Considering the entire verse, the Torah is telling us that the mitzvah of ציצית will save us from following our eyes and our hearts which cause us to stray from the Torah. How is that?

In the beginning of this weeks portion, we read about the twelve spies who were sent into Israel to report back to the Jewish people about the land. Of the twelve, only two, Joshua and Kalev, gave a positive report and told the people that we can conquer the land, no problem. The

other ten slandered the land and said it is a land that “devours its inhabitants” and would be impossible to conquer.

What prompted this negative evaluation?

As they travelled through the land, everywhere they went, they observed funerals being held; people were dying all over the place. They attributed this to the huge fruits that grew there. Apparently, they were deadly, and Israel is not a place where regular people like us could live!

They also reported that giants and very large people lived there. “We felt like grasshoppers and that’s exactly how we looked to them.” How could we possibly win a war against them?

The spies were very taken by what they saw. They saw funerals, they saw giants. They saw huge fruits. But, a little thought could have turned it all around. Our sages explain that the reason there were so many funerals was to distract the inhabitants and keep them preoccupied with their grief so they would not bother with the intruders spying on their land. God was also showing them that He could kill them whenever He wanted to, no matter how big they were. The huge fruits were a preview of all the bounty they would inherit when they entered the land. Right in front of their eyes was the evidence that Israel was a great land, and that they could conquer it in a cinch. Hashem was actually protecting them, and doing

everything for their good, but they could or would not see it that way. All they saw were the superficial facts, and they showed an impossible situation.

The ציצית are the antidote to superficial thinking. The ציצית say, think more deeply. You see the blue color? What does it remind you of? The sea? Okay, what does that remind you of? The sky! Okay, and what does that remind you of? Hashem of course!

You see those strings? How many knots? What are the configurations of the wraps? What is the numerical value of the word ציצית? Think, man think! Don't see only the superficial, which makes no sense. Look beneath the surface, think deeply! It is filled with meaning.

We are still stuck with a question. What lay at the root of the negative perspective on the land of Israel that the ten spies had? How was it that Yehoshua and Kalev were able to see the truth. Kalev said, "It's are a piece of cake!" What was different about them?

In the verse stated above, it says: "and do not explore after your heart and after your eyes." Rashi comments, "The eye sees, the heart covets, and then the body does the sins."

רש"י על במדבר פרק טו פסוק לט
הלב והעינים הם מרגלים לגוף ומסרסרים לו את העבירות העין רואה
והלב חומד והגוף עושה את העבירות:

There is a peculiarity in the order of things. If the eye sees, and then the heart covets, shouldn't the verse have said, "and do not explore after your eyes and after your heart"?

The answer to this question lies deep in human psychology. A person will not see something he does not *want* to see. No matter how obvious the evidence, how clear the matter is, if for some reason, one is not inclined to recognize the truth, he will dismiss it with the slightest excuse. The accuracy of what we see with our eyes is governed by what we want to see. If we are completely objective, we will see the truth, but if we want to see something else, we will see just that and nothing else. It really starts with what is in our hearts; that will determine what our eyes see.

There is a very striking example of this phenomenon. This piece was published by the ***Royal Society of Great Britain*** after the DNA of a very basic bacterium was decoded for the first time.

Quite a perplexing revelation from this work was that the genes actually overlap. Like a telegram with no spacing, the coded message read entirely differently, depending upon whether one began with the first, second, or third letter. The fact that three messages were contained within one, seemed to some researchers artificial or contrived, prompting Drs. Hiromitsu Yokoo and Iairo Oshima to revise to the theory, first suggested by Dr. Francis Crick and Leslie

Orgel (Icarus, Vol. 19,1973, p341) that life on earth began from organisms that were sent here billions of years ago by extraterrestrial civilizations that decided to “seed” other planets.

They realized that such a brilliant and complex system could not have come about by itself. There is obviously intelligence behind this difficult and ingenious system of coding. The coding system is so compact that scientists tell us that if you coded every single volume of printed material in every library in the whole world the way the DNA is coded, it would all fit in the space the size of the head of a pin. There must be an author, no way of denying that. Could that mean there is a God? Impossible, we don't believe in the supernatural. This is not an option. No problem. We can attribute it to Martians (extraterrestrial civilizations) who seeded our world billions of years ago.

A person will not see what he does not want to see no matter how clear and obvious it is.

We can now understand why the Torah puts the heart first. This is the reason the spies interpreted what they saw in the negative way that they did. Deep in their hearts, they were out to find the reasons not to go into Israel. Their eyes saw what was in their hearts.

The mitzvah of צִיצִית which focuses us on Hashem and the 613 mitzvot, can serve as a tool to help keep us objective about what we see. If we chose to see the world through

the eyes of the ציצית which is to say that everything points to Hashem, Hashem is everywhere, and I accept His will and His 613 commandments, we will always see correctly. Since our personal biases are not involved, our eyesight will always be 20/20.

It is interesting to know that there is no obligation from the Torah to wear the Talit or the ציצית. The Torah says *if* you own a four-cornered garment, in order to wear it, you must put ציצית on it. But, if one does not own such a garment, there is no obligation to buy one. In spite of that, we deliberately go out and purchase a four cornered garment in order to obligate ourselves in the mitzvah of ציצית.

Why would such a great mitzvah, one which is considered equal to the other 612 combined, be optional?

The answer is, we must choose to be in a position to see things objectively. Without this conscious choice, we are likely to see things the way we want to see them.

The sages have incorporated the paragraph of the *Tzitzit* into our daily recital of the Shema morning and evening. This paragraph also contains the mention of the exodus from Egypt which we are obligated to remember twice every day, morning and evening (as we state in the Haggadah).

It is not coincidental that these two concepts come together in the same paragraph. The exodus from Egypt was the single most compelling historical event that proved the existence of Hashem. Therefore, after getting the message of the *tzitzit* we immediately reinforce the reality of Hashem as remembering that He was seen by millions of people at the exodus.

When wearing the *Tzitzit*, we fulfill the mitzvah every single second they are on us. The story is told of the Vilna Gaon who on his death bed was seen crying. Those assembled were puzzled. What would a person who when reviewing his year, prior to Rosh Hashanah, couldn't remember where 10 minutes of time went, have to worry about when leaving this world?

The Vilna Gaon responded. "In this world, I can take a few dollars, buy myself a pair of *tzitzit*, and when I wear them, receive eternal reward for every second. Once I leave this world, that is no longer possible."

What an opportunity! Like the person who was in a field strewn with diamonds. "Do I *have* to pick up the diamonds?" he asked. Of course not! But, you wouldn't want to?

To this end, Partners has pairs of *tzitzit* available for anyone who wishes to avail himself of this great mitzvah.