

TEFILLAH TIPS

TEFILLAT SHACHARIT—SHABBAT

Vayomer - Parshat Tzitzit

The third section of the *Shema* is *Parshat Tzitzit*, which originates in *Bamidbar* 5:37. It begins “*Vayomer Hashem el Moshe Laymor Daber el Bnei Yisrael Veamarta Alayhem Veasu Lahem Tzitzit*” – “And G-d spoke To Moshe saying that *Bnei Yisrael* shall make for themselves *Tzitzit* on the corner of their garments...” It concludes “*Ani Hashem Elokaychem Asher Hotzeiti Etchem Mayeretz Mitzrayim*” – “I am the Lord, your G-d that took you out of Egypt”. The Torah commands us to remember our Exodus from Egypt every day (Deuteronomy 16:3). In this paragraph of *Shema* we fulfill that commandment by having in mind the *Mitzvah* and reciting the *Vayomer*. In this Tefillah Tip I would like to explain the *Mitzvah* of *Tzitzit* and its connection to our Exodus from Egypt.

Rav S. R. Hirsch zt”l demonstrates from the first verse in *Parshat Tzitzit* the intense devotion the Jewish people showed when fulfilling the mitzvah of *Tzitzit*. He explains the verse the following way: “*Daber el Bnei Yisrael Veamarta Alayhem - Veasu Lahem Tzitzit*” – “Speak to the children of Israel and tell them about the Mitzvah and **they will make for themselves Tzitzit.**” Rav Hirsch explains that the Torah did not instruct Jews to make *Tzitzit*; it just informed them of the *Mitzvah*. Because of their love, devotion, and dedication to G-d and his Torah, “*Veasu Lahem*” – The People of Israel went ahead and fulfilled the *Mitzvah* with alacrity. Wearing *Tzitzit* is a unique *Mitzvah* because in the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law), *OC* 24:1, it states that unless one is already wearing a four cornered garment, he is not obligated in the *Mitzvah* of *Tzitzit* at all. Yet, in 24:6 it states that one who is careful to fulfill the *Mitzvah* of *Tzitzit* properly will experience spiritual delight, and great will be the punishment of one that avoids the *Mitzvah*. We are thereby encouraged to create the situation (wear a four cornered garment) in order to fulfill the *Mitzvah*.

Tzitzit symbolize and represent so many fascinating and important lessons. In *Gematria* (numerical equivalent), *Tzitzit* equals 600. When we add the 8 strings and 5 knots on each pair of *Tzitzit* it equals 613 – the number of *Mitzvot* in the *Torah* that we are required to fulfill. Rav Schwab zt”l, in his book *On Prayer*, writes that although the *Tzitzit* are filled with knots, two thirds of each set of strings are left free flowing. This implies that although there are a significant number of laws and restrictions in Jewish life, in the end these laws and restrictions unleash an unmatched freedom to live and enjoy life. Additionally, the word *Tzitzit* in Hebrew not only means fringe, but a sprouting flower as well. Wearing *Tzitzit* that extend off of our clothing manifests the unique opportunity for every Jew to grow and develop towards their potential through *Mitzvot* like a beautiful flower that opens and shares all of its beauty.

The passage concludes, “*Ani Hashem Elokaychem Asher Hotzeiti Etchem Mayeretz Mitzrayim Lihiyot Lachem Laylokim*” – “I am the Lord, your G-d that took you out of Egypt so that I will be your Master”. The commentaries explain why the Parsha of *Tzitzit* concludes with the memory of the Exodus.

1. Since *Tzitzit* represent all 613 *Mitzvot*, the message is that G-d took us out of Egypt specifically so that we can fulfill all the *Mitzvot*.
2. The *Ohr Hachaim* writes that a four cornered garment with *Tzitzit* is a type of four cornered uniform that indicates that G-d rules all four directions of the earth: North, South, East and West. Therefore as a reminder that we were slaves to Pharaoh, and now we are servants of Hashem we don *Tzitzit*.

Take Home Tip: Jewish Law requires that one does not wear his *Tzitzit* fringes outward at a cemetery in order not to degrade the dead that are unable to fulfill the *Mitzvah* in their current state. After seeing the layers of meaning and wisdom contained in *Tzitzit*, we can better understand this law.

Shabbat Shalom.

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