

Meshech Chochmah Parshas Tetzaveh

The Tzitz and the Bnei Yisrael

וְעָשִׂיתָ צִיץ זָהָב טָהוֹר וּפְתַחְתָּ עָלָיו... קִדָּשׁ לַה'

*You shall make a tzitz (headplate) of pure gold, and you shall engrave upon it...
“Holy to Hashem” (28:36)*

The pasuk does not specify exactly what is “Holy to Hashem”. Does this refer to the *tzitz* itself? If so, in what way is the *tzitz* more “holy to Hashem” than any of the other *bigdei kehunah* (priestly garments)?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that the words on the *tzitz* need to be taken in the context of other words which are written on the *bigdei kehunah*. On two sets of stones worn by the Kohen Gadol – the *Avnei Shoham* on the *Efod* and the *Avnei Miluim* on the *Choshen* – are engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Tosefta¹ informs us that all the *bigdei kehunah* are inter-connected and inter-dependent, i.e. the mitzvah is performed by the Kohen Gadol specifically wearing all of them. As such, they are to be taken as a single composite unit. As such, it is conjunction with these names that the *tzitz* is to be read, for it is *to these twelve tribes* that it is referring when it says “Holy to Hashem,” as the pasuk states² “קִדָּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַה' – Israel is Holy to Hashem”!

In the World of Korbanos – Halachic Ramifications

It emerges that the two words engraved on the *tzitz* are a statement about the holiness of the Jewish People. Indeed, says Meshech Chochmah, this is something that is reflected in the halachic function of the *tzitz*, which is to atone for certain types of *tumah* that may occur in the bringing of *korbanos*. In the words of Chazal: “הַצִּיץ מְרַצֵּה – the *tzitz* expiates.” However, the Gemara states that this effects pertains only to the *korbanos* of the Bnei Yisrael. If a gentile should bring a *korban* and it becomes *tamei*, the *tzitz* does not atone for it. If the effect of the *tzitz* is self-contained, relating to the *korbanos* themselves, what difference should there be as to whose *korban* it atones for? Once we appreciate, however, that the *tzitz*

¹ Menachos 6:6.

² Yirmiyahu 2:3.

is expressing the kedushah of the Bnei Yisrael, we will understand why its effect is limited to their *korbanos*.

Moreover, commenting on the words in Parshas Shelach,³ “כְּכֶם כִּגְרִי יִהְיֶה לְפָנַי ה'” – As for you, so too, for the convert before Hashem,” the Sifrei⁴ explains that this comes to include converts in the category of those whose *korbanos* can be atoned for by the *tzitz*. Seemingly, such an exposition should not be necessary, for having converted and become part of the Jewish People, do they not naturally partake of all the halachos that relate to the Jewish People? Once we appreciate, however, that the effect of the *tzitz* is a function of the kedushah of the twelve tribes of Israel, we may have thought that it does not apply to someone who is not actually descended from one of those tribes. Therefore, the pasuk informs us that it applies to anyone who belongs to the People of Israel.

The Meshech Chochmah proceeds to explain in this light another episode where the *tzitz* played an active role. Toward the end of Chumash Bamidbar,⁵ Bnei Yisrael waged war against Midian, capturing many of those who had been involved in enticing the People to immorality. The Gemara⁶ explains that the means through which they detected which of the Midianite daughters should be put to death was by passing them in front of the *tzitz*, whereby those who were culpable visibly changed color. Why was this process performed by using the *tzitz* specifically? Since the actions of the daughters of Midian led to a profanation of the sanctity of Bnei Yisrael, their liability was determined by the *tzitz* which is dedicated to proclaiming that sanctity.

“Remembrance Stones for Bnei Yisrael”

This idea will give us deeper insight into a term which is used in conjunction with both these sets of stones, namely, that of זְכוּרָה – remembrance. The *Avnei Shoham* are referred to as “אֲבֵנֵי זִכְרוֹן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” – *remembrance stones for Bnei Yisrael*,⁷ and the pasuk subsequently states that the stones on the *Choshen* shall be “לְזִכְרוֹן לְפָנַי ה' תִּמְיֵד” – *as a remembrance before Hashem, always*.⁸

³ Bamidbar 15:15.

⁴ Shelach, sec. 109.

⁵ Perek 31.

⁶ Yevamos 60b.

⁷ Pasuk 12.

⁸ Pasuk 29.

The Gemara⁹ informs us that as surely as we wear tefillin in which are written pesukim proclaiming that Hashem is our One and Only God, so too, Hashem, so to speak, wears tefillin in which is stated “ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ – *Who is like Your nation, Israel, one People in the land!*” Once we appreciate that the words “קודש לה” on the *tzitz* are written in reference to the tribes of Israel engraved on the stones, we can understand that the stones are in fact a representation of the idea of Hashem’s tefillin which proclaim that the Jewish People are “Holy to Hashem”. In this light, the two sets of stones correspond to the two types of tefillin: the *Avnei Shoham* on the shoulders near the head – corresponding to the *shel rosh*, and the *Avnei Miluim* resting on the heart, corresponding to the *shel yad*.¹⁰

Moreover, says Meshech Chochmah, with this in mind we can understand on a new level the opinion of R’ Yehoshua ben Levi, cited in the Yerushalmi,¹¹ that the eight *bigdei kehunah* are to be worn by the Kohen Gadol only on Shabbos and Yom Tov. What is behind this qualification? Rather, during the week, when the Jewish People are wearing their tefillin, that is sufficient to evoke Hashem’s connection with us represented by His tefillin. On Shabbos and Yom Tov, when tefillin are not worn by Israel, the idea of Hashem’s tefillin is evoked by the two sets of remembrance stones worn by the Kohen Gadol as part of the *bigdei kehunah*.

⁹ Berachos 6a.

¹⁰ It is most interesting to consider in this regard the exposition of the Gemara (Yoma 6b) which derives from the word “תמיד - always” as stated with regards to the *tzitz* (pasuk 38) that one’s attention should not waver while he is wearing tefillin!

¹¹ Chagigah 2:4.