

Parsha Ponders

Tetzaveh | Feb 22, 2024 | 14 Adar I 5784

*Pomegranates, bells, and tzitzis*¹

ועשית את-מעיל האפוד כליל תכלת: ועשית על-שוליו רמני תכלת וארגמן ותולעת שני על-שוליו סביב ופעמני זהב בתוכם סביב

You shall make the *me'il* of the *eiphod* entirely *techeiles*. You shall make on the bottom of it pomegranates of *techeiles*, *argaman*, and *tola'as shani*, on the bottom all around, and golden bells amongst² them all around³

One of the garments of the *Kohen Gadol* is the *me'il*, a type of blue cloak. There's a dispute about exactly how it looked. Some say⁴ it was like a regular long shirt. In contrast, the Rambam describes⁵ the *me'il* as not having sleeves. Rather, it was divided into two corners from the neck downwards. Meaning, it is not attached except adjacent to the neck. This sounds similar to what our *tallis katan* looks like today, which is a four cornered garment⁶. One of the unique features of the *me'il* is the bottom of it had threads spun and woven together to resemble pomegranates, as well as golden bells. The latter were there so all would hear the *Kohen Gadol* as he came⁷.

There's a question about the exact placement of these pomegranates⁸. The Torah describes them as being on the bottom of the *me'il*, but where exactly was that? Was it at the very very bottom? That's problematic, for that would make it necessary to make the actual garment of the *me'il* slightly shorter. In that case, the Kohen wearing the *me'il* wouldn't be entirely covered by the garment as they should be. This would disqualify the garment. We can't say that the bottom of the garment would be measured from the bottom of the pomegranates, as the Torah commands making the *me'il*, and only then describes the pomegranates. It sounds like the *me'il* is a separate entity to the pomegranates. Instead, one could suggest that the pomegranates were sewn on a little higher in the garment, in such a way that the bottom of them aligned with the bottom of the *me'il*.

Some have noted⁹ that this interpretation precludes an answer to a different question. As stated, the Rambam's understanding of the *me'il* is something similar to our *tallis katan*. One could then ask¹⁰ on the Rambam, why didn't they put *tzitzis* on the *me'il*? We don't find anywhere any mention of such a

¹ Based on [Shalal Rav](#) to [Exodus](#) 28:31

² [Rashi ad. loc.](#) understands the *me'il* to have alternating pomegranates and bells. [Ramban ad. loc.](#) translates בתוכם as within them, and thus understands the bells to be inside the pomegranates

³ [Exodus](#) 28:31,33

⁴ [Rashi ad. loc.](#)

⁵ [Mishneh Torah Hilchos Klei HaMikdash](#) 9:3. [Ramban loc. cit.](#) understood the same. The [Ra'avad ad. loc.](#) is unsure where the [Ramban](#) got this from. Perhaps the [Ra'avad](#) understood like [Rashi](#). [Kesef Mishnah ad. loc.](#) suggests the [Ramban](#) and [Ramban](#) had a *baraisa* we no longer have.

⁶ [Radvaz ad. loc.](#) Cf. [Mirkeves HaMishnah ad. loc.](#), who disagrees with this interpretation of the [Ramban](#) and [Ramban](#) and posits that according to them the *me'il* did not have four corners.

⁷ [Exodus](#) 28:35

⁸ [Sefas Emes](#) to [Zevachim](#) 88b

⁹ [Shalal Rav](#) credits this to [Rav Yitzchak Weinberg](#)

¹⁰ [Minchas Chinuch](#) § 99

thing, and yet it's a four cornered garment¹¹. Some answer¹² simply that we know that a borrowed garment is exempt from *tzitzis*¹³, and the *me'il* was Temple property. As such, it was not obligated in *tzitzis*¹⁴.

However, some suggest¹⁵ a different answer. A potential source for the Rambam is the Zohar¹⁶, which explicitly says that the *me'il* had four corners¹⁷. The Zohar compares the *me'il* to a *tallis* with *tzitzis*. It says that the four corners of the *tallis* are like the *me'il*, with its bells and pomegranates at the bottom. It says these bells and pomegranates were at the corners of *mitzvah*, which are the five knots¹⁸. The implication is that the pomegranates, which were woven from threads of *techeiles*, *argaman*, and *tola'as shani* were **in place of tzitzis**, which are normally just white and *techeiles* threads. It's no wonder then why we don't find *tzitzis* in the *me'il*, as the pomegranates took their place¹⁹.

However, this approach doesn't square with the earlier interpretation of the location of the pomegranates²⁰. Due to lack of an alternative, the conclusion was that the location of the pomegranates was higher up on the *me'il*. They were located such that the *bottom* of the pomegranates reached the bottom of the *me'il*. If that's so, then it would be impossible to use them as *tzitzis*, which are supposed to hang below the garment. It would seem then that these approaches can't both be true. Either their location was indeed at the bottom of the *me'il*, or the *me'il* simply didn't have *tzitzis*. Either way, hopefully we now have a better understanding of the *me'il*, its look, and its various interpretations.

Good Shabbos

¹¹ The Minchas Chinuch adds that Arachin 4a discusses the novelty that Kohanim are obligated in *tzitzis*, because since they (or, at least the *Kohen Gadol*) are exempt from *sha'atnez* (which is related to *tzitzis*), I would have then thought they were also exempt from *tzitzis*. According to the Rambam there's a simpler approach the *gemarra* should have said: I would think Kohanim are exempt from *tzitzis* since the *Kohen Gadol* wore the *me'il* without *tzitzis*!

¹² Ibid; Teivas Gomeh ad. loc. § 1 by the Pri Megadim. The question doesn't start for the Mirkeves HaMishnah loc. cit.

¹³ Chullin 136a

¹⁴ The Minchas Chinuch says this answer is so obvious that he didn't even need to write about it, as the question was never a question. Nevertheless, he writes that when he shared this question to people, they were astounded at the brilliance of it. He therefore had to clarify the matter

¹⁵ Ein HaTecheiles 1:44, by Rav Gershon Chanoch Henoeh Leiner, the Radzyner Rebbe who discovered the cuttlefish as a potential source for *techeiles* in our days. He doesn't like the Minchas Chinuch's answer since once we know that the garments of the *Kohanim* are permitted for personal benefit (Mishneh Torah ad. loc. 8:11), they should be considered "your" garment. Rav Yerucham Fischel Perla, in his comments on Ein HaTecheiles (brought by Torah Sheleimah XXIII Miluim § 13) brings many sources which prove that despite the permit of their use, the garments are still considered property of the Almighty

¹⁶ Tikkunei Zohar § 10, brought by Yalkut Reuveni ad. loc. § 56

¹⁷ The consensus of most commentators is that the Rambam never saw the Zohar or its related works of Kabbalah. See Sedei Chemed Klalei HaPoskim 5:22 for a major discussion on this. See also Rav Chaim Kanievsky's Kiryas Melech which cites over 100 times where the Rambam's rulings have a source in the Zohar

¹⁸ The Radzyner primarily brought this Zohar to show that the custom of five knots in the *tzitzis* is very old

¹⁹ See also Menachos 41b. The Radzyner suggests that this is the source for those who are cautious to spin their *tzitzis* strings eight times, as this is how the pomegranate threads were made (Yoma 71a), something we find in no other vessel or garment in the Temple

²⁰ Rav Yitzchak Weinberg