

Parsha Ponders

Shelach | June 4, 2021 | 24 Sivan 5781

*The reminder of tzitzis*¹

ויהיו בני-ישראל במדבר וימצאו איש מקשש עצים ביום השבת: דבר אל-בני ישראל ואמרת אלהם ועשו להם ציצת על-כנפי בגדיהם לדרתם וגו'

While the Jews were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on Shabbos...Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: "In all generations, make *tzitzis* on the corners of your garments..."²

The Torah juxtaposes two seemingly unrelated and disconnected points. The first is an episode where a man was caught brazenly violating Shabbos. Immediately after this story is told, the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* is described. Why are these two things put next to each other? One explanation is³ that Moshe had a claim against Hashem⁴. The Jews are commanded to wear *tefillin* on their heads and arms six days a week. The *mitzvah* of *tefillin* reminds them to keep and observe the Torah properly. The one day that the Jews don't wear *tefillin* is on Shabbos⁵. As such, this man was susceptible to forgetting the *mitzvos*. How could it not be expected for someone to desecrate Shabbos? Hashem responded with the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, which apply all seven days of the week. *Tzitzis* are also a sign that Jew wears to remind them of all the *mitzvos*. This way, there's no need to worry about someone forgetting the laws of Shabbos, or any other *mitzvah*. The problem with this explanation is we are taught⁶ that the person who desecrated Shabbos knew full well what they were doing. They didn't forget anything. How then can we understand this approach⁷?

Even though this man transgressed Shabbos, there are those who say⁸ that his intentions were for the sake of Heaven. The Jews had just experienced the sin of the spies. Ten giants of the generation went into the land of Israel to scout out the land. Their report upon their return was disastrous. They spoke badly about the land, and the Jews believed them. As a result, they were all sentenced to die in the wilderness, and only their children would merit to enter the land of Israel. This person who transgressed Shabbos was concerned. Maybe the Jews will think that since they were sentenced to death in the wilderness, the *mitzvos* no longer apply. He therefore got up and transgressed Shabbos, and was subsequently punished. This was to show the people that indeed they were still obligated in the *mitzvos*⁹.

¹ Ta'amah D'Krah to Numbers 15:33, by Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita

² Ibid v. 32,38

³ Da'as Zekeinim to v. 32, based on Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Rabbah Chapter 26, brought in Yalkut Shimoni Shelach § 650 with some differences. It also appears in Rosh Al HaTorah ad. loc. A similar *Midrash* appears in Midrash Aggadah ad. loc. See also Ibn Ezra to v. 2 and Paneach Razah Shelach § 45 who write similarly. See as well Kol Bo § 31. Cf. Chizkuni to v. 40

⁴ Da'as Zekeinim loc. cit.; In Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu it was Hashem who initiated this dialogue. In Yalkut Shimoni it's closer to how the Da'as Zekeinim present it

⁵ Menachos 36b

⁶ Sanhedrin 41a and Sifrei Bamidbar § 113. He also wouldn't have been executed if he was an unwitting transgressor. For some reason what Ta'amah D'Krah quotes from the Sifri is really what it says in Sanhedrin

⁷ See Tzidkas HaTzaddik § 55 who differentiates between knowing in one's mind and knowing in one's heart that Hashem commanded against this act

⁸ A *Midrash* brought by Tosafos to Bava Basra 119b s.v. אפילו. See also appears Targum "Yonasan" to v. 32 who says a similar idea (although not the exact same, so it's surprising that Ta'amah D'Krah equates the two)

⁹ See Maharsha to Bava Basra 119a s.v. וראויה and Minchas Asher Bamidbar 27:3 for an interesting dispute as to how it was permitted for this man to do this

It turns out then that this man's entire intention was so that the Jews not forget the *mitzvah* of Shabbos, as well as the other *mitzvos*. However, if the Jews had had a sign, something with them at all times, such that they would never forget the *mitzvos*, the same thing could be accomplished. There wouldn't have been a need to transgress Shabbos. Therefore, Hashem commanded the Jews with the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. It would be a sign that they wear on their garments, in order to remember the *mitzvos*. Perhaps this is why the Torah wrote that *tzitzis* were to be for all generations¹⁰. We might have thought they were to just be for that generation, who were sentenced to die in the wilderness. They needed to be reminded of all the *mitzvos*. Hashem is teaching us that that is not so. Even we are prone to forget the *mitzvos*. That's why we were all commanded with the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*.

Good Shabbos

¹⁰ See Ta'amah D'Krah to v. 38, who gives another explanation for לדרתם