

B”H

613 Mitzvot
The Tzitzit

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

One of the 613 commandments is to tie a *tzitzit* on each of the corners of a four-cornered garment.

The commandment of *tzitzit* appears in the Pentateuch in the following verses:¹

God said to Moshe: "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them [that] they shall make tzitzit (צִיצִית) on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations; and in the tzitzit (צִיצִית) on the corner, they shall place a blue fiber. They will be your tzitzit (לְצִיצִית); you will look at it and you will remember all of God's commandments and you will do them; and, you shall not follow your hearts and eyes, after which you prostitute. So that you may remember and perform all my commandments; and you will be consecrated to your God. I am Havayah, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. I am Havayah, your God."

Note that in this paragraph, the Torah mentions the word *tzitzit* explicitly three times, whereas using a pronoun to refer to it would have been just as suitable (indeed, pronouns are used in some cases in this paragraph). It would be appropriate therefore to see how the three explicit instances of *tzitzit* in the *parshah* correspond to some Kabbalistic models.

Space, Time, and Soul

The simplest and most straightforward model to which these three instances of *tzitzit* correspond is from the Book of Formation, and is known as the space-time-soul model.

In this case, the correspondence is easy to see:

The 1st instance, "...make *tzitzit* on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations..." corresponds to time (generations).

The 2nd instance, "...in the *tzitzit* on the corner, they shall place a blue fiber" correspond to space (to place a blue fiber on the corner). The sages explain that the blue fiber, known as the *techelet* triggers a cascade of images related to both physical and spiritual space, "the *techelet* is similar to the sea, the sea is similar to the firmament, and the firmament is similar to the Supernal Throne." The Supernal Throne in Kabbalah is a connotation for the World of Creation. In Hebrew, the word "world" (עוֹלָם) stems from



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the word meaning "concealed" (נֶעְלָם), alluding to the fact that the Creator is concealed (impalpable) in the Worlds. Of the four worlds usually discussed (Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Action), the description of World is explicitly related to the World of Creation, the first level of consciousness where the ego shrouds God's presence.

And the 3rd instance, "...they will be your *tzitzit*; you will look at it and you will remember all of God's commandments" corresponds to soul (to look and to remember).

From Action to Emanation

The three explicit mentions of the *tzitzit* in these verses also suggest a progression through the Worlds, beginning with Action and ending in Emanation. This can be seen by focusing on the verbs accompanying each of the instances.

In the 1st instance (וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית), the verb is to make (וַעֲשׂוּ), which in Hebrew is the same verb as that from which stems "Action" (עֲשִׂיהָ).

In the 2nd instance (וַנִּתְּנוּ עַל צִיצִית הַכֶּנֶף), the verb is to place (וַנִּתְּנוּ), which alludes to the World of Formation, the level of consciousness in which there is an ongoing struggle between the two inclinations, the good and the evil (or, to use the conceptual scheme of the *Tanya*, between the Divine soul and the animal soul). The verb translated here as "they shall place" literally reads "they shall give." This same verb, to give, is the verb in the verse "Behold I have given before you today life and good and death and evil... choose life!"² Furthermore, these words, "And in the *tzitzit* on the corner, they shall place a blue fiber" instruct us to place a blue fiber together with the white fibers of the *tzitzit*. The white of the *tzitzit* alludes to the good inclination while the blue alludes to the power that God gives us to overcome our evil inclination. The value of this verb "and they shall place" (וַנִּתְּנוּ) is 512, or 2⁹, also alluding to the inherent duality characterizing the human psyche.

In the 3rd instance (וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית), the verb used is "to be" (וְהָיָה), which alludes to the World of Creation, the world where reality comes into being (*ex nihilo*). The word "and it shall be" (וְהָיָה), whose letters permute to spell God's essential Name, *Havayah* (יְהוָה), represents the reflection of the Almighty's manifestation in the World of Creation (a manifestation that originates from the World of Emanation). The two verbs in the previous phrases were in the plural form, referring to those being commanded. This verb is in the singular form and refers to the *tzitzit* itself, to its Divine potential. The World of Creation is the world of potential, as explained in Kabbalah. Note also that in the third instance the word "*tzitzit*" is prefaced with a relational *lamed* (לְצִיצִית), meaning "for a *tzitzit*." Based on its form (it is the only Hebrew letter ascending above the roof of

Probably the best known *gematria* about the *tzitzit* is that it is related to the number 613. How so? The *gematria* of *tzitzit* (צִיצִית) when written in its full form is 600 (see the next section for more on this). If we add to this the 5 double knots and the 8 strings found in each tassel, we get 613.⁶ This relationship provides a numerical depiction of how looking at the *tzitzit* reminds one of God's 613 commandments.

Indeed, 613 is the value of "Moshe Rabbeinu" (מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ), providing an additional level of contemplation of how the *tzitzit* connects us with the Torah given by Moshe Rabbeinu. Indeed, Moshe Rabbeinu is described (consummately) as "God's servant"⁷ (עֶבֶד יְהוָה). And, as above, the filling of the three instances of *tzitzit* equals the product of God (*Havayah*) and servant! Thus, contemplating the *tzitzit* and kissing it each time we mention it in the morning *Shema* leads us to become one with Moshe Rabbeinu, the consummate servant of God, who is essentially one with the 613 commandments of the Torah.

More on the Tzitzit and 613

We noted above that the *gematria* of *tzitzit* (צִיצִית) when written in its full form is 600. But, as we have seen, in all three instances the word *tzitzit* is spelled with only one *yud* not two, like so: צִיצִית.

Still, there is a simple numerical equivalency here that needs to be highlighted. The *gematria* of the three instances of *tzitzit* as it is written in the Torah (צִיצִית צִיצִית צִיצִית) is 1800, exactly the value of three times the full form (צִיצִית), which is equal to 600, and $3 \cdot 600 = 1800$! Thus, the teaching about *tzitzit* and 613 is based on the average value of the three instances.

In fact, this idea is apparent in the form of the three instances. We noted that in the third instance an additional relational *lamed* (ל), meaning "for," is added to the word. If we divide 30, the value of this additional *lamed*, in three, we get 10, or three letters *yud* (י) whose value is 10. When we add a *yud* to each of the three appearances of *tzitzit*, then each will now be the full form of the word.

Let us go another step deeper. The final form of the letter *mem* (ם) is equal to 600. Thus, three full forms of *tzitzit* (צִיצִית) equal three final *mems*. The sages refer to the final *mem* as the concealed *mem* (*mem stumah*), the letter of *Mashiach*. In addition, according to many great *tzadikim*, the *Mashiach*'s special *mitzvah*—the one through which he shines the most and his concealed essence becomes revealed—is the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit*.

One explanation for this is that the two-letter root of *tzitzit* is simply two letters *tzadik* (צצ), symbolizing the two levels of *tzadik* present in every Divine soul. These two levels are called the higher *tzadik*, the giver, and the lower *tzadik*, the receiver, as explained in

Chassidic writings.⁸ When both levels are revealed and unified, they release the Messianic potential of the soul.

The *gematria* of each letter *tzadik* (צ) is 90, or one twentieth of 1800. 90 is also the value of three letters *lamed* (ללל). In the three explicit instances of *tzitzit* there are 6 *tzadiks*, which, when inter-included each in each, total 36, corresponding to the 36 *tzadikim* of every generation, which represent the potential of the generation to merit the coming of Mashiach.

1. Numbers 15:37-39.

2. Deuteronomy 30:15.

3. See in depth in *The Hebrew Letters*, pp. 183, 189

4. There are two possible fillings for צ, either צדי or צדיק. Note that here, it is filled as צדי.

5. If we add to the three instances of *tzitzit* the filling of the pronoun "it" (אִתּוֹ), which we saw corresponds to yet a fourth level, אֵלָיו תּוֹ וְאוֹ, the total will come to 2506, or 7 times *Mashiach* (מָשִׁיחַ).

6. See *Rashi* to Numbers 15:39.

7. Deuteronomy 34:5

8. In the Torah, the archetypal figures of the higher and lower *tzadik* are Joseph and Benjamin.