

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's portion *Shlach* Hashem commands us regarding the mitzvah of *tzitzis*. The Rabbis tell us that the mitzvah of *tzitzis* symbolizes the 613 mitzvahs of the Torah. Rashi explains that there are 5 sets of double knots on each group of 8 strings. The gematria – numerical equivalent of the word *tzitzis* is 600. 600 plus 5 double knots, plus 8 strings = 613, the number of mitzvahs in the Torah!

Thus, *tzitzis* symbolize the entire Torah. As the verse states: *“And you will look at it (the thread) and you will remember all the Mitzvahs of Hashem and you will do them...”* (Bamidbar 15:39) Therefore, *tzitzis* have tremendous spiritual power, because one who wears *tzitzis* is like one who wraps his body in a Sefer Torah! The following amazing true story illustrates the power of the mitzvah of *tzitzis*.

Reb Moshe Ashkenazi was a melamed (Torah teacher for children) and a disciple of the Vilna Gaon, who lived about 250 years ago. Lacking employment as melamed in his own town, Reb Moshe was forced to become a melamed in a village quite a distance away. He stayed away from home most of the year, as he could not afford more frequent trips to visit his family. For the Yamim Tovim (High Holidays), however, he would scrape together enough money to come home and bring with him whatever money he had saved for his poor family.

Reb Moshe was an unusual man. Besides his scrupulous observance of all the mitzvot, there was one mitzvah which he was especially careful about, and that was the mitzvah of *tzitzis*. As far back as he could remember, Reb Moshe had never gone anywhere or even walked less than four cubits without donning his *tzitzis*. The respect and reverence which he felt for *tzitzis* was something that he imparted to his young students.

Prior to one Yom Tov, Reb Moshe boarded the wagon for the journey to his hometown. But midway through the trip, Reb Moshe's *tzitzis* somehow got caught inside one of the spokes of the wheels and tore in half. Immediately Reb Moshe asked the driver to stop the wagon so that he could check the *tzitzis*. Possibly they could be fixed, but certainly not here in the middle of a road miles away from the closest village. Reb Moshe offered to pay the driver if he would return to the village from where they had come and bring him another pair of *tzitzis*, but the driver refused initially. Reb Moshe insisted on remaining on the side of the road, because he would not move 4 cubits without *tzitzis*.

Finally, after much negotiation, Reb Moshe agreed to give the driver all the money he had made over the last few months, in order that the wagon driver should return to the village to bring a new pair of *tzitzis*. It was an incredible sum to pay for *tzitzis* but Reb Moshe felt he had no choice. With mixed emotions he sent the driver off and waited by the side of the road for him to return with the *tzitzis*. But the driver never came back.

Now Reb Moshe had a dilemma. He had given away all his money and had received nothing in return. But while he was disappointed that the driver had tricked him, he felt elated that he had been willing to sacrifice so much for this mitzvah which he held so dear. He waited at the side of the road until a wagon came along a few hours later and the driver kindly agreed to go to the next town and obtain a pair of *tzitzis* for Reb Moshe.

A few months later when Reb Moshe was back at his melamed position, he was in middle of teaching his young students when a messenger burst into the room. The messenger informed Reb Moshe that his brother, Reb Yitzchak, the pious author of the sefer *Bris Olam*, had suffered a major stroke. Reb Moshe was needed at his brother's side during his last moments on this world.

Reb Moshe came immediately and as he arrived at his brother's bedside he asked that everyone leave the room. The small crowd exited but after they closed the door they peered through the cracks to see what was happening. Reb Moshe stood over his brother's still body, whispering words of Tehillim when suddenly Reb Moshe removed his *tzitzis* and spread them over his brother's body. "Master of the World, not only have I dedicated my life to performing your commandments, but I have sacrificed all my money for the sake of *tzitzis*. Now I am prepared to give up all my reward if You restore my brother's health."

He then put back on his *tzitzis* and walked out of the room. His brother miraculously lived for another five years. (As told by Rav Aryeh Levin, in *Touched by a Story* R. Reb Yechiel Spiro p. 118) Rav Aryeh Levin

Besides being a mitzvah to wear *tzitzis*, wearing *tzitzis* is also one of the identifying garments of a Jew. There are those who say that one may fulfill his requirement of wearing *tzitzis* by wearing them under his shirt so that they are hidden. However, a Jew who wears his *tzitzis* so that the strings are showing, demonstrates his pride in being a member of the Holy Jewish nation. So, let us be inspired by these words and the story we have told above, to be meticulous with regard to the mitzvah of *tzitzis* and to wear them proudly. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**