



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת נח

וַיִּקַּח שֵׁם וְיֶפֶת אֶת הַשְּׂמָלָה וַיִּשִּׂמוּ עַל שִׁכְמָם שְׂנֵיהֶם וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרָיִת וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת עֲרוֹת אֲבִיהֶם. (בראשית ט, כג)
And Shem and Yefes took a garment, laid it upon their shoulders, and they walked backwards, and covered their father's disgrace. (Bereishis 9:23)

This week's *Sidrah* records the humiliating event in which Noach became intoxicated and found himself shamed. While Cham chose to mock and humiliate his father, Shem and Yefes decided to cover Noach, turning away to avoid seeing him in this state. When Noach awoke and realised what had happened, he cursed the descendants of Cham but blessed Shem and Yefes for their respectful actions.

Rashi, referring to the phrase *וַיִּקַּח שֵׁם וְיֶפֶת*, *And Shem and Yefes took*, notes that the verb *וַיִּקַּח* is in the singular form, indicating that Shem exerted more effort and took the initiative in honouring his father. Only after Shem stepped forward did Yefes join him. As a result, the descendants of Shem, represented by the Jewish nation, were privileged to receive the *mitzvah* of *שְׁלֵיטָה*, while Yefes was given the secondary reward of meriting burial for his descendants (in the future war of Gog and Magog).

The Meforshim (Mizrachi and others) question the reasoning behind Klal Yisroel receiving the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* because of the merit of Shem, from an opposing source. The Gemara (*Chullin* 88b) expounds from the *possuk*, *אִם מְחוּט וְעַד שְׂרוּךְ נָעַל*, *Avrohom said to the king of Sedom ... if so much as a thread or a shoestrapp...* (*Bereishis* 14:22-23), that as a reward for declining the offer of the thread and shoestrapp, Avrohom's descendants were granted the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, represented by the *thread*, and *tefillin*, represented by the *shoestrapp*. This raises a question about the true source of Klal Yisroel meriting the commandment of *tzitzis*: was it due to Shem's noble act or Avrohom's declaration to the king of Sedom?

The Meforshim provide various interpretations to resolve the apparent contradiction,¹ and the Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* elaborates extensively, offering a novel explanation based on a deeper analysis of the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. He cites Rashi (*Bava Kamma* 9b), who, while discussing the concept of *הַיָּדוּר מְצִינָה* (the beautification of a *mitzvah*), states that a person should create for themselves a beautiful Sefer Torah, a beautiful Lulav, a beautiful Tallis, and beautiful *tzitzis*.

¹ The Meforshim suggest that the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* warrants a "double merit" because it consists of two components: the white strings and the blue *techeiles* strings. We received the white strings in the merit of Shem, while the strand of *techeiles* was granted to us because of Avrohom.

Alternatively, it could be that the gift of *tzitzis* was initially given to Shem for his descendants, but it was not specified to which of them it would be granted. However, due to Avrohom's actions, he merited that this blessing would be given specifically to his descendants - Klal Yisroel.

The Brisker Rav questions the requirement to beautify the *mitzvah* by making a beautiful Tallis. He argues that the primary fulfilment of this *mitzvah* lies in the strings themselves, while the garment acts merely as a backdrop; it is only once someone possesses a four-cornered garment that there arises an obligation for *tzitzis*. Wouldn't this be similar to incorrectly suggesting that a person should acquire a beautiful home to enhance the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah*?!

Yet from Rashi's comment, we must conclude that the Tallis, which serves as the garment for *tzitzis*, is also regarded as a *mitzvah* item deserving of beautification. Seemingly, as long as the strings of *tzitzis* are attached to the garment, the entire garment is elevated to the esteemed status of being a *mitzvah* item, thus making it appropriate to be beautified.

The Rosh Yeshiva sheds further light on the concept that the entire garment can attain *mitzvah* status. He explains, drawing from various sources, that there are two key aspects to the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. The first aspect is the action of עִיטוּף, which involves wrapping oneself in a Tallis, the garment that has *tzitzis*. The second aspect is the ongoing fulfilment of the *mitzvah* while wearing the *tzitzis*. Even after a person has finished wrapping themselves in the Tallis, they continue to fulfil the *mitzvah* by wearing the garment. Since the act of wrapping oneself in a garment with *tzitzis* encompasses not just the strings but also involves being enwrapped in the entire garment, it is evident how the entire Tallis can be considered a *mitzvah* item. Therefore, the enhancement of the *mitzvah* applies to the entire garment of *tzitzis*.

With this understanding, the Rosh Yeshiva addresses the original question. Because of Shem's actions, we were granted the *mitzvah* of Tallis, which involves wrapping oneself in a garment that has *tzitzis*. In addition, due to Avrohom, we also received the merit that continuously wearing a garment with *tzitzis* is regarded as a *mitzvah*.

This characteristic of the entire garment becoming a *mitzvah* item, which arises from the fact that one wraps oneself in the entire garment, helps explain another *halachah*. The Mishnah Berurah (*Siman* 21 s.k. 12) cites various opinions about using the garment of *tzitzis* for dishonourable purposes. He then distinguishes between the Tallis used for davening, which should be treated with greater respect, and the *tallis katan*, which is regarded as an ordinary garment and does not require special treatment. The Rosh Yeshiva clarifies this distinction based on the concept mentioned earlier. The entire garment of the Tallis, which is used for wrapping oneself, acquires a holy status. In contrast, with a standard four-cornered garment, only the strings are considered holy, meaning the garment itself does not necessitate heightened respect.

This Devar Torah is adapted from ספר וענפיה ארזי אל and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to parshasheet@gyalumni.org.