

CHAPTER 6: THE SEQUENCE OF THE DAY □ PARAGRAPH 5-6

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Since our clothes reflect who we are and even foreshadow how we're likely to act the whole day long for the most part, it's clear that clothing can and should have spiritual significance. So we'll dwell on the role they play in our daily Divine service.

The mitzvot most obviously associated with our clothing are those of attaching "tzitzit" (tassels) onto our (four-cornered) garments, and of donning "tephillin" (the leather boxes that encase specific Torah verses that we wear on our forehead and arm). And both tzitzit and tephillin play an important role in our morning prayers, as we'll see. We'll focus upon tzitzit now and on tephillin next time, then upon the combination of the two.

Tzitzit are significant because they're one of the ways we fulfill G-d's wish for us to sanctify -- and be sanctified by -- even the most mundane of things, like our clothes. For G-d wants us to always have Him in mind no matter what we do, and to use everyday things like our clothing to help rectify the world. So, when we attach tzitzit to our clothes we consciously and willfully set them aside for G-d's purposes (i.e., we sanctify them). But there's even more to it than that, having to do with our standing out as G-d's servants and devotees. For like all servants and devotees, we too are required to wear our Master's insignia on our person to show our unwavering allegiance and in order to follow His lead.

After all, we're charged with carrying out G-d's wishes on earth to rectify all of creation (see 1:4:7), and to maintain the order that G-d desires (which is why everything we do -- both the sacred and the profane -- matters).

Now, we're asked to accept G-d's "yoke upon our shoulders" before we set out to serve Him, much the way a beast of burden (though there's really no comparison) would be expected to allow a yoke to be placed upon his shoulders in order to be tethered to the task at hand and set on course. Rather than a physical yoke, though, the yoke we assume is our willingness to subjugate ourselves to G-d's will, to be lead by His guidance, and to never veer off-course. Our ability to rectify things is aided by this willingness; and our wearing tzitzit is one way we accept G-d's yoke (in fact, tzitzit were classically placed on poncho-like garments that were indeed laid on one's shoulders like a yoke).

This all comes into play in the morning prayer service, when we wear a tallit (a "ritual shawl" that's always attached with tzitzit) and thus actively accept the yoke of Divine service upon ourselves as we set out to do our part in the rectification of the world.

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