

# TO LINK, I THINK

by Rabbi Label Lam

*Hashem said to Moses, saying, speak to the Children of Israel and say to them that they shall make themselves tzitzis on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations. And they shall place upon the tzitzis of each corner a thread of turquoise wool. It shall constitute tzitzis for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them; and not stray after your eyes after which you stray. (Bamidbar 15:37-39)*

How does that work that when you look at the wound strings and threads you are reminded of all the Mitzvos? The Talmud explains that since the blue color comes from some aquatic creature one is reminded of the sea, which is blue which reminds one of the sky, which in turn reminds one of The Almighty's "Throne of Glory" (Menachos 43b) That sounds simple enough.

Months after my wife and I were engaged almost two decades ago my mother was nice enough to throw a surprise wedding shower party. My job was to get the bride there at the appointed time, which I did. Then I was instructed to return a few hours later, after the party but not until then, which I dutifully did. When I arrived the festivities were just winding down and I started to fill up my car with all the sundry presents. The car was sufficiently loaded and we were all saying our curbside goodbyes.

I noticed there an eight-year old young man, the only male at the event who was a grandson of one my mother's friends. He had this transfixed look. He kept looking at me and then at my bride and then at my beat up old jalopy of a car. He looked increasingly perplexed as his eyes shifted back and forth. I asked him, "Derek, is everything all right?" Then he answered with something that simply amazed me and shocked me at once. He said, "How can a beautiful girl like that marry a guy with a car like that?"

Somehow through the power and insidious wisdom of advertising personal happiness and intimacy has been inexorably associated with a handsome hood ornament. When you get the status car the girl steps out to meet you. This may seem like a benign belief but he may spend the most vital and productive years of his life testing the veracity of that thesis only to find out something is seriously wrong. I don't mean to ruin anybody's day or life but owning a Lexus guarantees no more marital bliss than swinging a rubber chicken over your head and singing Beatle songs.

I think we can appreciate though that the mind is wired and emotions are engaged sometimes by a series of, often subtle, associations. Someone asked a certain great person our question. "How does

seeing the blue in the tzitzis reminds one of the sea and then the sky and then the throne and ultimately the justice of The Almighty?" The Rabbi asked him, "Do you understand why it is that one is not permitted gaze at his neighbor's wife's garments on the laundry line?" The fellow admitted, "Yes! Of course!" Then the Rabbi told him sharply, "The fact that you understand that but you don't understand the other does not speak well on your behalf."

To help us out Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch and The Sefas Emes trace the noun "Tzitzis" to the verb "Metzitz"-"Peering", as it is written in the verse from King Solomon's Song of Songs, "He (my beloved) stands behind our wall observing through the windows- peering through the cracks." Why is the beloved both observing and peering and why through windows and cracks? What's the difference?

A dear and recently departed friend of mine told me in the name of his teacher that sometimes when children are playing outside the mother is watching them openly through the window. As long as the behavior is good the children can look for open approval and acknowledgment.

When they start to act badly, though, the mother may choose to hide her face and draw the blinds. The child is left with the impression no one is there and nobody cares anymore but the concerned parent stands ever close still peering between the cracks in the lattice or the shades. The child doesn't see but we are told that loving supervision continues.

Maybe now we can understand that tzitzis are meant to remind us that although behind "the wall" we cannot gaze through the narrow cracks we are being peered at lovingly and cared for continuously, and perhaps that's how, with the assistance of these few bare threads we are supposed to link, I think.

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