

WHY WE ARE

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM said to Moshe saying: "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them that they shall make for themselves Tzitzis on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations. And they shall place upon the Tzitzis of each corner a thread of (techeles) blue wool. It shall constitute Tzitzis for you that you may see it and remember all the Commandments of HASHEM and perform them; and not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray. So you may remember and perform all My Commandments, and be holy to your G-d. I am HASHEM your G-d, who has removed you from the Land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am HASHEM. (Bamidbar 14:37-40)

Those Tzitzis- threads on that four cornered poncho like garment are sure packed with loads of meaning, since the stated purpose is that they are intended to remind us of all the Mitzvos of HASHEM. It is coded in a symbolic language, though. How do we begin to unravel the idiom of those holy strings?

With a particular focus on the single thread of blue on each corner Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch ztl refers to this "eighth thread" as "representing the power of Judaism as it is dipped into "Techeles" (a certain sky blue dye). He claims that the source of its name "Techeles" is etymologically related to the word "cala" meaning end.. Rav Hirsch says that the blue reminds us of the limits of human ken to comprehend the true depth of the supernatural realm. The word "Techeles" might also be subtly alerting us to the ultimate end, the "tachlis" -the goal of our existence. How so?

Years ago when I was visiting Jewish prisoners on a regular basis, we had a custom, a sort of orientation for the newcomers. It was also an entertaining and strong review for the others guys.. We would ask the unfortunate uninitiated the very same question that The Almighty asked of Adam, the first man when he made his first grave misstep.

"Man, where are you?!" Where do you now live?" Inevitably the poor guy would have to admit to himself the sad reality, "Green Haven Maximum Security Prison". I would always echo back emphatically, "No, man, where do you live?" A little lost, now and searching for a more expansive context the next guess might be, "New York State?" A resounding "No man, where do you live" would follow. The circumference would then widen and answers like, "America" or "good ship mother earth" would push the conversation to what seemed like its logical limits until the answer was revealed.

"No! If you want, you to acknowledge it, you live in front of HASHEM, as King David says, "I place HASHEM before me always". The Baal Shem Tov said that where a person's thoughts are, there is where they are entirely. If you want to be here in prison then here you are! However if you want to be in front of HASHEM always, then, although your body is anchored here, like a foot in a shoe, your mind and spirit can soar beyond prison walls.

I remember vividly being stuck at Newark Liberty Airport in a snow storm for 24 hours of chaos as flight after flight was canceled and postponed. An oriental gentleman ranting loudly and with great frustration was overheard on his cell phone shouting, "I don't know where I am! I don't know who I am! I don't know why I am?"

Tzitzis, especially the 8th thread representing eternity, and being blue stirs within us, as the Talmud suggests, a reminder of the blue sky which then triggers thoughts of the throne of ultimate judgment installing within a deep awe.

Now that the blue thread is lacking from our Tzitzis, all we have is a giant blue sky. We might then imagine it is the big blue of the eye of G-d gazing at us, reminding us of where we are, who we are, and **why we are!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).