

# GENTLE ENCOURAGEMENT

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

"G-d said to Moshe 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.'"

(Bamidbar/Numbers 15:37-38) Two features distinguish the mitzvah of tzitzis from most of the mitzvos (Divine commandments) in the Torah. Most mitzvos mandate that we unconditionally perform an act - eat matza at the Seder, wave a lulav on Succos, listen to the shofar blasts on Rosh Hashana - or unconditionally refrain from certain acts - do not eat on Yom Kippur, do not speak slanderously of others, do not steal. This contrasts the tzitzis strings that are only put on the corners of a four (or more) cornered garment. No corners, no tzitzis. With today's wardrobe of shirts and slacks we have no Torah obligation of tzitzis (although there is a Rabbinic imperative to wear a four cornered garment so that we can accept upon ourselves the Torah's mandate). Second, when G-d gave Moshe most of the mitzvos, the Torah relates, "G-d spoke to Moshe saying". Speaking is firmer and more direct than saying.

Why is this mitzvah only said, not spoken? And why is the Torah commandment conditional? Especially considering the rationale the Torah itself gives for the mitzvah of tzitzis: "That you may see it and remember all the commandments of G-d and perform them; and not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray. So that you may remember and perform all My commandments and be holy to your G-d." (15:39-40) This is not just "another" mitzvah; this is the key to them all. Proper fulfillment of tzitzis helps develop the mindset such that all the other mitzvos fall into place. How can THIS mitzvah not be mandatory?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through much of the last century) explains that in the choice to fulfill this mitzvah rests the "magic" of the mitzvah. The power of this mitzvah to remind us and encourage us to do the other mitzvos is borne in the G-d consciousness, the fostering of love toward and a loving relationship with G-d, which emanates from tzitzis. Only the gentle encouragement of "saying" will lead to choice, which leads to love, which leads to contemplation, which leads to the understanding that more mitzvah opportunities will further fortify the relationship, thus reminding and encouraging us to remain focused on the relationship, not to become distracted by the illusory fulfillment of temporal pleasures.

In these weeks between Pesach and Rosh Hashana Jews traditionally study one chapter of Pirkei

Avos/The Ethics of our Fathers per week. Each chapter ends: Rabbi Chanina ben Akashia says, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, wished to confer merit upon Israel; therefore he gave them Torah and mitzvos in abundance..." G-d wants us to build the relationship. That is why He gave us so many mitzvah opportunities; that is why He supports us with gentle encouragement.

Have a good Shabbos!

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