

ALL WOUND UP IN HOLINESS

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

So that you will remember and perform all My mitzvos, and be holy to your G-d.

Meshech Chochmah: We know and appreciate that the universe that Hashem created testifies to His greatness and wisdom, as well as to His own existence which is eternal, and precedes all time. We also understand that the world that we immediately inhabit is dynamic and changing. It does not, from our point of view, bear the same stamp of His absoluteness. Because He gave Man *bechirah*, the ability to choose between good and evil, Man's choices constantly move the world further away or closer to the goal of Creation: arriving at a completed and fulfilled state. In other words, Man was tasked with the job of bringing the world to its intended completion. (Commenting on the *pasuk*,^[2] "These are the products of heaven and earth when they were created/ *be-hibaram*," Chazal highlight the similarity of the last word to *be-Avraham*. They don't mean that the world was created for or because of our forefather. Rather, they use Avraham Avinu as representative of the kind of person we need to be – dedicating ourselves as he did to elevating everything around him, bringing everything closer to its lofty purpose.)

When we examine the laws of nature, we find much of Hashem's wisdom – but we do not always find a mirror of His perfection, at least not from a human perspective. To the contrary, we find randomness and apparent arbitrariness. Should we conclude that these laws will be subverted in the perfect worldly existence to come? That they will be replaced by kinder, gentler laws of nature?

Most definitely not! Part of the perfection of our world – despite allowance for human free-will, are laws of nature that themselves are fluid and dynamic. Specifically, when Man acts properly, Nature becomes less arbitrary, and more skewed in favor of those who fulfill His Will. In a more perfected existence, the present laws of nature are not replaced, but operate more responsively to Man's needs – which then coincide with His plan and desires. These laws become tools of Divine Providence, which moves from general oversight of Creation to the supervision of the needs of individuals as individuals. Rather than serving as counter-examples to Hashem's control of the world, they become the modalities through which He maintains a world that has grown closer to His goals.

The days of Shimon ben Shetach exhibited this relationship between Nature and Hashem's Will. The *gemara*^[3] relates that the rain always fell on evenings in which people were indoors, and did not inconvenience human travelers. This rain nurtured crops bountiful in quantity and quality. No laws of nature were shunted to the side to accomplish this. Rather, the traditional laws were squeezed to

produce results that reflected Divine pleasure in the actions of Man.

Another example is the copious blessing bestowed upon Oveid ha-Adomi^[4] during the time that he provided sanctuary to the Aron. There was nothing “miraculous” in the sense of overriding the laws of nature. Rather, those laws were used to channel blessing to the right recipients.

This is also what Chazal^[5] meant when they explained the meaning of one of Hashem's Names as the One who “said *dai* / enough to his world. We should not understand that as limiting His creative powers in the world. Rather, they mean that He invested enough preparation and wisdom within Creation for it to support His guiding of it towards its eventual perfection and completion – all without the need for miraculous “overrides” of natural laws and forces.

Summing up so far, neither Man's ability to choose (often resulting in moving the world more distant from Hashem than close to him), nor the apparent “blindness” of Nature to matters of moral right and wrong act to thwart the eventual perfection of this world. To the contrary. And this brings us, at long last, to *tzitzis*.

“He covers Himself with light like a garment.”^[6] A midrash^[7] relates this to the process of Creation. Hashem wraps Himself in some light, which He then causes to shine from one end of the world to the other. With this, Chazal use inadequate human words and images to help us understand a bit of the incomprehensible – the first stages of Creation, in which some emanation from Hashem spreads out to create the backdrop of all existence. The image is powerful. It is appropriate, however, to speak of light as shining forth. Garments, though, don't do that. How does light become a garment?

The Torah wishes for us to understand that this supernal light acted indeed like a garment, whose function is to separate and divide what it covers from the gaze of the external observer. Any unmediated “light” of Hashem would both overwhelm us in its brilliance, as well as strip us of any room to exercise *bechirah*. Its clarity would leave us no room to make the wrong choices. Even though in fact nothing separates and divides us from Hashem Who animates and empowers everything without exception, experientially the “light” was designed to cover and obscure His presence and nature from us. The light was modified to act like a garment that hides what is beneath.

Just as the Divine light paradoxically became an obscuring garment during the process of Creation, Creation itself remains an ongoing covering garment, shielding the Creator behind it, leaving Him hidden enough that we can find room to sin. This creation-as-garment is the backdrop of the drama of *tzitzis*. Through this mitzvah, HKBH reminds us that the garment of Creation remains incomplete. It calls to Man to complete it.

The mitzvah of *tzitzis* tells us, quite literally, that there are loose ends to Creation. The strings that flow freely from the corners represent the unfinished business of existence, the parts of the garment

that still have not been woven firmly into the rest of the fabric.

These strings, however, do not simply jut out from the woven part of the garment. They sprout from the section of knots and windings, in which the loose tendrils begin to come together in a larger form, but always surrounded by a single strand of *techeles*. That strand, representing the Honor of Hashem, reminds us that even in the work that Man does, he is surrounded and supported by the assistance of Heaven. Even in the arena of Man's freely-willed activity, in reality it is He Who is the Force responsible for all activity.

Moreover, the work of Man is begun for him by HKBH, Who reads his heart, and helps him along the path he chooses for himself. The *anaf*, the section of windings, also reminds Man that he should not follow his eyes and heart, but must rein in his passions and desires, and ensure that at all times he binds and ties himself to Hashem.

1. Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bamidbar 15:40 .
2. Bereishis 2:4 .
3. Taanis 23A .
4. 2 Shmuel 6:11 .
5. Chagigah 12A .
6. Tehillim 104:2 .
7. Bereishis Rabbah .