



“Be holy to your G-d” The Segulah of Sanctifying One’s Eyes

In this week’s parsha, parshas Shelach, we will focus on an intriguing aspect of the mitzvah of Tzitzis. Gazing upon the fringes of the Tzitzis is known to be a segulah; it portends remembering the mitzvos and fulfilling them. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Bamidbar 15, 37):

“ויאמר ה' אל משה לאמר, דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם ועשו להם ציצית על כנפי בגדיהם לדורותם, ונתנו על ציצית הכנף פתיל תכלת, והיה לכם לציצית, וראיתם אותו וזכרתם את כל מצוות ה' ועשיתם אותם, ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זונים אחריהם, למען תזכרו ועשיתם את כל מצוותי והייתם קדושים לאלקיכם.”

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell 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 ‘techeiles.’ It shall constitute Tzitzis for you, and you shall see it and you shall remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and perform them; and you shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray. So that you may remember and perform all My mitzvos and be holy to your G-d.”

Here the Torah informs us that looking at the Tzitzis portends observing and fulfilling all of the mitzvos: “And you shall see it and you shall

remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and perform them.” But why does the Torah find it necessary to repeat this fact in the following passuk: “So that you may remember and perform all My mitzvos and be holy to your G-d”?

Additionally, we will explore the relationship between the mitzvah of Tzitzis and safeguarding one’s eyesight: “And you shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray.” Here, Rashi comments: **The heart and the eyes are the spies of the body, procuring aveiros for it. The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body commits the aveirah.** The source for this notion is found in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachos 1, 5): “ליבא ועינא תריין סרסורין דחטאה, דכתיב תנה, בני לבך לי ועיניך דרכי תצרנה, אמר הקב”ה אי יהבת לי לבך ועיניך אנא ידע דאת לי.” The heart and the eyes are the two intermediaries of sin, as it is written (Mishlei 23, 26): “My child, give Me your heart and let your eyes guard My ways.” HKB”H says, “If you give Me your heart and your eyes, I know that you are Mine.”

This statement is brought down by the Tur (O.C. 1). He says that you should close or cover your eyes to avoid seeing negative, evil things, since that is the precursor of sin; the eye sees, the heart covets, then the bodily limbs perform the sinful act. We will endeavor to explain why

HKB“H chose to issue this warning specifically in relation to the mitzvah of Tzitzis.

“Enlighten our eyes with Your Torah” Addresses What the Eye Sees “And let our hearts cling to Your mitzvos” Addresses What the Heart Covets

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a precious teaching from the esteemed Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy“a, in Zera Kodesh (Bereishis). He explains the connection between the concluding words of the Torah and its opening words. Just as the eyes and heart are the agents of the yetzer hara promoting sin; similarly, the eyes and the heart are also agents of kedushah promoting mitzvos. Hence, the Torah concludes with the words: **“אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל”—that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael.** Moshe was encouraging Yisrael to sanctify their eyes. Now, this passuk ends with the letter **“lamed,”** and the Torah begins again with the letter **“beis”** of **“בראשית”**; together, they form the word **ל”ב** meaning heart. Thus, he was also teaching Yisrael that the heart should be the agent of mitzvah. Now, since Moshe Rabeinu, a“h, encompassed all the neshamos of Yisrael, he was able to influence the hearts and eyes of Yisrael with his kedushah to function as the intermediaries of mitzvah and not, chas v’shalom, aveirah.

Now, as a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to embellish this thought. Where do we find the concept of **“the eye sees, and the heart covets”** with regards to matters of kedushah? In the Berachos of Krias Shema of Shacharis, the Members of the Great Assembly instituted the formula: **“והאר עינינו בתורתך ודבק לבנו במצוותיך—enlighten our eyes with Your Torah, and let our hearts cling to Your mitzvos.** This is precisely what we are praying for. We are praying to Hashem that **“the eye that sees and the heart that covets”** serve as agents of kedushah.

Let us elaborate. The term sight is often used in relation to the intellect and comprehension. For instance, in the Mishnah (Avos 2, 9), Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai says to his pupils: **רואה אני את דברי אלעזר בן ערך.** Translated literally, this means **“I see the words of Elazar ben Arach.”** But what he is really saying is that intellectually, the opinion of Elazar ben Arach is superior and more appealing.

Hence, when a person exerts himself in the study of Torah, he is assured that he will begin to comprehend it with his mind’s eye, in keeping with the teaching (Megillah 6b): **“אם יאמר לך אדם יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן, לא יגעתי ומצאתי אל תאמן, יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן, לא יגעתי ומצאתי אל תאמן”—if someone tells you, “I labored in my Torah-study but did not succeed,” do not believe him. “I have not labored, yet I have succeeded,” do not believe him. “I have labored, and I have succeeded,” you may believe him.** Thus, by immersing oneself in Torah-study, the aforementioned dictum is fulfilled in relation to kedushah: **“העין רואה והלב חומד וכלי המעשה גומרים”**.

A Man’s Heart Is Called “לב” because There Are ל”ב Paths of Chochmah from the Brain to the Heart

With immense pleasure, we will now expand on the concept of **“the eye sees, and the heart covets.”** They expounded in the Gemara (Yoma 72b): **“מאי דכתיב למה זה מוחיר ביד כסיל לקנות חכמה ולב אין, אוי להם לשונאיהן של תלמידי חכמים שעוסקין בתורה ואין בהן יראת שמים.”** **What is the meaning of that which is written (Mishlei 17, 16): “Why is there money in the hand of a fool to purchase wisdom, though he lacks an understanding heart?”** **Woe unto the enemies of Torah scholars, who occupy themselves with Torah, yet lack “yiras shamayim”** (fear of Heaven). Shlomo HaMelech is teaching us that the goal of acquiring the chochmah of the Torah is for the brain to exert its influence on the heart.

In Tzidkas HaTzaddik (152), Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen interprets this based on the following Mishnah (Avos 3, 17): **”אם אין יראה אין חכמה, אם אין חכמה אין יראה—if yirah is lacking, there is no wisdom; if wisdom is lacking, there is no yirah.** Here is a translation of his sacred insight:

Regarding this topic, they said (Avos 3, 17): “If yirah is lacking, there is no wisdom; if wisdom is lacking, there is no yirah.” Wisdom (“chochmah”) is perceiving the Almighty; “yirah” is the fear of sin. One without the other is not enough. “Yirah” is referred to as a storehouse and receptacle; the heart is emptied of all sorts of desires and cravings; as a result, it is a receptacle available to receive words of Torah. As they of blessed memory said (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 10, 21): “Something foolish went out; words of Torah entered. Words of Torah went out; foolishness entered.” For when the heart is devoid of Torah, inevitably, it is available to receive all sorts of desires; because it is impossible for it to remain completely empty.

We will now add an amazing insight from the divine kabbalist, the Ramak, zy”a, in Pardes Rimonim. He writes that a man’s heart is called **”לב”**, because it receives the **(32) Paths of Chochmah** from the heavenly intellect. This coincides with what is taught in the Gemara (Berachos 61a): **”לב מבין”—the heart considers.** Rashi comments: **From where do we know that the heart considers? For it states (Yeshayah 6, 10): “And his heart will consider.”** In other words, the heart is capable of receiving the **”לב” Paths of Chochmah.**

In keeping with this discussion, this means that when a person studies the chochmah of the Torah, he attains with his mind’s eye the wisdom of the Torah which is comprised of 32 Paths of Chochmah. More importantly, it is not sufficient for that chochmah to remain in the intellect in the

brain. Instead, it must illuminate the heart with its **”לב”** paths. Once again, this is why the Hebrew term for the heart is **”לב”**, because it possesses the capacity to receive the **32 Paths of Chochmah** descending from the brain to the heart.

We can now appreciate to a greater extent, the insight of the Zera Kodesh concerning the connection between the end of the Torah and its beginning. Moshe Rabeinu conveyed to all of Yisrael the importance of sanctifying and purifying their eyes and hearts to be agents of mitzvah and not, chas v’shalom, agents of aveirah. For, the purpose of Torah-study is to acquire an **“eye that sees”** exclusively for the sake of kedushah—to perceive with one’s intellect—one’s mind’s eye—the 32 Paths of Chochmah encompassed by the Torah. Then, one can apply that chochmah to influence the **“heart that covets”** to accept from the brain those **32 Paths of Chochmah.** Then, it can exert its influence on the bodily limbs to complete the task—to actually perform the mitzvos.

This, indeed, is taught in the Gemara (ibid. 17a): **”מרגלא בפומיה דרבא, תכלית חכמה תשובה ומעשים טובים, שלא יהא אדם קורא ושונה ובוטע באביו ובאמו וברבו ובמי שהוא גדול ממנו בחכמה ובמנין, שנאמר ראשית חכמה יראת ה’ שכל טוב לכל עושיהם, ללומדיהם לא נאמר אלא לעושיהם.”** **The following was a familiar lesson of Rava’s: The purpose of Torah wisdom is to lead to repentance and good deeds, so that a person does not read and learn and, yet kick at his father, his mother, or his teacher, or at anyone greater than him in wisdom and numbers. For it states (Tehillim 111, 10): “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d, good understanding to all their practitioners.” It does not say to “their learners” but to “their practitioners.”** In keeping with our current discussion, this means that it is not **“the purpose of wisdom”** to remain in the intellect in the brain. On the contrary, its purpose is to supply **“good understanding to all their practitioners.”** Chochmah is meant to descend

from the brain to the heart to the bodily limbs of action to perform the mitzvos of Hashem.

Gazing upon the 32 Strands of the Tzitzis

Following this sublime path, we will now explain the wonderful segulah associated exclusively with the mitzvah of Tzitzis: **“And you shall see it and you shall remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and perform them.”** Rashi notes that the gematria of **ציצית** is **600**; add the **8** strings and the **5** knots; the sum is **613 (taryag)**. As we know, there are **32** strands on the garment of Tzitzis. Utilizing these numbers, we can now explain the segulah associated with gazing at the Tzitzis. Gazing at the Tzitzis that symbolically represent the taryag mitzvos, is using the **“eye that sees”** from the perspective of kedushah to consider all the mitzvos of the Torah. Thus, with this in mind, one can influence the **“heart that covets”** in a positive manner. This is alluded to by the **ל”ב** strings of the Tzitzis. As a result, the bodily limbs will complete the task of actually performing Hashem’s mitzvos.

This explains magnificently the exposition in the Gemara (Menachos 43b): **“וראיתם אותו וזכרתם ועשיתם, וראיה מביאה לידי זכירה, זכירה מביאה לידי עשייה—“and you will see it, and you will remember,” “and you will perform”;** seeing leads to remembering; remembering leads to performing. Rashi comments: **Seeing the Tzitzis leads to remembering the mitzvos.** Let us elaborate. The Torah is alluding to the three stages under discussion. Firstly: **“You will see it”** means looking at the Tzitzis, the stage of the **“eye that sees.”** Secondly: **“You will remember all the mitzvos of Hashem.”** As we learned from the Gemara: **Seeing leads to remembering.** This refers to the remembering of the heart, the stage of the **“heart that covets.”** Thirdly: **“You will do them.”** This is the desired end result—for the limbs of action to complete the process by performing the mitzvos.

This enlightens us as to the reason the Torah admonishes us immediately afterwards: **“And you shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray.”** Here Rashi explained: **The heart and the eyes are the spies of the body, procuring aveiros for it. The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body commits the aveirah.** Indeed, gazing upon the fringes of the Tzitzis is a fantastic segulah. It portends that the sequence of **“עין”** **“רואה והלב חומד וכלי המעשה גומרים”** will apply to matters of kedushah. Of course, this will not happen if a person neglects to shield his eyes from gazing upon prohibited, improper things. For, in that case, we have learned from Rashi that: **The eye sees, the heart covets, and the bodily limbs commit the aveiros.**

“למען תזכרו ועשיתם את כל מצוותי”

A Heavenly Guarantee that One Will Not Go Astray on Account of Looking at Inappropriate Things

Continuing on this sacred pilgrimage, we will now analyze the flow of the pesukim in the parsha of Tzitzis. Initially, it says: **כל וראיתם אותו וזכרתם את כל מצוות ה' ועשיתם אותם**. Then, the text digresses, so to speak, to admonish us: **ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זונים אחריהם**. It then repeats what was said initially: **למען תזכרו ועשיתם את כל מצוותי והייתם קדושים לאלקיכם**. Why?

To explain this, we will refer to what the great Rabbi of Sanz, zy”a, wrote in Divrei Chaim (Bechukosai) regarding the passuk (Vayikra 26, 3): **“אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם”**. He maintains that man’s material, physical being tends to follow the yetzer hara. Hence, HKB”H gave us the holy Torah. Through the mitzvos of the Torah, HKB”H safeguards us from the material, physical tendencies that lead to earthly desire. Along these lines, our blessed Rabbis (B.R. 67, 3) taught that man’s sight and hearing are not always under his control. Occasionally, he can be overcome by unwanted desires.

However, HKB”H assured us that if we subjugate the limbs under our control to Him, He will protect us and elevate us; and He will give us control of the limbs that based on human nature are not under our control, as mentioned by our blessed sages in the aforementioned Midrash. This is the underlying meaning of the passuk: “וּנְתַתִּי גַשְׁמִיכֶם בְּעֵתָם”. We will have control of our corporeal (“gashmi”) selves at the necessary times—i.e., not to suddenly see or hear negative, inappropriate things but only that which is necessary and appropriate at that moment and time—that which is necessary for the sake of a mitzvah.

The Divine Encounter between Rabeinu Tam and His Brother the Rashbam

It is now fitting to reinforce this noble idea by presenting a fascinating story presented by one of the Rishonim in the gloss of the Mordechai (Eiruvin; end of first chapter; 528). It is told that HKB”H miraculously arranged an encounter between two of the great Tosafists—the two holy brothers, Rabeinu Yaakov known as Rabeinu Tam and Rabeinu Shmuel known as the Rashbam. Both were sons of Rabbi Meir, Rashi’s son-in-law, and had the privilege of learning Torah with their grandfather, Rashi. Here is the story:

The Rashbam, who typically cast his gaze downward, intended to board a carriage; he did not notice that it was being pulled by a horse and a mule. Miraculously, his brother, Rabeinu Tam, appeared there. He told his brother, the Rashbam, not to be so righteous. If you would merely look up, you will see that a horse and a mule are standing before you. We learn in the Tosefta, chapter four of Maseches Kilayim, that it is prohibited to harness a horse to a mule and a mule to a donkey. Therefore, he refrained and did not board the carriage.

Let us elaborate. The passuk states explicitly (Devarim 22, 10): “לֹא תַחְרוֹשׁ בְּשׂוֹר וּבַחֲמֹר יַחְדָּיו”—**do not plow using an ox and a donkey together.** Chazal deduced from here that it is prohibited to unite two animals of different species—not just for plowing but for any form of labor, such as pulling a carriage. This is how the halachah is stated in the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 297, 10):

It is prohibited to perform work with two species, such as plowing, and pulling a carriage and the like—whether one is impure and the other is pure, whether both are impure or whether both are pure. Elsewhere, we find the following ruling (ibid. 12): **A wagon that is drawn by animals of different species, it is prohibited to ride in it, even if he is not driving; because his riding in it is the reason that they are pulling the wagon. Similarly, it is prohibited for one to ride in the wagon and one to drive.**

In this story, both the horse and mule are two species of impure animals included in the prohibition of: **“Do not plow using an ox and a donkey together.”** Therefore, it was prohibited for the Rashbam to ride in that carriage drawn by a horse and a mule together. As the halachah states, even though he only intended to ride in the carriage; nevertheless, his riding in the carriage was the reason the animals needed to pull it. Miraculously, his brother, Rabeinu Tam, happened to be there, prevented him from getting into the carriage, and saved him from transgressing this prohibition.

Now, the Rashbam was truly in a predicament. He needed to board the carriage, because he was travelling to a particular destination. Due to his humble nature, he did not look up and failed to notice that the carriage was being drawn by a horse and a mule. So, he was prohibited from riding in that carriage. Nevertheless, we have an accepted principle (Shmuel I 2, 9): “רַגְלֵי חֲסִידָיו יִשְׁמֹר”—**He**

guards the steps of His devout ones. Therefore, HKB”H arranged for the Rashbam’s brother, Rabeinu Tam, to appear miraculously and prevent him from boarding the carriage and transgressing the prohibition of kilayim. This incident clearly supports the sacred teaching of the Divrei Chaim. It illustrates that if a person does everything within his power to safeguard the sanctity of his eyes, he is protected from above.

We can now suggest the following interpretation of the passuk: **”וראיתם אותו וזכרתם את כל מצוות ה’ ועשיתם אותם.”** Gazing upon the fringes of the Tzitzis exemplifies the concept of **”the eye sees, the**

heart covets, and the limbs of action complete the deed,” i.e., the performance of mitzvos. However, then the Torah warns us: **”ולא תתורו אחרי”** **”לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זונים אחריהם”**—do not go astray on account of looking at things and desiring things that you should not, things that are related to tumah. Hence, the Torah goes on to reassure us: **”למען תזכרו ועשיתם את כל מצוותי והייתם קדושים לאלקיכם”**. If a person is careful to protect his eyes, he will be entitled to special protection from the heavens preventing him from failing. This is evident from the story of the Rashbam. Because he took great care to maintain the kedushah of his eyes, HKB”H saved him from committing an aveirah.



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