

Mishpatim 5774

Techelet: Raising Our Sites to the Higher Realms

Our parasha relates (Shemot 24,10):

וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת-אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְתַחַת-רַגְלָיו כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם
וְכַדְמָד כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם

And they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was like a sapir (the gemstone lapis lazuli) as bright blue as the sky

And the Yerushalmi (Berachot chapter 1) quotes R. Meir who said regarding the blue (techelet) of the tzitzit:

וְצִיצִית כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם [וְצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם] וְצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם
וְצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם וְצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם וְצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם
כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם וְצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם וְצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם כְּצֶבֶד שָׁמַיִם

The (color of) techelet is as the ocean, and the ocean is as the green grass, and the grass is as the sky, and the sky is like the color of the holy throne, and the holy throne is like the gemstone (lapis lazuli) as it says (Yechezkel 10,1) 'I looked and I saw above the raki'a (emptiness of space) the likeness of a throne of sapir that was over the heads of the cherubim

What are the rabbis teaching us with the idea that tzitzit initiate a chain reaction of sight and thought leading up to the Holy Throne and the cherubim?

Tzitzit are plain woolen fringes hanging at the bottom of a four-cornered garment, but they guide us through five ascending stages – ocean, grass, sky, Holy Throne and cherubim?

The function of tzitzit is to raise man's eyes and perspective from the routine and mundane to perceive the exalted spiritual

essence of the Creator. In Ivrit, the simpleton is called “rosh katan” (a small head) and the intelligent, enterprising person is called “rosh gadol”.

Hashem gave the Torah to those who are called rosh gadol, and He expects His chosen nation to strive to be rosh gadol.

As the Jewish People Go, So Goes the Holy Torah

A kabalistic concept states that when the Jewish people are in galut (exile), the Shechina (holy spirit of Hashem) also is in galut. I do not understand this concept, but it obviously refers to a time when the Jewish nation in galut is in an inferior, discredited, disparaged and diminished state in relation to what we were in Eretz Yisrael. One need not be an astute student of history to know that this was our fate during the 2000 years of our galut experience, until we the Jewish people were able to raise up our eyes in pride with the establishment of Medinat Yisrael after the horrific Shoah.

As the Jewish people go, so goes the holy Torah. When the Jews are honored and venerated, so is the holy Torah. When we are degraded, then our Torah and its way of life are disparaged and mocked.

Solving Modern Complex Halachic Issues

The Talmud is divided into six sections: Zera'im (agricultural laws), Mo'ed (holidays), Nashim (personal status – marriage, divorce etc.), Nezi'kim (torts and financial matters), Kodshim (the Temple service) and Taharot (purity and impurity).

During the 2000 years of galut, the realities of our existence impelled the talmidei chachamim (scholars) of Am Yisrael to diminish themselves into a status less than “rosh gadol”. Three of the six sections of the Talmud – Moed, Nashim and Nezi'kim – were studied, analyzed and contemplated, but the remaining three – Zera'im, Kodshim and Taharot – were relegated to the sole domain of individual gedolim. With the

establishment of the Medina and the new realities of our national renaissance, our talmidei chachamim have rescued the Shechina from its sorry state in the imprisoned and strangling galut. Here in Eretz Yisrael, the Talmud is studied in its entirety, bringing the three neglected sections back to life. Our religious farmers – and there are very many – till the soil, plant and harvest and set aside teruma and ma'asrot, according to the Halachot of the section of Zera'im. There is a renaissance in our yeshivot regarding the study of Kodshim with its accompanying initiatives – the increased interest in the Temple Mount and the future Bet Hamikdash – and the laws of tuma and tahara are studied in a much wider timeframe.

Our rabbis have to deal with issues which were never brought to the table in any beit din or yeshiva in galut:

- How to manage a modern army according to Halacha: aircraft, submarines, electronic warfare, ad infinitum.
- The vast world of medicine, including human cloning and embryonic stem-cell research.
- Shemita and the need to keep our farmers solvent during the year of rest from work. The prohibition against exporting sanctified Shemita produce.
- The great problem of conversion.
- Prevention of prohibited marriages.
- The halachic status of laws passed by the Knesset.
- Implications of the presence of the majority of halachic Jews now in the land.
- Treatment of minorities including religions defined as avoda zara.
- Drafting of yeshiva students for military service in this time of milchemet mitzva.
- Incorporation of Halacha into the Israeli legal system.
- The prohibition against giving hallowed lands to gentiles.

Although the list is endless, our poskim are, nevertheless, solving the problems one by one.

The Medina has brought about techiyat hamaitim (resurrection, revival), of the formerly neglected other half of our Talmud.

We are enjoying our return to being “rosh gadol”.

The Techelet is Missing

Agudas Yisrael of America is sponsoring three days of Torah learning this week at the Ramada Hotel in Yerushalayim. I attended and noticed that there were more than 200 participants from the US, who had given up a lot to come here to breathe in the holy atmosphere of Yerushalayim. Kol Hakavod.

What surprised and disappointed me, however, was that the sugya (subject) of the sessions (as determined by the organizers) was “intent when reciting a beracha and the precedence of various berachot”.

I asked myself, without belittling in any way, God forbid, the importance of learning the details of berachot – is this the burning halachic issue which the Jewish nation must deal with today? Isn't the above list of topics gripping the Jewish State more important? And what about the octopus of anti-Semitism whose strangling tentacles are growing all over the world, or the unstoppable wave of intermarriage which has reached over 70% in the United States?

As I was wrestling with this question, my problem was suddenly resolved. There was no one in the large ballroom of the hotel with techelet on his tzitizit. It was clear that these well-meaning Jews of the galut have no one and no object to raise their sights to the higher realms of our miraculous return to Hashem's Holy Land.

You can take the Jew out of the galut, but it is often impossible to take the galut out of the Jew.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5774/2013 Nachman Kahana