

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Shlach

In the end of this week's Parsha, the Torah tells us the mitzvah to attach *tzitzit* (fringes) to our four-cornered garments. Referred to in the Talmud as "Parshat Tzitzit," Numbers 15:37-41 creeps into the prayer book as the third paragraph of *Shema*. In order to fulfill the mitzvah of reciting the *Shema*, Maimonides rules one must say this Parsha.

In order to understand the role of *Parshat Tzitzit* within the *Shema*, we need to analyze both the content of the paragraph and how it connects to the rest of the *Shema*. In the first two paragraphs of *Shema*, we find verses instructing us to say these words "when you lie down and when you get up." The Rabbis interpret these verses to mean we must say these paragraphs twice daily, once in the morning and again in the evening. But why must we read *Parshat Tzitzit* at all, since we do not find any reference in the paragraph itself implying any need to say it even once daily? Also, why would they make *Parshat Tzitzit* the last paragraph of *Shema*, when the Torah actually records it first in Numbers Chapter 15, unlike the first two parts of *Shema* which appear in Deuteronomy 6 and 11 respectively?

In figuring out why the Rabbis made *Parshat Tzitzit* part of *Kriat Shema*, the Talmud (*Berachot 12b*) explains since the paragraph has six key components, it warrants inclusion in the *Shema*. Those six elements are to attach *tzitzit* to one's garments, to remember G-d redeemed us from Egypt, to remember all of the mitzvot, not to deny G-d, not to think about immoral activity, and not to think about idolatry. Clearly, *Parshat Tzitzit* contains a lot more than the instruction to wear *tzitzit* on a four-cornered garment. Presumably, the Talmud means that since these six commands are so important, the rabbis wanted every Jew to remind himself of them every day by saying *Parshat Tzitzit* as part of *Shema*. However, this does not explain the deeper connection between *Parshat Tzitzit* and the rest of *Shema*.

Based on *Berachot 13a*, Maimonides connects the third paragraph of *Shema* and the first two paragraphs. He says (Laws of Reading Shema 1:2) first we read the paragraph "*Shema Yisrael*" because it commands us about the oneness of G-d, love of G-d, and Torah study which is "the great fundamental practice upon which everything relies." Then we read the second paragraph which commands about all other mitzvot, as it says "It will be if you will surely listen to all of My commandments." Finally, *Parshat Tzitzit* instructs us to remember all of the *mitzvot*, as it says "You will see them and remember all of My mitzvot."



JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

continued ...

In other words, the three Torah portions of the *Shema* are not disjointed pieces mixed together in the prayer book, but rather they are specifically ordered so each section builds on the previous one. The first paragraph starts with the fundamentals of Judaism, the tenets from which everything derives, which are the oneness of G-d, the mitzvah to love Him, and the centrality of studying Torah. The next paragraph talks about man's accountability for all *mitzvot*, describing the rewards for keeping them and the punishments for violating them. The final paragraph, *Parshat Tzitzit*, tells us about a particular mitzvah which ideally brings one to remember all of the *mitzvot*.

In the same vein, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (*Berachot 14b*) points out another progression that exists within the three paragraphs of *Shema*. The first paragraph talks about studying Torah, teaching Torah, and performing *mitzvot*. The second paragraph talks about teaching Torah and performing *mitzvot*, but does not directly talk about studying Torah like the first paragraph instructed "and you should speak of them." The third paragraph speaks about neither studying nor teaching, but rather focuses only on the performance of *mitzvot*. According to R' Shimon's explanation, the Rabbis put the first two paragraphs before the third paragraph because studying and teaching are the prerequisites needed before one can know what to do.

The blessing we say before reading *Shema* in the morning sums up this progression. We beg of G-d to, "instill in our hearts to understand and clarify, to listen, learn, teach, safeguard, perform, and fulfill all of the words of Your Torah's teaching with love." First we ask for our hearts to be open so they can understand the Torah, then we ask to be able to teach it, and finally we ask for the ability to fulfill all of the teachings of the Torah. This encapsulates the messages of the three paragraphs of *Shema* which end with *Parshat Tzitzit*.

Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Yosef Saltzman

3626 El Camino Real
(650) 493-5764



Palo Alto, CA 94306
www.jsn.info