

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



LOOK AT THEM

Sh'lach

My relationship to sight has changed radically over the past months. I had cataract surgeries last December and January, and I can see again, B"H. It's amazing that there are legible words on street signs. I don't know how I was allowed to drive the last few years. Thank God, I survived my road adventures with no accidents. So, it's with renewed interest that I read the instruction to look at our TZITZIT in this week's Torah reading in Eretz Yisrael. So, I'm looking at these fringes, what exactly am I supposed to see?

A quick word about the customs of holding the TZITZIT during SH'MA. I'm a minimalist. I only hold the front two TZITZIT, as suggested by the Vilna Gaon. This keeps me surrounded by TZITZIT, front and back. I also don't kiss them. I find this interferes with the punctuation in my recitation. I hold them over my heart, and quickly glance at them when reciting the word TZITZIT.

Now, back to the question at hand: What I am supposed to see?

Rashi famously suggests: the numerical value of TZITZIT is six hundred, then add the eight (folded over) strings plus five knot and you get 613. Ding! Ding! Ding! That's the magic number of Mitzvot in the Torah. The Talmud submits for your consideration: Seeing leads to remembering; remembering leads to doing (Menachot 43b).

The mystics have the most concrete answers to this question. The Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh (1696-1743) mentions a few suggestions:

God commanded that the threads be white to symbolize God's attributes of mercy and goodness, traditionally symbolized by the color white. The color blue symbolizes God's mastery in the Celestial Regions, seeing the color blue is similar to the color of the sky. The number of threads, that is 8 or 4 folded over, also symbolize His Holy name of four letters. His uniqueness in His Sanctuary is equivalent to the number 8, that is a combination of two of His names, A'DONAI and the Tetragramaton. According to Menachot 39, it is a mystical dimension of the rule that the knot with which the blue thread is tied together with the white threads symbolizes the mystical dimensions of kindness and mercy combined.

It's also been suggested that the strings connected to the four corners of the garment remind us of the reality that God's power extends infinitely in all four directions of the compass. We should also note that the eight ends of the strings which are tied by five knots suggests the Thirteen Attributes of God's Compassion. Thirteen is also the gimatriya of AHAVA, love. (and of ECHAD.)

That's all very cool, but a lot to take in considering the fact that we're under a certain time constraint while davening. Generally, we have only a couple of minutes to recite the full three paragraphs of SH'MA when in a minyan. Those are really terrific suggestions of ideas to consider, and I do better with them when I daven alone. But that only happens when I or the entire world is sick.

So, I need something quicker for my average morning service.

The Mei Shilo'ach proposes that our looking should be like what Naomi instructed Ruth: Let your eyes be on the field of reaping (Ruth 2:9). The Rebbe says Naomi demanded that Ruth look at the end result of things, the 'reaping' as opposed to the 'sowing'. Always look toward your goal, and the process will be successful. Don't let temptations

distract you from where you truly desire to end up.

I think that comparing the translations of Targum Onkelos with that of Targum Yonatan teaches something similar, and may help. In Onkelos, for the word UR-ITEM (and you shall see them) we get the expected Aramaic word V'TECHEZUN. This is the same word that gives us CHAZON meaning a prophetic vision, as well as normal sight. However, Targum Yonatan renders it V'TECHEMUN. This word is related to T'CHUM, as in boundaries or limits.

I strongly suggest that Yonatan ben Uziel is teaching us that the sight we use to see our TZITZIT should be tunnel vision. This is, I believe, very similar to the Mei Shilo'ach. Eye on the prize. Keep your focus on your spiritual goals. When looking at the TZITZIT, think of blinders keeping us fixated on our chosen path.

I hate to compare us to animals, but many of us are a little like the dogs in the animated film UP! We get easily distracted by the 'squirrels' we encounter. This quick glance at the TZITZIT has many esoteric meanings, but the simplest, most effective purpose is: Keep your eyes zeroed in on your Torah target! Then you'll have a much greater chance of getting to where your soul desires to be. 