

The Sefer Chareidim on Tzitzis
By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Bamidbar 15:37-41 we read of the Commandment to put tzitzis in any four cornered garment worn by males. This mitzvah is one of the few mitzvos that the Torah itself reveals its significance. Of course every mitzvah is an edict from Hashem and we do all of the mitzvos as his loyal servants. But in verse 39 we are told explicitly that the mitzvah of Tzitzis is for us to 'see them and remember all of Hashem's mitzvos and do them and not turn after our hearts and our eyes.

Rahsi quotes for us on this verse the well known idea that the gematria , numeric value of Tzitzis is 600 and together with the eight strings and five double knots we reach 613 the total number mitzvos in the Torah. We see that the mitzvah of Tzitzis is more than a symbolic reminder; it is linked to all of the other mitzvos. For this reason, the mitzvah of tzitzis is important enough to us that we deliberately wear a four-cornered garment to be obligated in the mitzvah of tzitzis and we do not circumvent the mitzvah by wearing a garment that is not four corners. Indeed, we train our little boys to always wear their garment with tzitzis and to kiss the tzitzis at the time of the bracha and when they recite this parsha of the Shema.

The Sefer Chareidim by Rav Elazar Azkari, in the introductory chapters to this classic work, develops this idea of tzitzis being linked to the other mitzvos. However, he develops the idea little differently from what most of us have been trained to practice. Even though we may not conduct ourselves during the recital of Shema according to his understanding, nevertheless, what he writes is truly worthy of reflection and the lessons are very valuable to us. Rav Azkari writes that the tzitzis are a symbol of our king and reminder to carry out his word. The blue thread is a further reminder as the blue, the techeiles is like the sea which is like the sky which in turn reminds us of Hashem's throne of glory as Chazal tell us. All of these ideas are, of course, not to be understood in a physical sense. The four corners which cause a garment to require tzitzis correspond to the four agents of judgment described in Sefer Yechezkel 26:16 which are sword, hunger, wild animals and pestilence. When one recites the Shema one should take the two front tzitziyos and place them next to his heart as it states in Devarim 11:18, 'And you shall place my word upon your heart.' The tzitzis should be looked at as one says the words, 'And you shall see them'. He then quotes Rav Yosef Gekaatailia who writes that the tzitzis in front contain sixteen strings and together with the ten knots equal twenty-six the value of yud-kay uv kay, Hashem's name. This also corresponds to the twenty-six firmaments, large and small enumerated in Hilchos Yesodai Hatorah 3:5 in the Mishna Torah of the Rambam. The tzitzis are a reminder of who created the vast cosmos and all that is contained in them and we are to be reminded how small we really are. Hashem's greatness, power and ability to create vast galaxies as well as his power of reward and punishment are all symbolized by the mitzvah of tzitzis.