

TZIM PINTL

— ♦ Parasha ♦ —

Tzitzis – A New Way of Seeing

In Parshas Shelach, after the episode of the meraglim, the Torah ends with the mitzvah of tzitzis. The meraglim saw the land and they saw many things, but they measured them in the wrong way. The difficulties looked very great, and the strength of Hashem looked far away. They saw themselves as too small, and the people of the land as too great. When the measure of sight becomes distorted, the whole world is overturned.

Then comes the mitzvah of tzitzis: “And you shall see it, and you shall remember all the mitzvos of Hashem, and you shall do them, and you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes, after which you go astray.” The Torah gives a person a tikkun for sight. He must learn to see the world in its proper measure. The meraglim saw and fell. Through tzitzis, a person sees and returns to the Torah.

A person lives in a world where the eyes and the heart make things large. What is close becomes large. What pulls him becomes important. What frightens him now looks like the whole reality. One desire can look like an entire world. One honor can become the center of life. One fear can cover everything. The mitzvos are quieter, steadier, more inward.

From the outside they can look small, but when a person knows the truth, he sees their true greatness. Therefore the Torah gave small strings at the edge of the garment. A person moves through the world, goes in and out, takes care of his needs, sees things, hears things, speaks with people, and at the edge of his clothing there are strings. They make no noise. They are with him quietly. And precisely these small strings come to change his whole way of seeing. “And you shall see it.” The beginning of the tikkun is sight. The eye pulls; let it

be pulled to kedushah. The sight of tzitzis is a sight that brings remembrance. A Yid sees the strings, and he remembers all the mitzvos. A small detail brings him back to a great whole. A small string brings him back to the entire Torah.

This is a wonder. Tzitzis is small and simple, only strings at the edge of the garment. But this small string is connected to the greatest whole: “And you shall remember all the mitzvos of Hashem.” There are small details that are not truly small,

because they are connected to a great source. One Mishnah, one bracha, one act of overcoming, one moment of yishuv hadaas, one string of a mitzvah. From the outside it looks small. In truth, it is very great.

And there are things that look very large, but in truth they are only the vanities of the time. The heart and the eye make them large. They give them color, life, urgency, as if everything depends on them. Tzitzis comes and puts things back in their place. Torah and mitzvos become large, and desires become small. A person removes from the desire its imagined greatness. Desire becomes a passing will. Anger becomes a moment of heat. Fear becomes a picture of the hour. And the mitzvah returns to being something that truly stands.



The Rambam writes in Hilchos Tefillin Umezuzah Vesefer Torah, chapter 6, halacha 13: “A person must be careful with mezuzah, because it is an obligation upon everyone constantly. Whenever he enters and leaves, he meets the unity of the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and remembers His love, and awakens from his sleep and his errors in the vanities of the time, and knows that nothing stands forever and ever except the knowledge of the Rock of the world.

Immediately he returns to his daas and walks in upright ways.”

The Rambam continues: “The early Sages said: Whoever has tefillin on his head and on his arm, tzitzis on his garment, and mezuzah at his doorway, is presumed not to sin, for he has many reminders, and they are the angels that save him from sinning, as it says, ‘The angel of Hashem encamps around those who fear Him and rescues them.’”

The mezuzah stands at the doorway, where a person enters and leaves. The tzitzis are on the garment, where a person walks with his clothing in the world. Both do not come with great noise, but as a constant reminder, in the house and on the clothing. Both teach him that the vanities of the time do not stand forever, and that the passing world must not become too large in his eyes.

This is the place of tzitzis. It is an angel of remembrance. The strings rest upon him and say quietly: Do not go only after the heart and the eye. Do not let what you see now rule over your whole daas. Do not let the vanities of the time appear like an everlasting world. There are the mitzvos of Hashem. There is a purpose. There is love of Hashem. There is knowledge of the Rock of the world. Return to your daas.

“Returns to his daas.” When a person is pulled after his heart and his eyes, he leaves his inner self. He forgets who he is, to Whom he belongs, what truly stands, and what merely passes. Tzitzis brings him back to his own daas, the daas that the neshamah knows inside. The strings only awaken it.

This is also the tikkun for the meraglim. They went out, and their eyes became their whole reality. They saw giants, fortified cities, great difficulties, and from this came, “And we were in our eyes like grasshoppers.” When a person sees the difficulty as too large, he sees himself as too small. When he sees himself as too small, he forgets Hashem.

“And you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes.” The word “taturu,” you shall stray, reminds us of the meraglim, who were sent “lasur es ha’aretz,” to spy out the land. There is a touring of the land, and there is a touring and searching of the heart and the eyes. A person becomes like a spy inside his own world. He searches for what will pull him, what will frighten him, what will make himself large in his own eyes, and what will make his emunah small. The Torah says: Do not be dragged after such a search. Give your sight another source. Let the eye see tzitzis, and from that, remember.

Tzitzis teaches a person the measure of things, what is large and what is small. Desire, when it pulls, says: I am large, I am necessary, I am all of life. But when a person sees tzitzis, he can say: this is a passing will, this is the vanities of the time,

this does not stand forever. The Torah, which for a moment looked like something on the side, becomes great again. The small mitzvah in his hand becomes connected again to all the mitzvos of Hashem.

This is the whole avodas ha’adam. Sometimes a person makes the yetzer too large, and then it becomes hard to stand against it. If desire is a mountain, how can he stand against it? If fear is the whole reality, how can he move? If anger is the whole truth, how can he be silent? But when he returns to his daas, he sees: there is a pull here, there is a difficulty, there is a nisayon, but it is not the whole world. Then he can stand against it.

And sometimes a person makes the mitzvah too small. He says to himself: What is one bracha with kavannah worth? One Mishnah? One moment of shemiras einayim? Strings of tzitzis on a garment? The Torah answers: “And you shall remember all the mitzvos of Hashem.” This is not small. The detail is connected to the whole. The string is connected to the Rock of the world. The mitzvah brings you back to your daas.

Therefore tzitzis has a special strength. It does not stand only inside a sefer, and not only inside a thought, but on the garment, on the body, where a person stands and walks. A person must go out, work, buy, sell, meet people, see reality. But he must go out with strings, with a sign, with a reminder, so that he should not walk after his eyes alone, but his eyes should be connected to the remembrance of Hashem.

Many falls begin with an improper way of seeing the matter. When a temporary thing becomes too large, and the true thing becomes small, the person is already in danger. Tzitzis comes and arranges the gaze, and through that, the action becomes arranged. “And you shall see it, and you shall remember... and you shall do them.” Seeing, remembering, doing. This is the order.

In Parshas Shelach, after the great pain of the fallen sight of the meraglim, tzitzis comes and establishes a new way of seeing. The same eye that can go after the heart and the eyes can see tzitzis and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem. The same world that can look large, full of fears and desires, can become small. The same mitzvos that can look small can become great.

A person is not forced to see the world the way the heart and the eye pull him to see it. There is a small string at the edge of the garment, and from it another gaze opens. From that small string he returns to all the mitzvos of Hashem, to the knowledge of the Rock of the world, and to his own daas. Then even a large world cannot bring him down, because he is not a grasshopper. He is a Yid walking in the world with reminders around him.

— ♦ Stories ♦ —

Greatness Within Simplicity

R' Yaakov was a young kollel man who also worked for a living. He was in his twenties. In the morning he would learn a short seder in the beis midrash, afterward he would travel to work, and in the evening he would return home, to the children, to the house, and to the small shiur he tried to listen to when he still had strength.

By nature, he was a person who entered everything with his whole heart. He did not know how to do things halfway. If they gave him a small job, he made it into a whole matter. If they asked him to arrange something in the office, he was already thinking how the entire system should be rebuilt. If they asked him to check one account, he would also check everything around it. If he saw a mistake, he could not continue as if he had not seen it. He would go in deeply, fix, arrange, improve, and carry responsibility.

At first, this gave him great satisfaction. He felt that he was a trustworthy person. He was not from those people who do things only to get them over with. He worked with truth. His employer also saw this. In the beginning, he would tell him from time to time, "Yaakov, you are a good worker. One can rely on you." Those words gave him life.

But over time, something changed. Not because he worked less. On the contrary, he worked more. Every small thing became something large by him. Every phone call, every account, every order, every mistake of another worker, all entered under his responsibility. Sometimes he would stay after hours, fixing things others had not done. Sometimes he would come home tired, almost without strength to speak, and his wife would ask him, "What happened today?" He would answer, "Nothing." But inside, it was not nothing. Inside, he felt that he was carrying a world.

And because he felt that he was carrying a world, he began to want the employer to recognize it the way he felt it. Not only to say, "Thank you." Not only to give a smile. He wanted him to see the greatness. To understand how much he was investing, how much he was saving, how

much he was holding the system together so that it should not fall apart.

And when that did not happen, the pain began.

The employer would ask him for overtime, as if it were a simple thing. From time to time, at the end of the day, he would say to him, "Yaakov, maybe you can stay another half hour? We have to finish this and this today." That half hour sometimes became an hour and a half. And when the time came to speak about a raise, the employer would push it off: "Now is not an easy time. Let us wait a little longer." R' Yaakov would remain silent, but inside he was burning.

He would say to himself, "He does not see what I do. He does not understand. I am giving my life here. He counts it as just another thing on the list."



The truth was that the employer did recognize him. He knew that Yaakov worked well. He relied on him. He appreciated him to a certain extent. But he did not recognize him the way R' Yaakov felt it. R' Yaakov felt that his work was something great, almost a daily self-sacrifice. The employer saw a good worker, devoted, important, but still a worker. This gap hurt more than the money.

Slowly, little by little, he began rubbing against the employer. At first it was only in his heart. Then it came out in short words. Then in comments. When the employer asked him for overtime, he would answer with some anger: "I cannot always stay." "That was not my job." "If they want so much, they also have to pay that way."

His words were correct to a degree. He truly needed to protect himself. It is not right to be taken advantage of. It is not right for a person to give all his strength until he has no home, no rest, no Torah, and no soul. In this, he began to feel a boundary. He learned that not every request of an employer is a decree from Heaven. He

learned to sometimes say no. He learned to ask for what was coming to him.

But inside this good thing, friction also entered. Every request sounded to him like exploitation. Every comment sounded to him like a lack of recognition. Every time they did not give him a raise, he felt as if they were erasing all his effort. Sometimes the employer would say a small thing, and R' Yaakov would hear inside it something large. He did not hear the sentence. He heard all the years in which he felt that he had not been appreciated.

One day, the employer asked him to arrange a certain file before the end of the day. It was not such difficult work. But R' Yaakov heard in it, once again, the same old tune. "You have to. You can. Stay longer. Do more." He felt his whole body tightening.

He answered with difficulty, "Everything cannot be on me. If they want this kind of work, they need to have more people."

The employer looked at him. "Yaakov, I only asked for one file."

Those words hurt him. Because from one side, the employer was right. It was only one file. From the other side, by R' Yaakov, it was not one file. It was his whole life at work.

That evening he came home tired and bitter. He tried to learn after Maariv, but could not. He opened a Gemara, and the letters stood before him without life. He closed the Gemara and opened a publication that was lying nearby. There he saw a column about the soul, how a person weighs himself down by making a situation out of everything, by turning everything into something large. When he sees the act as large, the opposition also becomes large. But when he returns the act to a small place, the opposition also becomes smaller.

He read slowly. The words touched a very inner place.

"When I make a big thing out of something," he thought to himself, "then the employer also becomes a big opponent. The overtime becomes a war. The raise becomes a din Torah. Every file becomes a sign of whether they value me or not. Maybe I myself made the work too large."

Suddenly he understood something else. It is possible to keep boundaries without turning every day into a world war. It is possible to work faithfully, but not to put the whole heart into a place that does not need to receive the whole heart. It is possible to do one's part and leave. Not with coldness, but with order.

The next morning, before he entered the office, he stood for a moment near the door and said quietly to himself, "I

am not going now to carry the whole work. I am going in to do my part. A small work. What needs to be done, I will do. What not, not."

In the first hour, a request already came. One worker had forgotten to arrange an account, and the matter came to him. Usually, he would immediately take it upon himself, fix everything, and feel inside, here again, everything is on me. This time he stopped for a moment. He looked at the paper and said to himself, "This is an account. Not my whole life. An account."

He arranged what needed to be arranged. He did not add everything that had not been requested. He did not save the whole office. He did not make a speech in his heart. When the time came to leave, he placed the paper in its place and said to the employer, "I arranged what is relevant for now. The rest can be continued tomorrow."

The employer said, "Good."

R' Yaakov left on time.

On the way home he felt something strange. Not great joy, not excitement. Just open space. As if something he was used to carrying on his back had remained today on the table.

The following days did not immediately become easy. An old nature does not change in one day. There were still times when he felt the fire rising. There were still times when he heard, inside a small request, the whole history of his pain. But he began to have one sentence that returned to him quietly: "Make it small."

When the employer asked for overtime, he no longer answered from a wound. He would ask simply, "How much time is needed? Today I can stay until six, not more." And if he could not, he would say, "Today I cannot." Without war. Without a long explanation. Without proving that he was a human being.

When they spoke about money, he no longer came from a demand that they recognize his whole soul. He came with numbers. "This is the work I do. These are the hours. I hold that this amount is coming to me." If the employer pushed it off, it hurt him, but it did not become an erasing of his entire existence. It was a question of livelihood, of numbers, of a workplace. An important thing, but not all of life.

Slowly, he began to see that the employer himself became smaller in his eyes. Not small in a disrespectful way, but small in the right place. He was no longer the giant holding the value of his life in his hand. He was an employer, a person who had a business, worries, accounts, shortcomings, and good qualities. No more. And when the employer became smaller, the war with him also became smaller. It was possible to speak. It was

possible to agree. It was possible to disagree. It was possible to continue.

This was a wonder in his eyes. For years he had thought the problem was that the employer did not recognize his greatness. Now he began to understand that perhaps he himself had placed the greatness of his soul into too narrow a place. He had made his work into a vessel that had to carry the whole feeling of value, loyalty, importance, success, and recognition. That vessel was not built for this. Work for a living requires loyalty, honesty, and responsibility. But it cannot be the place where a person asks that his entire soul be recognized.

And when this began to become settled at work, other things also began to settle.

At home, earlier, he would enter in the evening like a man who had returned from a battlefield. Every request at home touched the great tiredness. A child would ask for help with homework, and he would feel, here too, they need me. His wife would say that something needed to be fixed, and he would hear, more responsibility. Everything was large. Even a small thing at home continued the heaviness of work.

One evening, when he came home, his wife said to him, "Yaakov, the light in the kitchen is not working well. Maybe you can take care of it?" For a moment, he felt the old tightening. Again responsibility. Again something placed on him. But he stopped. He looked at the lightbulb, looked at the house, and said quietly, "I will look at it after supper."

After supper, he brought a chair, checked the bulb, saw that it only needed to be screwed in a little tighter, and fixed it in two minutes. In the past, something like this could have become a whole story by him. Now it was a bulb. A small thing. He fixed it, came down from the chair, and the house remained calm.

With the children too, he began to see this way. In the past, when a child did not listen to him, he would immediately see before his eyes the entire future of the child. If now he is not listening, what will become of him? If now he is acting with chutzpah, where is this going? Because of that, he would respond heavily, not only to the small act, but to the whole large fear.

Now he began to say to himself, "This is now one act." It needs to be corrected, but the act needs to be corrected. If the child did not clean the room, now they clean the room. If he spoke without derech erez, now they teach how to speak. One does not place the whole worry about his soul into every comment. The children began to feel that their father was more settled. The boundaries remained, but the war became smaller.

In learning Torah, the change was also deep. For years he had pain that he was not learning the way he wanted to.

Every time he opened a Gemara in the evening, he immediately saw everything he did not know. All the sugyos he had not learned, all of Shas, all the poskim, all that an avreich ought to be. Because of this, even one page was heavy. He did not open a page; he opened all his lack.

Now he began to open the Gemara differently. Not a different Gemara, but a different opening. "Now I am learning a small piece." One daf. One line. One Tosafos. One Mishnah Berurah. Not to prove that he was a lamdan, and not to cover everything that was missing. Only Torah. A small thing, but alive.

And by making the learning smaller, the learning returned to being large. Because a small thing that can be done, gets done. And what is done today returns tomorrow. And what returns tomorrow becomes fixed. And what becomes fixed becomes a building. He no longer stood before the whole Shas, but before the open page. And the open page shone for him more than all the large calculations.

In tefillah too, he found himself changing. Earlier, when he would stand in Shemoneh Esrei, he wanted to daven properly, with his whole heart. And because he wanted it so much, and knew how much he was not succeeding, the tefillah became a place of pain. Every bracha reminded him how far he was from kavannah. Every distraction was a war. Every foreign thought was a fall.

Now he began to say, "One bracha. One word. One moment." He did not give up on tefillah. On the contrary, precisely because tefillah is so great, one must enter it through a small opening. "Baruch Atah." One moment to know before Whom he is standing. And if afterward he fell, he returned again. Another word. Another bracha. Not the whole tefillah at once. This is how the tefillah began to receive softness. Not a great war every day, but a thin thread of connection.

In the Yamim Tovim too, he began to see this way. In the past, every Yom Tov would come upon him with great heaviness, with all the inyanim, all the sefarim, and all the expectations. Later, he learned to enter even a Yom Tov through a small thing. On Pesach, a kezayis of matzah with simplicity. On Shavuot, one additional small learning. On Sukkos, one sitting under the schach. The greatness remained, but it entered through a small opening, alive and close.

Then he understood a general thing. Life is not small. Torah is not small. Tefillah is not small. Shalom bayis is not small. Chinuch is not small. Parnassah is not small. Everything is very great. But a person cannot carry all the greatness at every moment. If he places all the greatness into every small action, he breaks. Therefore, inside greatness there also needs to be a way of seeing with simplicity.

Greatness is the heavens. Simplicity is the ground. Without heavens, a person becomes dry. Without ground, he cannot walk. A person must know that there is depth in everything, there is purpose, there is responsibility, there is kedushah. But at the time of action, he must stand in the place where the hand can act. One file. One hour. One bracha. One word. One child. One page. One thing.

Once, after a few months, R' Yaakov was sitting during a short break in the office. The employer passed by and said to him, "Yaakov, I have to tell you, recently you are much calmer. The work is going well, and there is less tension."

R' Yaakov smiled. He did not know whether the employer understood what he had said. But he felt that the words were true.

He had not become a weaker worker. On the contrary, his work became more orderly. He had not become less loyal. Only less mixed in. He no longer allowed his livelihood to swallow his whole soul. He did his part, kept his boundaries, asked for what needed to be asked, and left. The work received a place, but not his whole heart.

That evening, when he came home, one of the children ran to him with a small Chumash sheet. "Tatty, can I read it to you?" R' Yaakov stood near the door, still wearing his coat, and he could have said, a little later. But suddenly he heard inside himself the words: a small thing.

He sat down on the chair near the door, with his coat still on, and listened to the child for five minutes. The child read a few pesukim, made two mistakes, corrected himself, and smiled. There was no great scene there. There was no shiur in chinuch. But there was a father, a child, and five minutes of truth.

Afterward he entered the kitchen. His wife asked him how the day had been. He wanted to begin telling about all the accounts, about the employer, about the things that still had not been settled. But he stopped for a moment and said, "Today was calmer. I did what I needed to do, and I left."

She looked at him and said, "It shows on you."

At night, after the house became quiet, he opened a Gemara. He did not make promises to himself. He did not think about everything he needed to make up. He learned a small amud. When he finished, he closed the Gemara and remained sitting for another moment. He felt that there was a thread here. That same thread that had been missing when everything had become too large. A small thread that connects the act to its source, without making noise from it.

Then he understood what he had learned from his own life: when a person makes every matter into a large general issue, he invites against himself a large general difficulty. When he returns the matter to the particular, to the small act, to its private thread, he can enter. And once he enters, the matter grows on its own.

This was true at work, and it was true at home, and it was true in Torah, and it was true in tefillah, and it was true between him and Hashem. Not to run away from greatness, but not to begin from it in a way that weighs down the soul. To leave the greatness inside, like a distant light, and to walk on the ground with simplicity.

From day to day, R' Yaakov became a quieter person. Not because he stopped feeling. He felt a great deal. But he learned that not every feeling needs to become a war. Not every act needs to become a whole parsha. Not every request needs to become an injury. Not every lack needs to become a question on all of life.

There is one small thing before him. Let him do it honestly. Afterward, the next thing will come.

And so, precisely when he stopped trying to hold all the greatness in his hands, the greatness began to return to him in a more proper way. Not as a burden, but as life. Not as a war, but as a walk. Not as something forced from above, but as something that grows from below.

He would often say to himself, when he felt the old heaviness awakening again: "Make it small, but make it true."

Because a small thing done with truth will, in the end, place a person somewhere greater than all the great imaginations that did not allow him to move.

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