

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמע

The Message of Techeilas

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

And Hashem said to Moshe saying ... they are to make themselves tzitzis on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations and they are to place upon the tzitzis of each corner a thread of *techeilas*...

ויאמר ה' אל משה
לאמר... ועשו להם ציצת
על כנפי בגדיהם לדרתם
ונתנו על ציצת הכנף
פתיל תכלת...

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word



The Torah (Bamidbar 15:38) commands us, ועשו להם ציצת על כנפי בגדיהם לדרתם, ונתנו על ציצת הכנף פתיל תכלת, "They are to make themselves tzitzis on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations and they are to place upon the tzitzis of each corner a thread of *techeilas*."

What is תכלת? It is a special shade of sky-blue wool, dyed with the inky secretion of a rare Mediterranean sea-creature called *chilazon*.

The color it secretes is uniquely evocative of Hashem's Throne of Glory, and therefore, no other color may be substituted for this dye. For over thirteen centuries, the identity of the *chilazon* has been unknown. Nevertheless, in the absence of the תכלת thread, the mitzvah of tzitzis remains in effect. Accordingly, tzitzis has consisted of only white threads, which the *halacha* recognizes as acceptable in the absence of תכלת. (Note: In recent years, there has been renewed interest into the source of תכלת. For an in-depth discussion, see the Appendix to the Schottenstein Edition of Tractate Menachos, Volume 2.)

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Blue Heavens

The *techeilas* thread on the tzitzis is meant to bring to mind Hashem's Throne of Glory whenever the wearer catches sight of its unique blue color.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Ascending Sensibly

The Gemara (Chulin 89a) asks what distinguished תכלת from all other dyes and caused it to be selected for coloring the tzitzis? It is because the color of תכלת is similar to that of the sea which is similar to that of the sky. The color of the sky is similar to that of the sapphire, which is similar to that of Hashem's Throne of Glory described by the Prophet Yechezkiel (1:26): "Like the appearance of sapphire stone in the likeness of a Throne." Rashi (Sotah 17a, s.v. *She'Hatecheilas*) explains that since תכלת has a similarity to Hashem's Throne of Glory, when we gaze at the תכלת threads we are reminded of the One Who sits on that throne and are considered as having welcomed the Divine Presence.

However, if the תכלת was selected for coloring the tzitzis from all other dyes because it was similar to Hashem's Throne of Glory, why is it necessary to state that it is similar to the color of the sea which is similar to that of the sky which is similar to that of the sapphire, which is similar to the Throne? Why not draw the comparison directly to Hashem's Throne

of Glory? The progression of comparisons illustrates that a person cannot jump spiritually from the depths of the ocean to the highest Heavens in one leap. To succeed in growing in spirituality, a person must be able to envision himself at the level toward which he is striving. It must be located within his reach. Otherwise, he is setting himself up for despair. He is like a clerk who decides he will strive to become president of the multinational corporation for which he works. Although it is the vision of life at the top that inspires his climb, he would gain far more momentum for his climb if he first set his sights on the senior clerk's position (*Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Volume 5, page 375).

Rav Dessler (*Ibid*, Volume 1, Introduction, page 24) reminds us that a person who wants to succeed in climbing the spiritual ladder should set an initial goal to reach the spiritual height that is closest to his current level of free will. With a realistic goal in sight, he will have the motivation to climb to the next step. Attempting to jump many rungs on the ladder is the recipe for failure.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Rung by Rung

An employer who asks his worker to fetch an item from the attic will not be angry when the worker does not leap from the bottom rung of the ladder straight to the top. He understands that his



worker can only ascend the ladder one step at a time.

Rav Chaim Volozhin (*Ruach Chaim, Avos*, Chapter 3, Mishnah 1) explains that if Our Master

is not disheartened by our slow progress in climbing the ladder to spirituality, neither should we lose patience with ourselves. Every small step that we successfully take towards our goal is not just a pause upon a new, higher level; it is a springboard that energizes our continuing climb.

Try This!

▶ In setting goals, a person should set a "minimum" and a "maximum" goal. The minimum goals give him a greater opportunity to gain strength from success, while the maximum goals give him a vision toward which to strive (*Sefer HaZikaron L'Baal Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Volume 2, page 155). Think of a goal you would like to accomplish and plan your first step for getting there by reminding yourself of the word תכלת and its step-by-step process.

Did You Know

▶ **Holding the Tzitzis**

During the Shacharis prayer, a person gathers the four tzitzis in his left hand (even if he is left-handed --*Sheilos U'teshuvos Be'ar Moshe* 2:5) when saying the words מארבע כנפות הארץ in the paragraph which precedes Shema (Ba'er Haitiv 59:3). From then on and throughout Shema, the tzitzis are held—according to some customs, between the fourth finger and the little finger of the left hand—against the heart. This practice is alluded to in the words: ועל לבבך... והיו הדברים האלה, "let these words... be upon your heart". When reaching the third paragraph, ויאמר ה' אל משה לאמר, one takes the tzitzis in the right hand, and holds them out so that he may look at them. One kisses the tzitzis every time he says the word "ציצת" and the word "אמת" at the end of Shema. He should continue to hold the tzitzis until he reaches the word נאמנים ונחמדים לעד, "faithful and delightful forever," in the paragraph following ויאמר, whereupon he kisses them and lets them go (Orach Chaim 24:2, Mishneh Berurah, ibid:4,5). Note that other customs apply.