



Parashat Shemini - #276

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Wearing Techelet in our Time

Question: What is Ha-Rav's opinion about wearing Techelet?

Answer: We only wear white. This is based on three considerations, each of which is sufficient on its own:

1. One of the authorities of last generation, the "Beit Ha-Levi," Ha-Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Brisk, held that in the absence of a continuous tradition it is impossible to reinstitute the identification of the Techelet, even with proofs. This identification has disappeared and can only be resumed when the Sanhedrin is reestablished. But even if we say that it is possible to reinstitute it with the aid of proofs, these proofs must be strong, clear and beyond doubt. The proofs relating to the Murex Trunculus are not one hundred percent. And the current identification of Techelet is the third such identification that has been offered. The first was by the Chasidic Rebbe of Radzyner, and was adopted by the Breslav Chasidim as well. The second identification was by Ha-Rav Yitzchak Herzog, who later became the Chief Rabbi of Israel. So this is now the third time Techelet has been "re-discovered". The great Rabbis of our generation have not accepted any of these suggestions, and are thus waiting for a fourth possibility.

2. We are not strict to wear any Techelet since our Sages said that wearing a blue color which is not Techelet (called "kala ilan") invalidates an entire Talit (see Bava Metzia 61b and Menachot 40a, 43a). It is thus possible that wearing this Techelet could invalidate the entire Talit. Furthermore, when we are strict about something it is when we are certain that this stricture causes us to be better off regarding the mitzvah. But if we are uncertain about it, it is not considered a "stricture."

3. Wearing this Techelet amounts to casting aspersion on earlier Jews and the great Rabbis of our generation who did not and do not wear the Techelet. A Torah scholar once asked Maran Ha-Rav Kook about Techelet. He did not ask if he should wear Techelet. He said: "I wear Techelet on my Tzitzit which I tuck in. Should I also wear them on my Talit?" Maran Ha-Rav Kook answered: "No, by doing so you would be casting aspersion on the earlier ones who did not do so. It is fine if you are wearing them and they are tucked in, 'I walk with wholeness of heart within the confines of my house' (Tehillim 101:2), but do not wear them out."

It is also forbidden to act with "yuhara" – religious arrogance – before the great Rabbis of our generation. The Gemara in Baba Kamma (81) discusses that Yehoshua bin Nun made the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael conditional on ten laws. One of them is that people may walk on the side of the road (on the border of others' property) to avoid hardened clumps of dirt on the road. Rav and Rabbi Chiya were once walking on the road, and they veered off to the side to avoid the clumps of dirt. Rav Yehudah bar Kenosa was ahead of them and walked in the middle, taking big steps to avoid the obstacles. Rav said: "Who is that? It is 'yehura' not to rely on Yehoshua's enactment!" Rabbi Chiya said: "Perhaps it is my student, Rav Yehudah bar Kenosa. All his actions are for the sake of Heaven." It is haughty to act strictly in front of one's Rabbi. Rav Yehudah bar Kenosa was different, however, as he always acted strictly. If someone wears Techelet, we do not disparage him, for he has on whom to rely. But if someone comes and asks, we say to him: "do not display 'yuhara.'" The Torah scholars of our generation wore and wear white Tzitzit and we are going to act strictly in front of them? Do we know more about Techelet than Ha-Rav Avraham Shapira ztz"l?! Do we know more about Techelet than Ha-Rav Mordechai Eliyahu Shilt"a?!

In sum: We need to continue to research the matter, and it is a long journey. Although the heart aches, we wait. In the meanwhile, we wear white, "it has completely turned white, it is pure" (a play on Vayikra 13:13).

[MT – note: It is worth noting that Rav Aviner was once asked: What was Maran Ha-Rav Kook's attitude regarding Techelet?

Answer: When a Torah scholar who wore Techelet on his Tzitzit asked Maran Ha-Rav if he should also put Techelet on his Talit, he responded: "It is sufficient for you to have the Tzitzit with Techelet. Techelet on your Talit will be seen as casting aspersion on the earlier ones who did not put Techelet on their Tzitzit" (brought in "Sefer Ha-Techelet of Rav M. Bornstein, p. 192). "When Maran Ha-Rav saw that Ha-Rav David Cohain, Ha-Nazir, put Techelet on his Tzitzit, he asked him: Do you feel the lack of the Techelet on your Tzitzit and that you have a need for it? Ha-Nazir took this as a criticism and ceased putting on the Techelet. After a short time, Maran Ha-Rav came in a second time and said to him: Nu, nu, continue putting the Techelet on your Talit. Ha-Nazir however held fast to the first comment and refrained from doing so, and only put on the Techelet in private after the death of Maran Ha-Rav" (ibid., p. 188). I – the lowly one – heard the story in the following version: "When Maran Ha-Rav saw Ha-Nazir wearing Techelet on his Tzitzit, he rebuked him that he should not follow a path about which almost all the great Rabbis of Israel had reservations. Ha-Rav then entered his room and after a few minutes came out again and told Ha-Nazir that there is nonetheless a place for this. Despite the fact that this is not the path to be followed by the community, unique individuals may follow it, and since Ha-Nazir is unique and special, he could follow this special path."]

Rav Aviner on...

Redemption and Regression

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Vayikra 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: How do we deal spiritually with the feeling that Jews from among our people are seeking to expel us from the settlements in the Land of Israel?

Answer: In serious matters, we don't operate based on feelings, but based on intellectual clarification. Unfortunately, the issue you raise is not just a feeling. There really has been

regression here. We took a step backward at Yamit, at Gush Katif, at Amona, at Migron, and at Hebron. Still, you must realize that over the course of the Redemption there will sometimes also be regression.

As with anything historical, Redemption is not mathematical. It is statistical. With statistics, not everything is totally predictable. Statisticians say that if something is less than 10%, it doesn't exist. Thank G-d, Judea and Samaria has 350,000 Jewish residents. 10% of that is 35,000. The statistician will say that what happens to less than 35,000 people is insignificant. Spiritually as well, it is not written that there will be no problems over the course of the Redemption. Even Moshe, who was certainly the divine emissary for the redemption from Egypt, experienced difficulties. When he set out to redeem the Jewish People, wicked Pharaoh refused to listen to him, and matters just deteriorated -- until the Israelites were forced to gather their own straw. In those moments, it was very hard for the people and for Moshe himself.

Ramban, in his Torah commentary, explains that Moshe knew from G-d that Pharaoh would refuse, hence it was clear that the redemption would not occur overnight, but gradually. Now something else became clear to him, that there would probably be regressions. And indeed, the situation deteriorated, and only later improved.

Ramban enlists our Sages' words about the verse, "My beloved is like a gazelle" (Shir Ha-Shirim 2:9): "Just as a gazelle appears, goes into concealment and then reappears, so did the first redeemer appear to the Israelites, was then concealed, and only later reappeared" (Ramban on Shemot 5:22; Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah 2:22).

The gazelle runs in the mountains. Suddenly it is concealed and cannot be seen, and then it reappears. It seems to have disappeared, but it has really advanced. It comes into view at a more advanced point. In the same way, Moshe, the redeemer who brought good tidings and raised hopes and faith, suddenly seemed to disappear, and matters deteriorated, yet in the end the situation improved.

At the start of the return to Zion, the Arabs perpetrated a terrible pogrom in Hebron. Not only did many righteous Jews die cruel deaths, but the Jewish community was in despair. This wasn't what they had hoped for.

Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook wrote an article entitled, "Shuvu La-Bitzaron" [Be strengthened once more], in which he said, "We have to strengthen our resolve. The terrible thing that has now occurred in Hebron represents the redeemer being concealed, but he will reveal himself once more" (Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah, p. 360).

We mustn't despair over what occurs. Just because there are several mishaps along the way, must we immediately say that everything is falling apart? Rather, everything is advancing in enormous strides, only here and there is a regression.

Had the return to Zion been carried out by small handful of righteous men, it would not have moved forward. Yet the return to Zion was carried out by the whole people. As is known, some of the righteous did not even move to Israel. The return to Zion was carried out by the Jewish People, and the Jewish people includes all sorts of individuals, the righteous, those in between, and even those less than that. Because the Jewish People are the ones building the Land and sacrificing themselves in the Army, not everything is exactly like we want.

This country has other problems. For example, there is a lot of Sabbath desecration. But for many of us, for some reason, Sabbath desecration does not disturb our sleep. We say, "You need patience." Most of the education in this country is not Torah education, and that too doesn't stop many of us from sleeping. There are also a lot of people who don't keep the family purity laws, and for some reason that doesn't stop many of us from sleeping. But when towns are uprooted, we suddenly say that the whole redemption has been halted, that everything is a catastrophe, that everything is a tragedy. Where were we when they were cutting off the side curls of the Yemenites and placing the children in secular schools? Why didn't we say then that the redemption had ceased? Why do only these, and not other, things bother us?

The truth is, all of these things should bother us. Everybody should be troubled when parts of the land of Israel are uprooted. We all have to act. But we're moving in the right direction. We need to increase the strength and valor of the nation, and gradually rectify all of the problems.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Sneezing in Halachah

Blessing Someone who Sneezes

Q: Why do we say a blessing to someone who sneezes?

A: At the end of the Book of Bereshit (48:1), it is reported to Yosef, "Behold, your father is sick" (Bereshit 48:1). The Gemara points out that this is the first mention in the Torah of an individual becoming ill. It says in fact that from the time the world was created until Yaakov, no one ever got sick before dying (Baba Metziah 87a). The Midrash states that until the time of Yaakov a person would be completely healthy until one day, all of a sudden, he would sneeze and his soul would depart through his nostrils. But Yaakov was unhappy with this way of the world, so he prayed that Hashem would have mercy on people: "Please bring sickness into the world," he prayed, "so that people will have an inkling that death is approaching. Please do not take away my soul until I have had a chance to get my house in order and talk to my children." Hashem answered Yaakov's prayer (Pirkei De-Rebbe Eliezer, chap. 52. Also partially quoted in Bereshit Rabbah 65:9). We therefore say to someone who sneezes: "Asuta" which means "healing" in Aramaic (Mishnah Berurah 230:7). And in Hebrew, we say "Liberiyut".

The Sneezer's Response

Q: What Should the Sneezer say?

A: The person who sneezes should respond to the blesser, "Baruch Tiheyeh - May you be blessed" and then recite the verse: "Lishu'atcha Keiveiti Hashem - For your salvation I wait, Hashem" (Bereshit 49:18. Yam shel Shlomo, Bava Kamma, chap. 8, #64 quoted in Magen Avraham Orach Hayim 230: 6 and Mishnah Berurah 230:7). Some however refrain from saying this verse since they are involved with sneezing and will not recite it with proper intention (Kaf Ha-Chaim 170:3). And some recite the verse without pronouncing Hashem's Name (Ha-Rav Mordechai Eliyahu in Darchei Halachah on Kitzur Shulchan Aruch #61 Ot 5). And some report that the Chatam Sofer did not recite this verse at all or did so without Hashem's Name lest out of habit he say this verse in the bathroom if he sneezed (see Minhageu Baal Ha-Chatam Sofer, p. 13. Minhagei Rabotenu Ve-Halichoteihem on the Chatam Sofer, p. 241).

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