תנא דבי אליהו, כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא

IT WAS TAUGHT IN THE ACADEMY OF ELIYAHU, WHOEVER STUDIES TORAH LAWS EVERY DAY IS ASSURED THAT HE WILL BE PRESENT IN THE 'WORLD TO COME'

Chapter 3, Question 1

What is the correct procedure for adorning a Talit Gadol ?

A remarkable medrash is recorded in **Yalkut Tehillim**¹ about King David - the epitome leader of the Jewish people. It describes how **David HaMelech** was so successful in his unflinching service of the Almighty, that there was not a single limb in his body that he did not sanctify by devoting it for the performance of the mitzvot. The medrash lists how David HaMelech dedicated each and every limb to fulfil a specific mitzvah, starting from his head on which he would wear Tefillin, to using his thighs for holding a baby boy who was being circumcised.² What is interesting - and with this we begin the topic of our essay - is that David HaMelech gives a seemingly perplexing example of the mitzvah he fulfilled with the use of his **neck**! He says the following:

בצוארי - עטיפת ציצית

"With my neck - [I fulfilled] the wrapping of the tzitzit."

The use of the neck for the mitzvah of tzitzit raises some genuine difficulties:

- 1. Does one really fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit by wearing it around their necks?
- 2. What exactly is this action of עטוף 'wrapping' that David HaMelech refers to?

Let us first look into the background to this special mitzvah and then delve into the actual halacha. The Biblical commandment for a man to wear tzitzit on a four-cornered garment appears in two places in the Torah. The first is in p'rashat Shelah as follows:³

דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אלהם ועשו להם ציצית על כנפי בגדיהם לדרתם...

Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them that they shall make for themselves tzitzit on the corners of their garments...

^{1.} ילקוט שמעוני תהילים, סימן תשכג

^{2. &}quot;סנדק" מה שקוראים היום

^{3.} במדבר טו:לח

From the verse above it is evident that tzitzit must be worn on an item that is classified as a '**garment**'. The second place in Scripture we find the mitzvah is in p'rashat Ki Tetzei:⁴

2

גְּדָלִים תעשה לך על ארבע כנפות כסותך אשר תכסה בה

You shall make for yourself twisted threads on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself.

The above verse is more revealing. We are now informed that it is not sufficient to simply wear tzitzit on a four-cornered garment, but rather on a garment that one **'covers'** themselves with, i.e. to exclude a head-covering that is not used to cover the body. A custom was therefore established in Klal Yisrael to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit through wearing a well known garment that has been part of the Jewish man's identity since the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai - the **Talit**.

There are two types of Talitot; a Talit Gadol (Large Shawl) and a Talit Katan (Small Shawl). A **Talit Gadol** (שלית גדול) is worn for the morning prayer service, as well as on other special occasions and it differs from the Talit Katan, which is a smaller garment that is worn underneath our outer clothes. Both of these types of Talitot are worn in a manner that covers the body, or the upper body, since from the verses above it is evident that in order to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit one would have to **cover the body** with a Talit. We could therefore safely assume, at this stage of our analysis, that one does not fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit by wearing a Talit on their head or only around their neck. Our first question on the medrash by David HaMelech is even stronger now. Why did David HaMelech praise himself for the use of his neck to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit?!

The answer to this question actually lies in the second question we raised;

How is one supposed to 'wrap' themselves in a Talit? Many believe that the mitzvah of wearing a Talit is fulfilled by simply reciting the required blessing and then placing the Talit on top of one's shoulders and back. It may come as a surprise, however, to learn that the correct procedure of how to adorn and ultimately fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit, in the proper manner, depends on the view of the Sages of the Talmud and the Rishonim.⁵

^{4.} דברים כבייב

^{5.} The early halachic authorities

The whole essence of the debate is routed in the blessing for this mitzvah - **תתעטף בציצית** (*Lehit'atef B'tzitzit*) - 'to wrap in tzitzit', which is recited primarily for a Talit Gadol. The language of this b'racha clearly teaches that an action of **עטוף** - **'wrapping'** is required. We find the source of this b'racha first expressed in a Tosefta (a supplement to the Mishnah) from tractate B'rachot.⁶ It is then evident from the Talmud in tractate Succah⁷ that a specific procedure is required for wearing a Talit:

3

קטן היודע להתעטף חייב בציצת

A child who knows how to "wrap" is obligated in [the mitzvah of wearing] tzitzit.

The Talmud's ruling above is in the context of what age a father has to begin to teach his child how to perform the mitzvah of tzitzit and it implies that there is a skill in putting on a Talit. This mitzvah is clearly not fulfilled by simply placing the Talit onto one's shoulders, which a child of almost any age could do. **Tosefot**⁸ (Medieval commentator on the Talmud) infers the same and says that the reason an age restriction was given to determine when a father should teach his son about this mitzvah is because there is actually a skilled art in adorning a Talit Gadol.

So how is עטוף done exactly? The Talmud in tractate **Mo'ed Katan** discusses certain halachic requirements that are expected of a mourner (Heaven forbid). In the Talmudic period and possibly for some time thereafter, mourners were accustomed to wrap themselves with a shawl in a manner of עיטוף during the seven-day shiva period. Some people are also accustomed to do this whenever they recite תקון חצות *Tikkun Hatzot* and lament over the destruction of the Temple.⁹ The great Sages, Shmuel and Rav Nahman, come along and describe exactly what your means and how it is done:¹⁰

דאמר שמואל... וכל עטיפה שאינה כעטיפת ישמעאלים אינה עטיפה מחוי רב נחמן עד גובי דדיקנא

^{6. (}גרכות ס: ובמנחות מג) פ"ו ה' טו, וכמה מקומות בש"ס (ברכות ס: ובמנחות מג)

^{7. &#}x27;דף מב והוא תוספתא בחגיגה פ"א ג

^{8.} בערכין דף בי ד"ה היודע ועיין שם ביאור אחר בזה

^{9.} שעה"כ נח ע"ב והובא בבא"ח וישלח אות יא

^{10.} מועד קטן, דף כד

As Shmuel said; And any wrapping that is not like the wrapping of the Yishmaelites is not considered to be a wrapping. Rav Nahman demonstrated [this wrapping to be] up to the hollows of one's cheeks.

We now see that a Talit has to be adorned in a specific manner - like the wrapping of the Yishmaelites, which is otherwise known as עיטוף. This seems to be a wrapping of the head, as Rav Nahman demonstrates that one must wrap in a manner up to the cheeks. Rashi¹¹ (HaRav Shlomo Yitzchaki - medieval France, 1040 - 1105) clarifies further that עיטוף means the wrapping of the head just below the dimples of the cheeks. It is important to point out that if one wrapped their head in a Talit, their neck would automatically become wrapped in it! The medrash of David HaMelech is now much easier to understand. [As an aside - it is quite surprising to see the Sages of the Talmud define a halachic law according to the behaviour of our Yishmaelite brothers, who were the Arabs of that time. Nevertheless, it must have been necessary to draw on this comparison in order to clarify any conflicting opinions that were prevalent at the time.]

The opinion of the **Ge'onim** on this topic now enters the spotlight. The Ge'onim were the great Sages who lived in the period just after the Amora'im of the Talmud. They continued leading the famous Torah Institutions of Sura and Pumbedita - known as the region of Syria and Iraq today. They were accepted as the leaders of the Jewish community worldwide and their opinions on matters of Jewish law are highly revered and no doubt the foundations of the halachot we live by today.

The **Tur** (HaRav Yaakov ben Asher, Cologne - 1269 - 1343) records the opinion of the **Ge'onim** on the topic of how one is supposed to adorn a Talit Gadol:¹²

וסדר עטיפתו פירשו הגאונים כעטיפת ישמעאלים שהיא עטיפה גמורה

And the order of wrapping [the Talit Gaol] is explained by the Ge'onim [as being] like the wrapping of the Yishmaelites, which is a **complete wrapping**.

11. שם ד"ה גובי דיקנא 12. סימן ח The Ge'onim held that in order to fulfil the mitzvah of wearing tzitzit with a Talit Gadol one has to wrap themselves in a manner of **עטוף**, like the Yishmaelites. The **Beth Yosef** (Mar'an - HaRav Yosef Caro, 1488-1575) shows his reverence to the opinion of the Ge'onim by agreeing that the wrapping the Talmud refers to is indeed a **wrapping of the head**. Even till today, i.e. in Muslim countries, one can still witness tribal nomadic men wrapping themselves in their shawls and often their heads are covered as well.

Even though the Talmud gives us a clear definition of the meaning of עטוף, which has been explained by the Ge'onim, nevertheless we find that one of the early halachic authorities of 12th century France - the **Ba'al HaIttur** (Rabbenu Yitzchak ben Abba Mari -1122-1193) argues with the Ge'onim on this point. The **Tur** quotes the Ba'al HaItur below:¹³

ובעל העיטור כתב דלא בעינן כולי האי אלא כדרך בני אדם שמתכסין בכסותן ועוסקין במלאכתן פעמים בכיסוי הראש ופעמים בגילוי הראש.

And the Ba'al Haltur writes that all that is not necessary. Rather [one should generally wear it] in the way of people who cover themselves with their clothes and go about their work - sometimes with their heads covered and sometimes with their heads uncovered.

The Ba'al Haltur felt that it is not necessary for the Talit to be wrapped around the head. Rather, just a wrapping of the body is sufficient. One of the late Rishonim called the **Mahari Abuhav** (Harav Yitzhak da Fonseca of Portugal - 1443-1503) upheld the opinion of the Ba'al Haltur in this regard. His reason being that the Torah commanded us to wear tzitzit on our סטר (clothing) (as quoted above) and not as a head-covering.

The Ge'onim disagree, as they literally translate the word עטוף as also a covering of the head, as we explained from the Talmud in Mo'ed Katan. We also find **another proof** from tractate Mo'ed Katan that the wrapping of the Yishmaelites is in fact referring to a covering of the head:

5

שם.13

מהו בעטיפת הראשי ת"ש "ועל שפם יעטה"¹⁴ מכלל שחייב בעטיפת הראש.

What about the wrapping of the head? Come and learn, [as the verse says;] "And on their mouth they should wrap" From here we learn that there is an **obligation to wrap the head**.

The **Radvaz** (HaRav David ben Zimra - Spain, 1479 - 1573)¹⁵ sides with the Ge'onim in this regard. He says unequivocally that we should not rely on the Ba'al HaItur on this matter for two important reasons:

- a. All the words of the Ge'onim are based on teachings of **Kabbalah**, i.e. direct transmissions from the early Sages of the Talmud.
- b. From the **language of the b'racha** that was instituted for this mitzvah (להתעטף), it is clear one has to do a wrapping action (עטוף), otherwise the b'racha should have been established as להתכסות בציצית 'to **cover** with tzitzit.'¹⁶

It is interesting to find that Mar'an in the **Shulhan Aruch**¹⁷ initially rules according to the opinion of the Ba'al Haltur in which he says that covering the body is sufficient to fulfill this mitzvah. However, Mar'an then clarifies his opinion by adding that it is indeed **CCI** - **CCI to cover one's head as well** with the Talit, i.e. like the opinion of the Ge'onim. The essence of this debate is captured by the holy **Ben Ish Hai** (HaRav Yosef Ha'im - Baghdad, 1834 - 1909). The Ben Ish Hai makes a strong emphasis on the importance of putting on the Talit in the manner of **wrapping the head** <u>first</u> and not to practice the opinion of certain "wise-folk" who wrap their bodies in the Talit first:¹⁸ Here is the Ben Ish Hai's ruling on this halacha:

אחר סיום הברכה <u>תעטף בו ראשך בלבד,</u> ולא כאותם המתחכמים לעטף בו כל גופם מתחלה, דאין לנו אלא דברי רבנו האר"י ז"ל...

14. ויקרא יג 15. חלק א סי' שמג 16. חלק א סי שמג 16. וע"ש עוד שהוכיח ממדרש הנ"ל על דוד המלך ועוד כמה טעמים לפסוק כהגאונים 17. שם סע' ב 18. שם For those who are familiar with the works of the Ben Ish Hai one can easily notice a complete change in his style of writing in the halacha above. The Ben Ish Hai, as a rule, is always very respectful and sensitive to the opinions of other halachic authorities. This is one of the attributes that the Ben Ish Hai is greatly revered and respected for. However, in this case he takes a much harsher line with those who adorn the Talit Gadol by wrapping their bodies first. It is therefore clear that the Ben Ish Hai felt very strongly that such a custom goes against the teachings of the **Holy Ari z'l** and therefore against the halacha. The Ben Ish Hai's opinion is also the ruling of the **Hessed L'Alafim** (HaRav Eliezer Papo, Bulgaria - 1785–1828) who he often quotes in his writings.¹⁹

Again we find that in his sefer Torah L'Shma,²⁰ the Ben Ish Hai describes the importance of adorning the Talit Gadol according to the Yishmaelites by ensuring it is wrapped around one's neck (and ultimately the head as well). It is here that he quotes the medrash about David HaMelech, which we brought at the beginning of the essay :

כמה עניינים אשר לכאורה יחשוב האדם אותם מנהגים בעלמא והנה הם באמת צריכים ובכלל המצות הם והוא עטיפת הציצית כדרך עטיפת הישמעאלים שהוא עטיפה על הצואר וכמ"ש במאמר הנז' "בצוארי עטיפת ציצית" והן הן הדברים אשר הזהיר בהם רבינו מהרח"ו ז"ל בשם רבינו האר"י זצ"ל... גם רבינו סעדיה ז"ל כתב...

There are a number of practices which people consider to be merely customs, but behold in truth they are much needed and part of the actual [fulfillment] of the mitzvot. One of them is the wrapping of tzitzit in the manner of the Yishmaelites, which is a wrapping on the neck, as it is written [in Yalkut Tehillim that which King David said;] "With my neck - the wrapping of the tzitzit!"

And these are the exact words which our Rabbi - HaRav Haim Vital z'l warned in the name of our Rabbi - The Ari zt'l... and also our Rabbi - HaRav Sa'adia Gaon z'l...

19. סי' ח, אות ב 20. א"ח שאלה ט"ל

בס"ד

The opinion of the **Holy Ari z'l** (HaRav Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi, 1534 - 1572) on the order of איטון is recorded by his student and ultimate successor - **HaRav Ha'im Vital**, in several places in the holy sefer Sha'ar HaKavanot, which is the famous sefer that relays the Kabbalistic teachings of the Ari z'l. The table below lists the three places where the Ari z'l expresses clearly that one must wrap their head with a Talit first:

"When one wraps himself in Tzitzit and afterwards one should bring down the wrapping from the top of one's neck, and such was the custom of my teacher (The Ari) z'l" We see here that the Talit Gadol has to be taken down from the neck area, after it was wrapped, which is a clear proof that only the head was wrapped in it initially.	בעת שמתעטף בציצית ואח"כ יסיר העיטוף <u>מעל צוארו</u> וכך היה מנהגו של מורי (הארי) ז"ל	трт
"When a person wraps himself in a Talit he needs to hold the right hand side of the talit with its two tzitzit and throw them onto the left side around his throat onto the left shoulder and behind." Again we find that when detailing the procedure for putting a Talit Gadol on, the instruction is to cover oneself in a way that enables the neck to become wrapped first. This shows that the head must be wrapped first - before the body.	כשמתעטף האדם בטלית צריך שיאחוז בצד הימני של הטלית בשתי הציציות שבו וישליכםלצד שמאל סביב גרונו על הכתף השמאלי לאחור	דף ה
"And in the matter of the Talit Gadol, it is known the concept of wrapping one's head, which is not the case with a Talit Katan. However, my teacher (the Ari z'l) was accustomed to wrap his head specifically when he would wear a Talit Katan in the day, and afterwards he would remove it from his head and put his head through it and place it on his two shoulders downwards and onto his body" In the above quote the opinion of the Ari z'l regarding a Talit Gadol is clearly evident.	<u>ובענין הטלית גדול נודע ענין עטיפת הראש</u> מש'כ בטלית קטן אבל מורי ז'ל כשהיה לובש טלית קטן ביום היה נוהג לעטף בו את הראש ממש ואח"כ היה שומטו מעל ראשו ומכניס ראשו בתוכו ומורידו על שני כתפיו למטה על גופו	דף ז

8

In summary, the Ben Ish Hai gives us a step by step procedure of how one should adorn a Talit Gadol according to the opinion of the Ari z'l. His halachic ruling has been paraphrased in the summary table below:²¹

The Orde	The Order of Adorning a Talit Gadol According to the Ben Ish Hai		
Step 1	After reciting the b'racha you should wrap (לעטף) the Talit around your head only, in the following manner; Place the Talit on top of your head. The four corners of the talit should be allowed to hang down from your head onto your shoulders and in front of you; two corners on your right side and two corners on your left side.		
Step 2	You then take hold of the two corners that on your right side and throw them onto the left side of your back, in a manner that will enable the Talit to wrap around the front of your neck and onto the back of your left shoulder. Ensure the eyes and mouth are left exposed.		
Step 3	The two left-hand corners of the Talit should remain hanging in front of you for a few seconds (the amount of time it takes to walk 4 amot - 2 metres).		
Step 4	You then take hold of these two left-hand corners and also throw them onto your left shoulder in a manner that all four corners of the Talit are now on your back and over the left-hand side.		
Step 5	Remain in this position for a few seconds and then allow the Talit to fall from being on your head and wrapped around your neck onto the rest of the body and now you will be completely wrapped in it - both your head and your body together.		

It is well known that the Ari z'l was the leading authority in Kabbalah - who revealed the truths of the Torah under the direct auspices of his teacher - Eliyahu HaNavi. It would therefore be difficult to find another Rabbinic authority who would try to challenge his opinion. However, what we do find is that one later halachic authority, **HaRav Avraham Hayun** (late 18th century Solinica) tries to marry the opinion of the Ari z'l together with his own logic in the halacha. In his commentary on a sefer called **Shalmei Tzibur**, written by the great HaRav Yisrael Ya'akov Algazi (Solonica, 1680-1756),²²

^{22.} הג"ה בשלמי צבור, דיני ציצית דף עח

HaRav Avraham Hayun says that indeed a wrapping of the head is required - like the opinion of the Ge'onim. On the other hand he does not want to ignore the opinion of the Ba'al HaItur, as the verse we quoted earlier specifically refers to tzitzit as being adorned on Tole's garment, i.e. not a head-covering. He therefore reasons that if someone wrapped the Talit around his head only, he would not have completed the mitzvah fully until it covers the rest of his body. In order the avoid this 'gap' (*hefsek - corecover*) between the recital of the b'racha and the actualisation of the mitzvah, the HaRav Hayun rules that **one should wrap their head together with their body** with the Talit first, in order to fulfill the mitzvah and only then wrap the Talit around one's neck (and head). This is the exact opinion that the Ben Ish Hai was opposed to.

The truth is that HaRav Avraham Hayun's novelty on this subject does present some difficulties, for the following reasons:

- 1. The smallest measurement of what is an acceptable size for a Talit is 36 Godalim by 24 Godalim (72cm by 48 cm).²³ It would simply be **impossible** to wrap the head together with the body, at the same time, with such a small Talit! Nevertheless, we find that the Ari z'l used to recite the blessing of להתעטף (to wrap) on a Talit Katan and would then do an action of איטוף, but of his head only. According to HaRav Hayun's ruling one could never fulfil the mitzvah of tzitzit with the smallest Talit that is halachically acceptable!
- 2. HaRav Hayun claims that there would be an interruption between the b'racha and the fulfillment of the mitzvah if one wraps the head first and not together with the body. He therefore believes that there is no mitzvah fulfilled by wearing the Talit around one's neck, which is automatically wrapped when one covers the head. However, the Beth Yosef writes clearly²⁴ that a four-cornered סודר suddar (scarf) that is worn around the neck must have tzitzit attached to it!²⁵ So it is clear that the

^{23.} בא"ח לך לך אות יב

^{24.} סימן י

^{25.} בב"י סי' י כתב על סודר שנתון על הצואר שיש בו שיעור טלית ועוטף בו צוארו חייב בציצית ורק אם מניחים אתם על הצואר ללא עטיפה אלא דרך העלאה בעלמא פטורים, ומש"כ המ"א סי'ח אות ב בשם המ"ב איירי כשאינם מתעטפים סביב גרונם אלא העלאה גרידא ודלא כפי שהבין המחה"ש וממילא מש"כ המעשה ניסים (סי'ב) בדעת הבא"ח אינו

neck is an area of the body that fulfills the mitzvah of Talit Gadol. We have also proven from the writings of the Ari z'l, as well as the medrash from Yalkut Tehillim, that the neck is an important area for the fulfillment of wearing tzitzit.

Now that the halacha is clear, we may find ourselves asking an important question; What is all the fuss about?? Does it really *essentially* matter in what fashion we put on our Talitot? The answer to this fundamental question speaks to the **very core** of what it means to be a Jew.

We can try and answer it in the following way, b'ezrat Hashem...

The world we live in is the end result of a series of higher spiritual worlds that emanate from an Infinite Dimension, which we know as Hashem - the Almighty's Name. Every physical entity that exists in this world is connected to the upper worlds (and ultimately to Hashem) through an interconnecting chain of **spiritual pipelines**. It therefore follows that every action that we do down here, be it positive or negative, directly affects the higher spiritual realms, so to speak, in a way that we could not even begin to imagine. Our holy Torah and all its mitzvot contained therein is the unique **'key'** that enables us to tap into this spiritual network and utilise the bounty of blessings that Hashem has to offer us. By living our lives according to the Will of Hashem, even the most miniscule of actions can influence the ultimate Divine plan in a crucial way.

With this knowledge in mind we can genuinely start to appreciate why Judaism is filled with so many detailed halachic instructions and intricate procedures on how to perform the mitzvot of the Torah. Let us imagine the analogy of **a machine**; one cannot expect a machine to switch on and function without carefully adhering to the rules written in the instruction manual. Our world was created in a very similar fashion. In order to connect to our Creator and become holy vessels that are fitting to receive His blessings, we must **engage the physical** world according to the guidelines laid down for us by the Torah, as

מוכרח דלהנ"ל שפיר יכול להפסיק בפסוקים וכ"ש לענות דברים שבקדושה דע"י עיטוף הצואר כבר נתקיימה המצוה לכו"ע דהצואר הוי חלק מגופו ולא נתמעט מכסותך ולא כסות הראש. וע"ע ביב"א ח"ג סי' א מה שכתב הגאון הרב עובדיה יוסף שליט"א עוד טעם דלא חשיב הפסק לאחר התחלת העיטוף.

expressed in the Shulhan Aruch and other halachic works. This is the reason why we are meticulous in the way we observe the Torah and its mitzvot.

12

In order to bring this point to life here is a very small insight into the topic of our essay the mitzvah of tzitzit, which the Ben Ish Hai reveals to us according to the mystical teachings of the Holy Ari z'l. The Ben Ish Hai, in his introduction to the laws of tzitzit,²⁶ explains a remarkable reality inherent in the **spiritual mechanics** of the mitzvah of tzitzit. He says the following...

A four-cornered garment that has tzitzit attached to it possesses a special **spiritual aura** called an *hit called an Ohr HaMakif*, meaning "The Enveloping Light." When a man wears tzitzit this special primordial light envelopes his whole body and has the power to deflect negative spiritual forces! What is even more fascinating is that the wearing of tzitzit also helps preserve and enhance a person's **memory**, which is usually one of the first assets that is severely affected by negative spiritual energies that are created by a person's sins. We may be touching upon the deeper reason why the halacha requires us to wrap the head with the Talit first before the rest of the body ~ ?

We can now understand why this mitzvah and all other mitzvot in the Torah are given such specific guidelines to fulfil. For wrapped within these halachic rulings are promises and assurances that are ready to be showered upon us, which most of us are unaware of. From these words we can find the strength and courage to perform all of Hashem's precious mitzvot, confident in the knowledge that we can never lose out when we perform His holy commandments in the most meticulous and perfect way.

Rabbi Yosef Haim David

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26. בראשית