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Mishna

The *Mishna* says that the *techeiles* – blue wool (of the *tzitzis*) does not preclude the *lavan* – white wool strings, nor does the white preclude the blue. Similarly, the *tefillin* of the arm and the *tefillin* of the head are independent of each other. (38a)

Blue and White Strings

The *Gemora* suggests that the *Mishna’s* first statement follows Rebbe. The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*, in which Rebbe says that the verse which states *ur’isem oso* – and you shall see it [tzitzis] teaches that the two components (blue and white wool strings) are both necessary to fulfill the *mitzvah*. The Sages say that they are independent.

The *Gemora* explains that the verse first requires one to put *tzitzis* on *hakanaef* – the corner, referring to the white strings, which are similar to the (generally) white corner, and then requires one to put on the blue string. After listing both, the verse then says that one should see it. The singular form (“it”) indicates that both are considered one unit, and one needs both to fulfill the commandment. The Sages say that the singular form refers to each element individually, and teaches that one can fulfill the commandment with either one.

Since Rebbe says that one needs both types of strings to fulfill the commandment, this seems inconsistent with the *Mishna*, which says that each type is independent.

Rav Yehudah says in the name of Rav that the *Mishna* can be consistent with Rebbe, as it is only referring to the order of placing the strings, for it was taught in a *braisa* that one should place the white strings on the corner before the blue ones (as the verse first refers to the strings that are like the corner). However, if he placed the blue ones first, he fulfilled his obligation, but is missing a commandment.

The *Gemora* questions how Rebbe would understand the phrase, “missing a commandment.” It cannot mean that he missed the commandment of the white strings, but only fulfilled the one of blue, since Rebbe says that they aren’t independent. Rather, Rav Yehudah quotes Rav saying that the *braisa* means that he fulfilled the commandment, but missed one, i.e., he didn’t fulfill the commandment optimally.

The *Gemora* says that this explains how Rebbe would be consistent with the second clause of the *Mishna*, as it means that omitting the white strings first does not preclude fulfilling the commandment by putting the blue ones first instead. However, how would Rebbe be consistent with the first clause?

Rami bar Chama suggests that it refers to a blue garment, where the blue strings are the ones similar to the corner.

The *Gemora* supports this reading by relating a dialogue between Levi and Shmuel. Levi told Shmuel that he should not rest until he explained what the two clauses of the *Mishna* mean. Shmuel said that the *Mishna* is referring to a white garment, on which one should begin with white

strings. The *Mishna* is teaching that omitting the white strings first does not preclude fulfilling the commandment by putting the blue ones first instead.

The *Gemora* again asks how we would explain the first clause, and Rami bar Chama answers that it is referring to a blue garment.

Rava challenges this answer, since the verse which refers to *tzitzis* on the corner is referring to white, even on a blue garment, since most garments are white. Therefore, even on a blue garment, one should place the white strings first.

Rather, Rava says that the *Mishna* is referring to strings that were severed. The *Mishna* is teaching that if either the white or blue strings were severed and only stubs remained, the *tzitzis* are still valid with the remaining stubs. Similarly, Rabbi Chiya's sons say that stubs of *tzitzis* are valid, and the stubs of the hyssop used for sprinkling the ashes of the red heifer are valid.

Bar Hamduri quotes Shmuel saying that the amount that remain must be enough to tie them into a bow.

The *Gemora* inquires whether this means tying each one individually (*less*) or tying them together (*more*), and leaves this unresolved.

Rav Ashi asks how we measure the stubs of thick strings. Do we require that the stubs be long enough to tie them at their thickness, or just long enough that one could have tied them if they were thinner?

Rav Acha the son of Rava answered that their thickness, which beautifies the *mitzvah*, is not a reason to make them less valid. Therefore, as long as there is enough to tie them, if they had been thinner, they are valid.

The *Gemora* identifies the opinion that differs with Rebbe as that of Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri. The *braisa* cites Rabbi

Yitzchak in the name of Rabbi Nassan in the name of Rabbi Yossi HaGelili in the name of Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri saying that if one has no blue strings, he places white ones. (38a – 38b)

Tying Knots

Rava says that from the statement of Rabbi Chiya's sons, validating the stubs of *tzitzis*, we can learn that one must tie a knot on each section of winding the strings. [*Each fringe on the four corners is in part wound around with thread, which is referred to as "gedil," and in part hangs loose, which is called "pesil." After the threads have been inserted into the hole at the corner of the garment and folded over into eight strands, they are knotted together. Then, one thread is taken and wound around the others, and after several windings a knot is made and then the windings begin over again. Each series of windings – braids, is called a "chulya." After each of the braids are completed, a knot is made to prevent the windings from unraveling.*] If one would not tie a knot (*between each of the braids*), once a string was severed, all the windings would come undone, and could not be counted as valid.

The *Gemora* deflects this, as one may not be *obligated* to tie a knot, but Rabbi Chiya's sons were referring to a case where one *did* tie a knot. (38b – 39a)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Blue and/or White?

The *Gemora* cites the dispute between Rebbe and the Sages about whether the blue and white strings of the *tzitzis* are independent parts of the commandment. Rebbe says that both are necessary, while the Sages say they are independent.

Although the Ba'al Hama'or (Shabbos Rif 12a) rules like Rebbe, all other Rishonim (Rambam, Tosfos, Rosh, Rif) rule

like the Sages, but debate what their exact position is.

Rashi and Tosfos both say that the Torah mandates two strings of blue and two of white, doubled over into a total of eight. Rashi explains that the Sages say that if one only has one of the types (blue or white), instead of placing four strings, half blue and half white, he places all four strings from the color he has.

Tosfos (38a hatecheiles) notes that the *Mishna* continues with the case of *tefillin*, stating that the head and hand *tefillin* are independent. In the case of *tefillin*, the *Mishna* clearly is stating that one may fulfill one without the other. Therefore, to be parallel, it would seem that the *Mishna* means that one may place only the white or blue strings, if he only has one type, but not that he should fill in the missing strings.

Tosfos ultimately agrees with Rashi, citing numerous proofs to this position. In the course of the discussion, Tosfos introduces two possible positions on the number of strings:

1. There is no upper limit. Just as the verse refers to *arvei nachal* – willows of the stream, which means at least two, yet we rule that one may add as many as he wants, so the number of strings mandated by the Torah for *tzitzis* is a minimum.
2. When only using white, one may put a minimum of two, until a maximum of four.

See Tur (OH 11) who cites various opinions on how many strings one may place for *tzitzis*.

The Rashba (Responso 1:468) explicitly states that one may not place any more than the mandated amount, which is four strings doubled over on each corner.

The Rambam says that only one of the eight strings (i.e., only half of one of the original four) must be blue, and it is used to wind around the others. Therefore, if one has no blue, he simply uses four full strings of white, using one of the white strings to wind around the others.

Leftovers

Rava says that the *Mishna* (according to Rebbe) is referring to the remnants of the strings, as if the blue is severed, leaving only the white, or vice versa, it is still valid. Rava cites the sons of Rabbi Chiya, who say that the remnants of the blue of *tzitzis*, and the remnants of the hyssop used to sprinkle the ashes of the red heifer, are valid, even though they are less than what would have been needed initially. Rava and the sons of Rabbi Chiya do not seem to be saying the same thing.

The Rishonim debate the details of this *halachah*. Tosfos (38b el) and the Rosh (7) cites those who say that the concept of *tzitzis* being valid based on remnants is only according to Rebbe, as it is cited as a way of explaining the *Mishna* to be consistent with Rebbe. They reject this, and discuss how this ruling applies to the Sages.

Tosfos offers the following options to read the *Gemora*:

1. Rava is indeed explaining how Rebbe will read the *Mishna*. Since Rebbe says that the blue and white are both essential, if one is totally severed, the other remaining one makes the *tzitzis* valid. The sons of Rabbi Chiya are discussing a case where all are severed, but still have enough to tie a bow, and teach that these remnants make the *tzitzis* valid. Rava cites them as a proof that the threshold for *tzitzis* being valid after they are tied is lower than when they are being tied. We rule like the sons of Rabbi Chiya, whose statement is also according to the Sages. Therefore, even if all strings are severed, as long as there is enough to tie a bow, it is valid. (Ri)
2. Rava is stating that if either the blue or white strings have only remnants, the *tzitzis* are still valid. However, if neither type is intact, the *tzitzis* are invalid. The sons of Rabbi Chiya teach that *remnants* are valid, and the *Gemora* learns that this means that a minimum amount is necessary (enough to tie a bow). This is another condition in the strings that

have been severed, not a different case. According to the Sages, who allow one to substitute white for blue, we consider two of the four strings to be in place of blue, and two to be for white. Therefore, to be valid, one set of strings (i.e., two out of four strings) must be intact, while the severed ones must have remnants, i.e., enough to tie a bow. According to Rebbe, even if the two were severed completely, it is still valid, by the presence of the other two. (Rabbenu Tam)

Rashi rules that the size of the remnant is measured from the hanging part of the strings, while Tosfos (38b kdai) says that it is measured from the first knot.

See the Bais Yosef (OH 12) and Kesef Mishneh (*Tzitzis* 1:4,18) for a thorough discussion of the Rambam's position on the question of *tzitzis* remnants.

The Shulchan Aruch (OH 12) cites both positions, and rules like the first, but says that one should be careful and follow the second. See the Shulchan Aruch and the commentators for a fuller discussion of what these positions mean in terms of how many of the eight strings hanging from the *tzitzis* may be severed. The Shulchan Aruch rules like Rashi regarding the starting point of the remnants, but says one can rely on Tosfos in situations where it is difficult to find strings.

Remnants of a Lulav, Shofar and Tzitzis

The leaders of the generations tried to understand the difference between the *mitzvah* of the *shofar* and the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. Everyone agrees that their *halachos* differ but the question is why, as follows.

When purifying a person who is *tamei meis* one must sprinkle him with water mixed with ashes of the *parah adumah* by means of a bunch of hyssop branches, which must have a certain size. Our *Gemora* explains that even after sprinkling

someone with a hyssop, if parts fell off it and it no longer has the proper size, it may be used for sprinkling: “the remnants of a hyssop are kosher”. Also, cords of *tzitzis* on a garment that had the proper length and snapped are kosher: “the remnants of *tzitzis* are kosher”. The *Gemora* suggests that straps of *tefillin* that were severed are also kosher, but dismisses it because “they are for holy usage” in contrast to *tzitzis* that are for “*mitzvah* usage”. We thus have a rule that one can continue using an object which was fit for its *mitzvah* but which became smaller.

This *Gemora* presents us with a tremendous question. We know that a *lulav* less than four handbreadths long is disqualified (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 650) and the same applies to a *shofar* which is less than four thumbbreadths long. We have never heard that a tall *lulav* that was shortened to two handbreadths should be kosher or that a *shofar* a meter long that was drastically shortened should be kosher. Apparently, in the light of the rule explained in our *sugya*, that “the remnants of a *mitzvah* are kosher”, we must understand why a *lulav* or a *shofar* differ from a hyssop and *tzitzis*. There must be an essential distinction between a hyssop and *tzitzis*, on the one hand, and a *lulav* and *shofar*, on the other hand, which will clarify the difference between them.

Hagaon Rav Shlomoh Kluger zt”l asked this question, and the Chasam Sofer zt”l (Responsa, Y.D. §256) answered as follows. The cords of the *tzitzis* must be **woven for their *mitzvah***. On the other hand, a *shofar* or a *lulav* are kosher for their *mitzvah* as they are, and need not be made for a *mitzvah*. Therefore, the dedication for the *mitzvah* when *tzitzis* are properly made does not leave them but becomes an inseparable part of them though they become shortened. But a *lulav* or a *shofar* are not made for the sake of a *mitzvah* and once their size is lessened, they are no longer fit to be a *lulav* or a *shofar*.

Still, this explanation does not suffice to understand the difference between a hyssop and a *lulav* as there is no need for a hyssop to be made for the sake of its *mitzvah*. Indeed,

the Chasam Sofer zt"l faced this puzzle (see *ibid* what he wrote as a possible explanation) but he concludes: "...and let someone whose mind is broader than mine tell us a proper solution and we shall receive it with love."

The author of *Or Sameiach (Hilchos Lulav, 7:8)* addresses the rule of "the remnants of a *mitzvah* are kosher" from a completely different viewpoint and found another difference between a *lulav*, a hyssop and *tzitzis*. In his opinion, the rule of "the remnants of a *mitzvah* are kosher" applies to objects with which a *mitzvah* was fulfilled properly and a new obligation of the same *mitzvah* occurs **after** the object became a *mitzvah*-remnant. However, a *mitzvah* whose obligation occurred before the object became a remnant must be observed only with an object of the proper size.

Therefore, we can detect a sharp distinction between the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* and the *mitzvah* of the *lulav*. On the morning of Sukkos, everyone becomes personally obligated with the *mitzvah* of the *lulav*, a *mitzvah* observed in one moment. If one person takes up a *lulav* at sunrise and another takes it up before sunset, both have observed the obligation they incurred with the arrival of morning – to take up the *lulav* one time. However, *tzitzis* is different: it is not an obligation from which one becomes exempt upon its performance as the *mitzvah* renews itself at every moment. [*Tefillin* are likewise; remnants would therefore be kosher if not for the straps being "holy usage"] A person who dons *tzitzis* at seven in the morning and another who puts them on in the afternoon do not observe the same obligation – one observed the obligation of that time and the other observed the obligation of another time. We thus understand that if someone puts on *tzitzis* in the morning and they later become "remnants", he may continue to wear them as a renewed obligation occurred when they became remnants. The remnants once kosher remain kosher for the next day. However, someone who wants to take up a *lulav* in the afternoon that was kosher in the morning and served its *mitzvah* may not do so as he is only now observing the obligation he incurred in the morning and at that time the

lulav could not be a remnant as no one had fulfilled today's *mitzvah* with it. (Yesterday's *mitzvah* is a different one, see *ibid*). Sprinkling with a hyssop, in contrast, is not a personal obligation but a *taharah* procedure that begins for each individual at the time of sprinkling. When it breaks after one sprinkling it becomes a *mitzvah* remnant for another (see *Chazon Yechezkel, Sukkah, Ch. 5, halachah 9*, who devotes a long discussion to this halachah).