The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
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סימן י"א סעיף י"ב-י"ד

Overview

Siman 11 Seif 12:

The number of threads in every corner is four. Those four threads are folded in the corner and become eight. If one added additional strings the *tzitzis* become invalid. One should cut the thread into four pieces before inserting them into the hole.

- There is a disagreement whether extra threads, in fact, violate *bal tosif* so if one cannot remove the extra thread it may be worn with the extra thread but the extra thread must be removed as soon as possible. (M.B. 60)
- The thread should be cut with one's teeth rather than with a knife. (M.B. 61)

Siman 11 Seif 13:

One must be careful to cut the threads to make them eight strings before any windings. If one did even one set of windings followed by even a single knot and then cut the strings, the *tzitzis* are invalid.

- Regarding a case in which one did not cut the strings before the windings, if one did not tie the knot after the wrappings it is considered as though nothing was done and it is permitted to cut the *tzitzis*. (M.B. 64)

Siman 11 Seif 14:

The two sets of four strings are tied with a double knot. The long string is wound around the other seven a few times and then another double knot is tied. Additional windings followed by double knots are added until one has five double knots with windings in between. There is no specific number of windings that are required but the length of the knots and windings should altogether be four *godlim* and the remaining length of the strings should be an additional eight *godlim*. If the strings are longer one should maintain the ratio of one-third knots and windings and two-thirds hanging string. **The custom is to have seven windings in the first section, nine in the second section, eleven in the third section and thirteen in the fourth section. Added together the number of windings is thirty-nine plus one for Hashem equaling forty which is the numerical value of the words *Hashem echad*. There is a custom to tie the end of each string to assure that they do not unravel.**

- Biblically, three windings and a single knot suffices for *tzitzis* and one may rely on this, for example on Erev Shabbos if there is not time to do all the windings and knots, although even in this circumstance it is preferable to tie a knot before the windings as well. Immediately after Shabbos one should complete the remaining windings and knots. (M.B. 66)
- The ratio of four *godlim* of windings and knots and eight *godlim* of hanging string is a *l'chatchila* requirement. (M.B. 67)
- It is a beautification of the *tzitzis* if each set of windings is the same length so the first windings should be distant from one another and get progressively closer with each additional set. (M.B. 68)
- Sha'ar Kavanos writes that the second series should have eight windings rather than nine. (M.B. 70)
- It is best to obtain string that is not too thick and not too thin. (M.B. 71)

Halacha Highlights

Cutting *tzitzis* strings

Mishnah Berurah Siman 11 Seif Koton 61

ויש לחתכם בשניו ולא בסכין

And one should cut them with his teeth and not with a knife

Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק ס"א) writes that one should cut the strings of his *tzitzis* with his teeth rather than with a knife. The source of this is Magen Avrohom (ס"ק י"ח) who writes in the name of earlier authorities that the total number of strings on a *talis* is thirty-two which corresponds to the thirty-two teeth in a person's mouth. For this reason Kaf HaChaim (ס"ק י"ז) notes that *tzitzis* is a *segulah* that one should not suffer from toothaches. The reason to avoid using a knife to cut *tzitzis* is based on Chazal's indication that *tzitzis* has the ability to lengthen one's days (See Shabbos 32b). Consequently, one should not use iron since iron is used to shorten a person's life. This is similar to the restriction against using iron in making the altar which the Mishnah in Midos (3:4) explains is that it is improper to use something designed to shorten a person's life with something designed to lengthen a person's life (ע' שו"ע הרב סע' כ"ד).

There is a disagreement amongst the Poskim whether one should avoid using a knife to even out the length of the *tzitzis* after all the windings and knots are completed. Kaf HaChaim (ס"ק י"ז) writes that restriction against using a knife applies even after the *tzitzis* are completed. Sefer Bais Baruch on the Chaye Adam (בית ברוך על חיי"א כלל י"א ס"ק קכ"א), however, writes that if one wants to shorten his *tzitzis* because they are too long or if his *tzitzis* become disqualified and he wants to remove them altogether and it is difficult for him to cut the strings with his teeth it is acceptable to use a knife. His rationale is that the restriction applies primarily to making the *tzitzis*. In the event that it is difficult for one to cut the strings with his teeth one may use a knife made from a material other than iron or plastic (ע' פסקי תשובות אות כ"ט).

Stories to Share

Hashem's Ineffable Name

ש"ע ס' י"א, י"ד: "עד שישלים לחמש קשרים...כמנין ה' אחד"

When a certain rav was learning hilchos tzitzis he was astounded by the implications of a very practical halachah on today's amud. "Since the prevalent custom of many is to wrap the tzitzis a total of twenty-six times which is the gematria of Hashem's ineffable Name, it is obviously forbidden to cut the tzitzis. After all, if he does cut them, won't he be erasing Hashem's Name? What is the difference if the Name is written or symbolized by how we wrap the tzitzis?"

But the Mahari Ayish, zt"l, rejected this out of hand. "It is absolutely unfounded to forbid cutting the tzitzis on account of erasing Hashem's Name. This prohibition does not extent to anything other than what we find explicitly laid out in Shas and poskim."

שו"ת בית יהודה, או"ח, ס' כ"ד

Rashi and Tosefos explain that the word tzitzis itself has a numerical value of six hundred. If we add the eight strings we come to six hundred and eight. In order to remind us that tzitzis is equal to all six hundred and thirteen mitzvos we make specifically five double-knots to complete the sum of six hundred and thirteen. In this way, we are supposed to remember that tzitzis are equal to the six hundred and thirteen commandments and they lead us to do them.

Rav Sternbuch, shlit"a, points out that it is therefore strange that this important concept is not included in the l'shem yichud we say before putting on our tallis every morning. He concludes that this is discussed in many sources, but a satisfactory reason is not forthcoming. He therefore added to his siddur before the blessing, "I am focusing on fulfilling the commandment of tzitzis by seeing them and being reminded of all the mitzvos to fulfill them. As the Creator, blessed is His Name, commanded, as it says, 'And you will see them and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and do them. May it be Your will, Hashem my G-d and the G-d of my fathers, that you grant me the merit to fulfill and uphold all Your mitzvos as You desire. Blessed is His name!"

תשובות והנהגות, ח"א, ס' כ"ג