



Parshat Shlach – There's No Place Like Home

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We are taught in this week's parsha, Shlach, about the law of wearing tzitzit (fringes) on the corners of our garments. This law follows the story of Moses sending twelve spies into the land of Canaan. The connection of these two parts is based on our understanding of a **home** and the need for protection in our **home**.

A few months ago, as I was preparing for morning services, I noticed that one of the tzitzit (the corner fringes) on my tallit was frayed. Wearing a tallit without the proper tzitzit would not allow me to fulfill the mitzvah correctly.

Luckily, I have two tallitot and though my second one is generally only used on Holidays and Shabbat, I knew that I could wear it until my daily one was repaired.

My everyday tallit is one that I bought when I was in High School, in Israel. This was not the first time that I had to repair the tzitzit, but took pride knowing that it was a mitzvah that I would be able to do myself.

There is a story that is told of a man who wanted very much to experience all of the best things that the world had to offer. He found the best scotch, the best cigars, had the fanciest carriage, ate in the fanciest restaurants and heard that in the highest point of the city lived the most beautiful woman ever to live. Wanting to experience the very best that the world had to offer, he went to visit this woman in order to enjoy her company. Not only did this woman live on the highest mountain of the city, but she lived on the top floor of an apartment building that had no elevator. On a mission, the man began to climb the stairs. As he climbed, the tzitzit that he wore under his clothes began to hit him in the knees and fly up into his face. Looking down at his tzitzit, he was reminded of the 613 mitzvot (the strings are tied in such a way that when you add up the number of knots, strings, and gematria for the word tzitzit, the total is 613) and decided to turn back and go **home**.

My holiday and Shabbat tallit was given to me by my wife, Jessica, before our wedding eight years ago. The first time that it was used was as our Chuppah (our wedding canopy). The tallit and tzitzit serve separate purposes, yet a tallit without tzitzit is merely a garment and without a tallit we would have nowhere to tie our tzitzit.

As children we might have found that protection in a blankie or in the warm embrace of a parent. To me, the tallit represents God. When we wrap ourselves in it, it is as if we are wrapping ourselves in God. When we stand under it (at our wedding) it acts as our first **home** and symbolizes protection.

In this week's parsha, Shlach, Moshe is preparing the Jewish people to enter into our first **home** (at that point the land was called Canaan, today Israel).

Prior to entering into the land, Moshe sends twelve spies (one for each tribe) into the land, in order to report what B'nai Yisrael can expect when they enter the land. Of the twelve spies who enter the land, only two (Calev ben Yefune and Yehoshua bin Nun), return with a positive report. The other ten spies report that there are giants in the land and that it would be impossible to conquer. It was because of this report that the Jews are forced to wander the land for 40 years.

This week's Haftorah comes from the book of Joshua (which, in the Tanakh comes directly after the Torah – at the end of the 40 years of wandering). It begins with the story of spies, again going into the land to report how to prepare for conquering the land. Only two spies are sent this time, who are, according to commentary, Calev and Pinchas (Yehoshua at this point was the leader of the Jewish people). While in the land, the two spies were forced to hide in the **home** of Rachav, a harlot (as translated by the Etz Chayim Chumash). Rachav hides the spies and lies to the leaders of the city who knew that they had been infiltrated. She keeps the spies safe in her **home**. In order to repay Rachav, the spies agree to save her when the Israelites conquer Canaan. In order to be saved, Rachav needed to put a string marker on her **home**. This string marker would provide protection for her and her father's **homes**.

We put Mezzuzot, markers on our doorposts to protect our **homes**, to remind us that through our deeds our **home** is protected. A tallit protects us individually. Its symbolism allows us to feel that we are always surrounded by a **home**. It is the unconditional embrace of God (much like the embrace of a parent) that gives us our protection. The tzitzit remind us that though we are protected, we have to live up to our end of the covenant (by doing the Mitzvot). The tallit is a regular reminder (for some it is worn only during prayer times, for others, they wear it throughout the day underneath their clothing). It is something that we take with us no matter where we go and ties us to mitzvot, to God's unconditional love and to our responsibilities.

AS A FAMILY:

- Design a Tallit that each member of the family can wear at their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Tie the strings together as a family.
- Wrap the entire family in a Tallit and sit together to learn about the Parsha.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. Whose name is changed in the beginning of the Parsha? Why? To what was it changed?
2. How long were the spies gone? What did they report?
3. What happened to the ten spies who gave the false report?
4. What mitzvah regarding Challah is given in this Parsha?
5. Which of the Ten Commandments is broken? What happened to the man who broke the Commandment?
6. What is Tekhelet? What does it represent? Why doesn't everyone use it today?