

A week ago Sunday, Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe mentioned a halakhic position I had been, so far as I could tell, wholly unaware of, namely that the strings should be tied around the side of the tallit, rather than straight down, so that they would “fall on the corner”. I felt worse when I realized that this position was apparently cited in Shulhan Arukh OC 11:15, although I recovered slightly when a random sampling of my rabbinic colleagues showed that my ignorance was widely shared. To my knowledge, I have not seen a commercial tallit or tallit katan which came with its tzitzit so arranged, and I’d like to hear from readers if they have other experiences.

The history of this issue turns out to be quite fascinating, and I hope to write about it extensively – in the short run, however, I don’t believe that anyone needs to alter their practice. This week, however, I want to focus on a striking methodological argument made by the BACH, R. Yoel Sirkes, in his treatment of this issue.¹

Rabbi Sirkes is discussing the position of Baal HaIttur, as cited by MaharI Abohav, as cited by Beit Yosef, which sets out as its primary position that a statement in the Sifre invalidates what was in his day the standard method of tying tzitzit. The literal translation of Sifre is

“on the *keren* (corner) is invalid,
as Scripture writes ‘on the four *kanfot* (corners)’ – four but not eight.”

Baal HaIttur, says MaharI Abohav, asserts that the Sifre would consider the standard method invalid because it produces

“eight *tzitzit* on the *tallit*,
as to whichever side one flips the *tallit*, we can use these *tzitzit*,
so it is as if there are eight *tzitzit* present”.

However, Baal HaIttur then suggests that the contemporary method can be justified if one interprets the Sifre differently. In this interpretation Sifrei invalidates tzitzit that are

“tied on the *kanaf ba’alakhson*,
so that the *tzitzit* can be seen as for this *kanaf* or for that *kanaf*,
so it is as if there are two *kanfot*.”

All the above is within Beit Yosef’s presentation of MaharI Abohav’s presentation of Baal HaIttur. Bach, however, argues that this presentation of Baal HaIttur’s initial reading has Baal HaIttur reaching an unwarranted conclusion from the Sifrei; he therefore suggests a different way in which Baal HaIttur might have invalidated the standard method on the basis of the Sifrei. But then – and this is our focus - he argues that Baal HaIttur must not have intended to invalidate the standard method completely, but rather only suggest that it not be adopted ab initio. Certainly Baal HaIttur did not intend to prohibit making a blessing over tzitzit tied via the standard method.

Bach does not base his argument on the presumption that contemporary practice is correct; if that were the case, he would simply adopt Baal HaIttur’s second reading. Rather, he claims that Baal HaIttur cannot intend to provide two mutually exclusive readings such that one who seeks to be meticulously observant cannot find a way of satisfying all positions.

¹ The original text is attached and translated, although my understanding of the substance is limited, and I welcome suggestions and corrections; it is also possible that my understanding of the form of the argument is colored by a misunderstanding of the substance.

Rabbi Mayer Schiller wrote an article years ago in a YU journal – I believe it was *Bein Kolteli HaYeshiva* – setting out what he saw as mutually exclusive positions regarding Kiddush Levanah, and using that to argue against the notion of always playing it safe religiously, and I regularly make a similar argument for the ineluctability of religious risk on the basis of the conflicting Tosafistic definitions of learning Torah not *lishmoh* (the audio of that shiur is [here](#)).

But it seems that BACH disagrees, and believes that it would be unjust to allow such situations to exist within Halakhah.- and that this should be so obvious to all, that one can reject the straightforward interpretation of a precedent on the ground that it would create such a situation. Now this strikes me as peculiar – true, Baal HaIttur might prevent himself from suggesting two approaches that combine for this effect, but if he suggested one, how could he prevent someone else from suggesting the other? By suggesting the first, is he precluding anyone from suggesting the second, even if they see the second as the most likely interpretation? In other words, does the necessity of letting there always be a religiously safe way to practice halakhah trump the ideal of determining the true Halakhah?

I stand by my own position that avoidance of risk is not the ultimate purpose of Halakhah. But I think it is certainly sociologically correct that many people are attracted to an observance spelled out in fine detail by its promise of security, and at the least BACH can serve as a reminder that poskim have a pastoral responsibility to account for their religious motivations.

Shabbat shalom!

Aryeh Klapper

P.S. Many thanks to those who have responded generously to our Shavuot letter – please join them if you haven't already!

ב"ה אורח חיים סימן יא

1. הבית יוסף הביא בסוף סימן זה (עמ' מט ד"ה כתב) מה שכתב מהר"י אבוהב בשם בעל העיטור
2. דבספרי איתא
3. דעל הקרן פסולה
4. משום דכתיב "על ארבע כנפות" - ארבע ולא שמנה
5. ולפיכך פסל כל ציציות שלנו
6. לפי שיש בטלית שמנה ציציות.
7. שהרי לכל צד שתהפוך הטלית אנו יכולים להשתמש באלו הציציות
8. והרי הוא כאילו היו בכאן שמנה ציציות עכ"ל
9. נראה דרצונו לומר
10. דבין שתלבוש הטלית כדרכו ובין שתהפוך הפנימי לחוץ לכל צד שתהפוך הטלית
11. יכול להשתמש באלו הציציות
12. שיהיו נוטפים על הקרן לכל צד
13. והרי הוא כאילו היו שמנה ציציות
14. אי נמי הכי קאמר
15. דלכל צד משני צדי הכנף שתהפוך הציציות בטלית
16. אנו יכולים להשתמש באלו הציציות וכו'
17. ואמר דשלנו פסולים
18. אבל כשנעשה שתי נקבים בטלית ונטיל הציציות בתוכה ונוציא אותם לצד אחד
19. אז לא יהיו נוטפים על הקרן
20. אלא יוצאין מצד אחד מן כנף הטלית
21. כענף היוצא מן הבד
22. אבל מצד השני אין שם ציצית כלל
23. וכתב עוד
24. שיש ליישב המנהג שלנו
25. שנפרש הא דאמר בספרי על הקרן פסולה משום ארבע ולא שמנה
26. היינו דוקא כשנותן הציצית על הכנף באלכסון
27. שהציצית נראה שהוא לכנף זה ולכנף זה
28. והוה ליה כשתי כנפות עכ"ד
29. וכן מצאתי על שם תוספות אלפסי
30. שחזר בו מהר"ם
31. ואמר שהכל קרוי נוטף על הקרן
32. ולא אימעוט אלא שלא יהא הציצית נקשרים באלכסון כזה
33. עכ"ל מהרש"ל בחדושו לטור
34. והיינו דקאמר בספרי דעל הקרן פירוש באלכסון פסולה
35. משום ארבע ולא שמנה.
36. ונראה
37. דמה שכתב שלא יהיו הציציות נקשרים באלכסון
38. רצונו לומר שלא יעשה שני נקבים בכנף
39. אחד למעלה בתוך שלש ואחד למטה בסוף הקרן
40. ונטיל הציצית בנקב שלמעלה בתוך שלש ואח"כ נטיל ראשי הציצית בתוך הנקב למטה
41. אותן שהן בצד פנים ישים אותם בנקב למטה שיהיו תלויין לחוץ
42. ואותן שהן בצד חוץ ישים אותן בנקב למטה שיהיו תלויין לפנים
43. דבאופן זה הם נקשרים באלכסון
44. ואינן זזין ממקומן
45. דהוה ליה שמנה

46. ארבע לכנף זה וארבע לכנף זה:
47. ואיכא לתמוה על מה שפסל בעל העיטור כל ציציות שלנו מכח הספרי שאמר ארבע ולא שמנה
48. דמאין למד לומר דציציות שלנו לפי שיכולין להפכן לכל צד משני צדי הכנף שיהא זה חשוב כאילו
היו שם שני ציצית,
49. ונמצא לארבע כנפים שמנה ציצית, וארבע ולא שמנה קאמר קרא
50. דכל זה דחוק ורחוק
51. דהלא אין כאן אלא ארבע ציצית על ארבע כנפות ולא יותר
52. ועוד
53. דקרא קאמר ארבע כנפות כסותך
54. והספרי דורש ארבע ציצית ולא שמנה ציצית
55. ולכן נראה דהספרי הכי קאמר
56. דאע"פ דלכל כנף איכא שני צדדים
57. אחד למטה לצד הארץ ואחד לצד הכנף
58. והתורה אמרה גדילים תעשה לך על ארבע כנפות כסותך
59. דמשמע דלכל צד משני צדי הכנף יעשה גדילים גדיל אחד לכל צד וצד
60. וא"כ יהיו שמנה גדילים
61. על כל כנף וכנף שני גדילים
62. גדיל אחד מצד אחד קבוע בשני נקבים
63. נקב אחד בתוך שלשה למעלה ונקב אחד למטה בסוף הקרן
64. וכן בצד השני, וכן בכל אחד מהכנפים הארבע
65. ויהיו שמנה גדילים
66. ואמר הספרי דהא ליתא
67. דא"כ לימא קרא איפכא על ארבע כנפות כסותך תעשה לך גדילים
68. מדלא קאמר קרא הכי אלא אמר גדילים תעשה לך על ארבע וגו'
69. דרשינן דארבע קאי נמי אגדילים
70. ואתא קרא לאורויי דלא יעשה אלא ארבע גדילים ולא שמנה
71. כאילו אמר גדילים תעשה לך ארבע על ארבע כנפות כסותך
72. ודכותה דרשינן (ע"י ספרי כי תצא רפז) קרא דלא תחסום שור בדישו (דברים כה ד)
73. מדלא כתב איפכא שור לא תחסום בדישו
74. אלמא דלא תחסום מכל מקום קאמר
75. וכן קראי טובא דרשינן הכי
76. והשתא לפי זה לא פסל הספרי מהך דרשא אלא בעושה שמנה גדילים ממש, שני גדילים לכל כנף
77. אבל ציצית שלנו שאין בהם אלא ארבע גדילים ולא יותר ודאי דכשרים
78. ולא חיישינן למה שמתהפכין בטלית לכל צד
79. דמכח ההיפוך לא נעשין שמנה
80. אלא דמכל מקום סבירא ליה לבעל העיטור דכיון דהספרי פוסל שמנה גדילים ממש
81. אם כן הני ציצית דמתהפכין לכל צד נמי יש לפוסלן לפי שנראין כאילו היו בכאן שמנה ציצית
82. ולפסול לכתחלה קאמר שאין לעשותן כך
83. אבל מודה ודאי דאם נעשו כך בטלית דכשר לברך עליהן
84. ודלא כנראה ממה שכתב מהר"י אבוהב הביאו בית יוסף דבעל העיטור פוסל ציצית שלנו מן הדין
85. דלפי זה ליכא תקנה למדקדק שיהא יוצא ידי שניהם
86. ולכן גם הבית יוסף דחה דברי בעל העיטור בשתי ידיים
87. אבל למה דפרישית דבעל העיטור לא אמר אלא דפסולין ציצית אלו לכתחלה
88. שפיר איכא תקנה למדקדק
89. ונכון הוא דיעשו לכתחלה מצוה מן המובהר כמו שכתב בעל העיטור ונתברר בשם רבותיו
90. ויתקן הציצית בשני נקבים ותלויין מצד אחד כענף מן הבד

91. אלא לפי דמיחזי כיוהרא ומן המתמיהין וכמו שכתב בית יוסף
92. לכך לא ישנה הציצית בגלוי בטלית שעליו ממנהג העולם
93. אבל מתחת למדיו שהוא מכוסה יתקן לו הציצית במלבוש הקטן כסברת בעל העיטור ורבותיו
94. שהוא העיקר לפענ"ד.
95. וזה לשון מהרי"ל
96. אין לתלות הציצית למטה לצד הארץ
97. אלא על צד הכנף
98. שנאמר על כנפי בגדיהם עכ"ל:

BaCH OC 11

1. Beit Yosef brings at the end of this *siman* that which MaharI Abohav wrote in the name of Baal HaIttur, that
2. the Sifrei writes:
3. on the *keren* is invalid,
4. as Scripture writes ‘on the four *kanfot*’ – four but not eight.”
5. Therefore he invalidated all our *tzitzit*,
6. as they yield a situation in which the *tallit* has eight *tzitzit*,
7. as to whichever side the *tallit* is flipped to, we can use those *tzitzit*,
8. so it is as if there are eight *tzitzit* here.
9. It seems that his intent is
10. Whether you wear the *tallit* in its usual fashion, or whether you turn it inside out – whichever side you flip the *tallit* to,
11. you can use the same *tzitzit*,
12. as they will be ‘dripping’ on the corner on all sides,
13. and it will be as if there are eight *tzitzit*.
14. Alternatively, he meant
15. that to whichever side of the *tallit* one flips the *tzitzit*
16. you can use those *tzitzit* etc.
17. Now he says that ours are invalid,
18. but that if we would make two holes in the *tallit*, and put the *tzitzit* through them, and pull the strings out on one side only,
19. then they would not be ‘dripping on the corner’,
20. rather they would be emerging from one side of the *kanaf* of the *tallit*,
21. like a branch emerging from the trunk
22. but on the second side there would be no *tzitzit* at all.
23. He writes further
24. that our custom can be reconciled
25. by interpreting Sifre’s statement “on the *keren* is invalid because we require four and not eight”
26. as referring only to when one puts the *tzitzit* on the *kanaf baalakhson*,
27. so that the *tzitzit* appear to be either for this *kanaf* or for that *kanaf*,
28. and so it is as if there are two *kanfot*.
29. I found the same written in the name of Tosafot Alfasi,
30. that MaharaM changed his mind
31. and said that everything is called ‘dripping on the corner’,
32. and it is only tying the *tzitzit* in such an *alakhson* that is excluded
33. This was the language of Maharshal in his novellae to the Tur,
34. that when Sifre says “on the *keren* is invalid”, it means that *baalakhson* is forbidden
35. on the ground “four not eight”.
36. Now it seems
37. That when he wrote that the *tzitzit* should not be tied *baalakhson*
38. he meant that one should not make two holes in the *kanaf*
39. one above, within three fingerwidths, and one below at the edge of the *keren*,

40. and put the *tzitzit* through the upper hole, and afterward put the heads of the *tzitzit* through the lower hole
41. the ones that are on the inside, put through the lower hole so that they hang outside
42. and the ones that are on the outside, put through the lower hole so that they hang inside
43. as in this fashion they are tied *baalakhson*
44. and they do not move from their places
45. so they become eight –
46. four for this *kanaf* and four for that *kanaf*.
47. But there is room to express astonishment here at the Baal HaIttue for invalidating all our *tzitzit* on the basis of Sifre saying “four but not eight”,
48. as from where did he learn that our *tzitzit*, because they can flip to either side of the *kanaf*, that his should be considered as if there are two *tzitzit* there,
49. so that it turns out that there are eight *tzitzit* for four *kanfot*, when Scripture says “four but not eight”?
50. All this is forced and distance,
51. as there are present only four *tzitzit* on four *kanfot*, not more,
52. and furthermore,
53. the verse says “the four *kanfot* of your garment”,
54. so how does Sifre learn “four *tzitzit* and not eight *tzitzit*”!?
55. Therefore this seems to me the intent of Sifre
56. that even though each *kanaf* has two sides
57. one lower, toward the ground, and one on the side of the *kanaf*,
58. and the Torah says “Make *gedilim* for yourself on the four *kanfot* of your garment”,
59. which implies that one must make *gedilim* for both sides of the *kanaf*, one *gedil* for each side,
60. so that there would be eight *gedilim*
61. two *gedilim* for each *kanaf*
62. one *gedil* on one side fixed via two holes
63. one hole within three fingerwidths above, and another hole below at the edge of the *keren*,
64. and similarly on the other side, and on each of the four *kanfot*,
65. so that there would be eight *gedilim*,
66. The Sifre says that this is incorrect,
67. as if that were so the Torah should have a different order, namely “on the four *kanfot* of your garment you should make *gedilim* for yourself”,
68. but since the verse does not say thus, rather “You must make yourself *gedilim* on the four etc.”,
69. Sifre interprets the “four” as applying to the *gedilim* as well,
70. so that the verse comes to teach us that we should make only four *gedilim* and not eight,
71. as if it said “You must make yourself *gedilim*, four of them, on the four *kanfot* of your garment”,
72. and we similarly interpret the verse “Do not muzzle an ox while it is threshing”,

73. that since it does not say “an ox you must not muzzle while it is threshing”,
74. that you must not muzzle an ox during any work,
75. and many other verses are interpreted similarly.
76. Now according to this the Sifre only invalidated via this interpretation eight **actual** *gedilim*, two *gedilim* on each *kanaf*,
77. but our *tzitzit*, which have only four *gedilim*, not more, are certainly valid,
78. and we are not concerned that they flip to each side of the *tallit*,
79. as flipping doesn’t turn them into eight,
80. But Baal HaIttur nonetheless holds that since the Sifre invalidates having eight actual *gedilim*,
81. therefore one should also invalidate those *tzitzit* that flip to each side, because they **appear as if** there are eight *tzitzit* here,
82. But he means that they are invalid *lekhatchilah*, that they should not be made that way,
83. but certainly he concedes that if they were made thus on a *tallit*, one can make a blessing over them,
84. as opposed to that which appears from that which MaharI Abohav wrote as cited by Beit Yosef that Baal HaIttur invalidates our *tzitzit* as a matter of law,
85. as according to this there is no solution for the scrupulous to be able to fulfill both of his alternative interpretations.
86. For this same reason Beit Yosed pushed away the Baal HaIttur’s position with both hands.
87. But according to what we have explained, that the Baal HaIttur only invalidates these *tzitzit lekhatchilah*,
88. there is a solution for the scrupulous,
89. and it would be proper to make them *lekhatchilah* as a *mitzvah min hamuvchar* as Baal HaIttur wrote and explained in the name of his teachers,
90. namely that one set up the *tzitzit* via two holes, and hanging from one side like a branch of a trunk,
91. but because this would seem like spiritual arrogance, and astonishing behavior, as Biet Yosef wrote,
92. therefore one should not alter the *tzitzit* that are visible on the *tallit* you are wearing from the standard practice,
93. but under your clothes, which is covered, you should set up your *tzitzit* on the small garment in accordance with Baal HaIttur’s reasoning, and his teachers,
94. which is the bottom-line law in my humble opinion.
95. And this is the language of MaharIL:
96. One must not hang the *tzitzit* downward, toward the ground,
97. but rather on the side of the *kanaf*,
98. as Scripture says “on the *kanfot* of their garments”.