

We addressed *hilkhot tzitzit* one parshah early last week. The stimulus to that was Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe's mentioning to me the halakhic position that *tzitzit* should hang alongside the vertical hem of one's garment, rather than falling straight down from the hole. I wrote last week that I was embarrassingly unfamiliar with this position, but that my ignorance seemed widely shared. Several readers indicated that it was not universally shared, however, although a common theme was that in practice it was very difficult to keep the *tzitzit* from reverting to a completely vertical axis. David Fried ('10) offered perhaps a *limmud zekhut* for my ignorance, and a practical solution, in the name of his teacher Rabbi Yaakov Love: that this rule applies only to the initial tying of the *tzitzit* onto the garment. David writes that this seems to be the straightforward reading of the *sugya* as well, about which I will reserve judgment at this point.

The question that I want to address this week, in a narrow and preliminary manner, is the extent to which the straightforward reading of a Talmudic source should determine the Halakhah. Among the alternatives are ruling like the (straightforward reading of) the *Shulchan Arukh's* understanding; ruling like the majority of recent decisors; ruling in accordance with popular practice; or ruling in accordance with what seems to be the most reasonable contemporary result.

*Shulchan Arukh* here rules as follows:

**שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות ציצית סימן יא:טו**  
י"א שצריך לדקדק שיתלה הציציות לאורך הטלית  
דבעינן שתהא נוטפת על הקרן (פי' תלוי על הקרן),  
ואם היה ברחבו לא היה נוטף,  
שהרי כלפי קרקע היה תלוי.

Some say that one must be scrupulous to suspend the *tzitzit* along the length of the tallit as we require that they be *notefet al haqeren* (meaning: suspended on the corner), but if they were along the width, they would not be *notef*, as they would be suspended toward the ground.

*Mishnah Berurah*<sup>1</sup> states that

- a) as against Rabbi Love, this applies both at the time of making and whenever one wears the garment, and
- b) this is only a *lekhatchilah* requirement.

Now *Shulchan Arukh's* source, which he quotes almost verbatim, is the medieval Tosafist Rabbi Eliezer of Metz (the *Yereim*), which he cited in *Beit Yosef* from the *Hagahot Maimuniyot*. *Hagahot Maimuniyot* continues as follows:

כתב רא"ם (יראים השלם סי' תא):  
וצריך לתת הציצית לאורך הטלית ולא לרחבו דבעינן (מנחות מב.) שתהא נוטפת על הכנף  
פירוש - תלוי על הקרן  
ואי הוי ברחבו, לא הוי נוטף, שהרי כלפי הקרקע הוא תלוי.  
וכן הנהיג מהר"ם לדקדק בו בטלית שיהא הציצית נוטף על הכנף בשעה שמעוטף בו האדם,  
ויש כנף שהוא תולה הציצית בארכו, ויש ברחבו - הכל לפי מה שמתעטפים בו,  
ושוב חזר בו ואמר דהכל נקרא נוטף על הכנף, ולא אמעיט אלא שלא יהא הציצית תלוי באלכסון על קרן זווית.  
ורש"י פירש הא שתהא נוטפת על הקרן שתהא תולה ומכה על הקרן,

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<sup>1</sup>דבעינן וכו' - היינו בין בשעת התליה או אח"כ אם נשמטו לצד מטה יחזירם  
וכ"ז לכתחילה אבל בדיעבד אין קפידא בזה  
אך עכ"פ יזהר מאוד שלא יהיו הציציות תלויים באלכסון על קרן זווית מפני שהוא מנהג הקרא"ם שעושין כן  
ואם תלויים מצוה להחזירם למקומן:

פירוש - שיגביה למעלה מן השפה כדי שתהא תלויה ונוגעת התליה בקרן עכ"ל:

This was also the practice of Maharam, to be scrupulous regarding a tallit that it be *notef al hakanaf* at the time that a person wears it,

so that there are corners where the tzitzit are suspended along its length, and others along its width – all in accordance with the way in which it is worn.

Afterward Maharam recanted and said that any manner is considered *notef al hakanaf*, which is intended only to exclude tzitzit suspended in a diagonal to the point of the corner.

It seems clear to me that Maharam read the requirement as applying exclusively to the wearing, rather than to the making of tzitzit, and accordingly that Rabbi Love's reading is not the straightforward reading of Shulchan Arukh.

Note that Maharam eventually recanted, and decided that *notefet al hakeren* only required that the tzitzit not be diagonal so as to go across the point of the corner. This position of his does not make the Shulchan Arukh at all, so far as I can tell. However, it is resurrected by Magen Avraham, and cited as the law even bediavad by Mishnah Berurah, on entirely separate grounds – that the Karaites *required* tzitzit to be tie that way, and so anyone doing so is supporting their heresy<sup>2</sup>.

The problem here is that *notefet al hakeren* can conceivably be read as requiring that tzitzit be suspended along the corner, as opposed to running diagonally across the corner. (I suspect, perhaps following Raavyah<sup>3</sup>, that *netef* is analogized the the *netef*, or shoulders, of grape clusters). But I don't see a plausible way that it can be read as preferring tzitzit that drop straight down to tzitzit running diagonally across the corner.

There are, however, three other more-or-less plausible meanings of *notef al hakeren*.

- a) that the tzitzit be tied loosely, rather than tightly around the garment.
- b) that the tzitzit hang on one side of the garment, rather than half on one side and half on the other
- c) that the tzitzit be suspended from above the edge of the garment, rather than from the edge

Which of these is most likely the intent of the Talmud, and what historical resonance does each have?

**a) that the tzitzit be tied loosely, rather than tightly around the garment.**

This appears to be the position of the Sheiltot deRav Achai Gaon (127), as best I can understand it.

ציצית צריכה שתהא נוטפת על הבגד  
מאי היא דלרפויי רפויי

Tzitzit must be *notefet al hakenaf*.

What does this mean? To loosen them.

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<sup>2</sup> So the phrase *notefet al hakeren* is read by Mishnah Berurah lekhatchilah as banning the diagonal, while Magen Avraham reports that the Karaites apparently read *al kanfei* as requiring the diagonal, so that Magen Avraham, and in his footsteps Mishnah Berurah, bans it even bediavad.

<sup>3</sup> משנה מסכת פאה פרק ז משנה ד

איזוהי עוללת כל שאין לה לא כתף ולא נטף  
ראבי"ה תשובות וביאורי סוגיות סימן אלף ד

השדרה היא זמורה הגדולה האמצעית וכשיוצאה זמורה הקטנה מן השדרה אחת מכאן ואחת מכאן דומה לאדם שכתופותיו יוצאות משדרתו. ועוד צריך שיהיו יוצאות ארוכות ונכפפות ויורדות. ודומה לו במנחות (מב ע"א) צריכה נוטפת על הקרן. אבי העזרי.

He goes on to add explicitly that this applies only to the making, not the wearing, of tzitzit. However, Beit Yosef likely knew of this position only through Baal HaIttur, who has רפויי רפויי instead of כפויי כפויי – I don't know what that would mean - and does not cite it at all

**b) that the tzitzit hang on one side of the garment, rather than half on one side and half on the other**

This is cited by Beit Yosef as the position of Baal HaIttur, and it is the basis of what I am told is the Chabad custom of tying the tzitzit through two holes so that the loose strings hang down on only one side of the garment. As we discussed last week, it invalidates all conventionally tied tzitzit, and is not cited at all in Shulchan Arukh, so far as I can tell. However – the Talmud on Menachot 42a, which is the source for the requirement of *notefet al hakeren*, reads as follows:

ת"ר:  
הטיל על הקרן או על הגדיל – כשירה;  
רבי אליעזר בן יעקב (אומר) פוסל בשתייהן.  
כמאן אזלא הא דאמר רב גידל אמר רב: ציצית צריכה שתהא נוטפת על הקרן, שנאמר: (במדבר ט"ו) על  
כנפי בגדיהם?  
כמאן? כרבי אליעזר בן יעקב.

A beraita:

If he placed the tzitzit on the corner or on the fringe – they are valid;

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov invalidates both.

Which position does the following statement of Rav Gidal in the name of Rav follow:

“Tzitzit must be *notefet al hakeren*, as Scripture writes “on the corners of their garments?”

Which position?! That of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov!.

So the requirement of *notefet al hakenaf* goes along with the position that forbids *al hakeren*. What is that position? Here is the Sifrei:

ספרי במדבר פרשת שלח פסקא קטו  
על קרן כשרה  
ר' אליעזר בן יעקב פוסל  
לפי שאמרה תורה על ארבע כנפות כסותך ולא על שמנה:

On the corner is valid.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov invalidates,

because the Torah says “on the four corners of your garment, not on eight”.

This seems to strongly support the Chabad custom, and suggest that in fact contemporary practice is against the straightforward reading of the Talmud. However, that reading is completely rejected by Shulchan Arukh and seems not to have been broadly practice anywhere before Chabad, and there is no Talmudic evidence for requiring two holes rather than one.

**c) that the tzitzit be suspended from above the edge of the garment, rather than from the edge**

This reading, cited by Beit Yosef from Rashi, seems to me to be generated by the broader Talmudic context of the requirement *notefet al hakeren*. Earlier I cited the immediate context – here is a fuller citation.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת מנחות דף מב עמוד א  
ת"ר:  
הטיל על הקרן או על הגדיל – כשירה;  
רבי אליעזר בן יעקב (אומר) פוסל בשתייהן.

כמאן אזלא הא דאמר רב גידל אמר רב:  
 ציצית צריכה שתהא נוטפת על הקרן, שנאמר: (במדבר ט"ו) על כנפי בגדיהם?  
 כמאן? כרבי אליעזר בן יעקב.  
אמר ר' יעקב אמר רבי יוחנן:  
וצריך שירחיק מלא קשר גודל.  
 ואיצטריך דרב פפא, ואיצטריך דר' יעקב;  
 דאי מדרב פפא, הוה אמינא: תוך ג' דלא לירחיק טפי, וכמה דמקרב מעלי,  
 ואיצטריך דר' יעקב;  
 ואי מדרבי יעקב, הוה אמינא: מלא קשר גודל דלא ליקרב טפי, וכמה דרחיק מעלי,  
 צריכא.  
 רבינא ורב סמא הוו יתבי קמיה דרב אשי,  
 חזייה רב סמא לקרניה דגלימיה דרבינא דסתר ובצר ממלא קשר גודל,  
 אמר ליה: לא סבר לה מר להא דר' יעקב?  
 אמר ליה: בשעת עשייה איתמר . . .

Our requirement is followed immediately by the statement of Rabbi Yaakov in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that “*and* one must distance (the hole from the hem at least a full fingerjoint”. Rashi seems to have read Rabbi Yaakov as clarifying R. Gidal, and R. Eliezer ben Yaakov – when they required the tzitzit to be off the corner – *notefet* rather than on – their minimum measurement was a fingerjoint. It seems to me that this reading, which is eminently plausible based on the “and” at the beginning of Rabbi Yaakov’s statement, is the basis of contemporary and historical practice.

However, I have to admit that I suspect otherwise. Rabbi Yaakov’s statement is followed immediately by a discussion that seems to me to read him as a continuation of a statement by R. Pappa<sup>4</sup> on the previous page giving the maximum distance the hole may be from the edge. If this is so, our requirement is unrelated to Rabbi Yaakov, but rather part of a parenthetical conversation which ends just before Rabbi Yaakov.

Note that the statement “this only refers to when they are made” later on the page, which I presume was David Fried’s support for Rabbi Love (and the Sheiltot), would therefore be irrelevant as well.

So how would you pasken?

Shabbat shalom

Aryeh Klapper

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<sup>4</sup> תלמוד בבלי מסכת מנחות דף מא עמוד ב

.אמר רב פפא, הלכתא: ד' בתוך שלש משולשת ארבע