



Rabbi David Silverberg  
Parashat Shelach  
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Parashat Shelach concludes by introducing the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*, which requires affixing fringes to the corners of a four-cornered garment. Strictly speaking, one who does not normally wear this kind of garment is under no obligation to make of point of doing so in order to fulfill the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*. Nevertheless, it is customary to wear a four-cornered garment throughout the day so that one can fulfill this *mitzva*. Maimonides mentions this custom in the closing passages of *Hilkhot Tzitzit* (3:11-12):

Even though a person is not obligated to purchase for himself a *tallit* and wrap himself in it in order to make *tzitzit* on it, it is not proper for a pious person to exempt himself from this *mitzva*. Rather, he should always endeavor to be wrapped in a garment obligated in *tzitzit* in order to fulfill this *mitzva*. And during prayer one must exercise particular care in this regard; it is very disgraceful for Torah scholars to pray while not wrapped [in a *tallit*]. (*halakha* 11)

A person should always exercise care with regard to the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*, for the Torah equated it with, and hinged upon it, all the *mitzvot*, as it says (Bamidbar 15:39), "you shall see it [the *tzitzit*] and remember all the commandments of the Lord..." (*halakha* 12)

Interestingly enough, Maimonides appears, at least initially, to restrict this *halakha* to a "pious person" and "Torah scholars." His remarks in *halakha* 11 suggest that for an ordinary layman, there is no requirement to make a point of wearing a four-cornered garment obligated in *tzitzit*. Thereafter, however, in *halakha* 12, Maimonides admonishes all people ("A person should always...") to approach this *mitzva* with special vigilance, given the critical purpose it serves to remind us of all the *mitzvot*. How might we understand the relationship between these two passages? Does he demand that all people make a point of wearing a garment with *tzitzit*, or only the particularly pious and learned members of the nation?

An insightful explanation of Maimonides' remarks was offered by Rabbi Chananya Yosef Eizenbach, in his work on *hilkhot tzitzit* entitled *Machaneh Yosef* (1979). Rabbi Eizenbach suggests that in the first of these two passages, Maimonides addresses the broader issue of making oneself obligated in a *mitzva* from which he would otherwise be exempt. In this regard, he distinguishes between ordinary laymen and the spiritual elite. Most observant Jews should ensure to strictly satisfy their basic religious obligations, before setting their sights upon higher standards. Ultimately, of course, we must all strive for spiritual greatness. In the immediate present, however, a person's attention must be focused on strict halakhic compliance, rather than on lofty levels of

piety. Therefore, Maimonides writes that in principle, only the "pious ones" and "Torah scholars" are enjoined to make a point of donning a four-cornered garment to obligate themselves in the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*.

In *halakha* 12, however, Maimonides notes that the *mitzva* of *tzitzit* is exceptional in this regard. It not only constitutes a *mitzva* in its own right, but also assists in the performance of all the other *mitzvot*. As the Torah writes regarding the *tzitzit* strings, "you shall see it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and perform them, and you will not stray after your heart and eyes, after which you are lured..." The *tzitzit* are to remind an individual of his religious responsibilities – which he would otherwise forget and overlook given the natural human tendency to pursue personal gratification. Due to this critical purpose served by *tzitzit*, it behooves even the ordinary, simple Jew to make a point of acquiring and wearing a garment that requires *tzitzit*. Even if ordinarily the laymen are encouraged to focus their efforts on satisfying their basic requirements, when it comes to *tzitzit* all are enjoined to make themselves obligated, in order that they will always remember their responsibilities towards all the *mitzvot* in the Torah.