

April 28, 2019 - Num 15:1-41 - Instructions for Offerings; a Stoning; Fringes
Torah Reading: Numbers 15:1-41 - Instructions for Offerings; a Stoning; Fringes
Psalm 102:1-12
Haftarah: Isaiah 56:3-8 + 57:15-16, 18-19

Numbers 15:1-2 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you..."

God is speaking to the younger generation, not their parents who would die in the wilderness and not inherit the land. This word was to give them hope and restate the covenant promise for their sake. i.e that they WILL come into the Land.

Numbers 15:3-16 - Instructions for the acceptance offerings - burnt and peace offerings

This is also to give them assurance that they are accepted by God, unlike the older generation.

Numbers 15:17-21 - First Fruit Offering

This is also for their encouragement - i.e. there WILL be a harvest in the new land, and you will reap it and present the first fruits of it to God.

Numbers 15:22-26 - If the Whole Congregation sins through Ignorance

"ignorance" = *shĕgagah* - through ignorance, unawares, inadvertently, unwittingly, deceived

These instructions were given already in **Leviticus 4 and 5**, but are repeated here for the new generation.

How does the "whole congregation" sin?

Maimonides understands this law as relating to extraneous/idolatrous worship. Probably pointing to the times of the future wicked kings when by following the evil example of godless rulers, the people neglected their hereditary rites, and forgetting the sacred laws, fell by a common sin into the observance of the idolatry of other nations.

An example of this is when King Hezekiah offered these same sacrifices to cleanse the Temple and nation from the evil idolatry of King Ahaz (**2 Chronicles 29**)

The burnt offering is mentioned first here as the most valued, it would always follow the sin offering because sin had to be expiated before the congregation could sanctify its life and efforts afresh to the Lord in the burnt-offering. (This is the only time the burnt offering is listed before the sin offering)

Numbers 15:27-29 - If a Person sins through Ignorance

This refers to a single person, not the whole congregation.

"ignorance" = *shĕgagah* - through ignorance, unawares, inadvertently, unwittingly, deceived

A person who actually does not know the law, or is deceived, or tries but cannot fulfill a command.

David prayed to be cleansed from his secret faults, those sins which he himself was not aware of.

This rule even extends to the greatest sin of all - the crucifixion:

- **Luke 23:34** - "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Jesus says they sinned through ignorance, probably recalling these verses.

All forgiveness is contingent on Christ's blood and his death on the cross. The sacrifices and offerings described here point to His fulfillment of them.

Numbers 15:30-31 - If a Person Sins Presumptuously

Numbers 15:30 - "But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people."

"Presumptuously" = *ruwm* - from a 'lifted up' or exalted position, puffed up, lofty, to magnify oneself, set up (like antichrist sets himself up in the temple as God - **2 Thessalonians 2:4**)

"reproacheth" = *gadaph* - to blaspheme, reproach, revile

- **Isaiah 55:7** - "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

- **Ephesians 1:7-8** - "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence."

Even the worst sinner can repent. So what is this verse describing?

"Presumptuously" means with "a high hand" or through pride, as in the Targum of Jonathan, i.e. in a haughty, insolent, bold and daring manner; in an obstinate, stubborn, self-willed way, with purpose and design, openly and publicly, neither fearing God nor regarding man. He is therefore by definition unrepentant.

Rashi says all the commandments are contingent on the first two: "I am [the Lord, your God]" and "You must not have [any other gods]" (Exodus 20:2-3). One who commits idolatry is considered as if he had denied the entire Torah and all the prophecies of the prophets, as it says, "from the day on which the Lord commanded and from then on." - [Sifrei Shelach 33]

Idolatry is the "master sin" behind all the rest.

Such a person disdains God's authority, and therefore leaves himself in a terrible position - since he feels God is powerless, non-existent or not worth listening to, he also cannot believe God could or would forgive. Nor would the sinner think he needed to be forgiven. There can be no repentance in that case. Like Esau, he may even search for repentance with tears, but be able to achieve only the "repentance of the world.

This is similar to Jesus' statement:

- **Matthew 12:31-32** - "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the one to come...."

To sin presumptuously = "blasphemy"= inability to repent

Numbers 15:33 -36 - A Man who Gathered Sticks on the Sabbath

See <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/sticks-and-stoned/>

The deed was done with unblushing boldness in broad daylight, in open defiance of the divine authority. This was a "presumptuous" sin.

Rashi - "Those who found him gathering": [This redundant clause means to say that] they warned him, but he did not stop gathering even after they found him and warned him. — [Sanh. 90a, Sifrei Shelach 55]

Rabbi Akiva identifies him as Zelophehad who was a descendant of Joseph (Rashi, B'midbar 27:3 and T. Bab. Sabbat, fol. 96. 2.). Rabbi Yehudah ben Betera insists that we are not meant to know who he is.

He didn't just violate a commandment, he discounted the Sabbath.

The Sabbath predates the Law. God rested on the seventh day of creation.

A midrash (Shemot Rabbah 5:22) explains that in Egypt the Hebrew slaves had in their possession various scrolls relating the incidents of the book of Genesis, which they would enjoy reading during their rest every Sabbath. They knew from these scrolls that God would redeem them. Pharaoh, therefore, decreed the collecting of straw so that

they would have no rest, and thus not be able to think of redemption. Thus every Hebrew slave was forced to break the Sabbath rest.

Later, they were not allowed to gather manna on the Sabbath (**Exodus 16:29**).

Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath requirements uniquely and perfectly in the tomb.

In a spiritual sense all "collecting" or "gathering" is incompatible with the Sabbath rest. When our mind compels us to see lack and thus to "gather" when we should be at rest in Him, we revert to a slave mentality of bondage in Egypt, and trample on the blood of Christ who redeemed us from slavery.

God's judgment on this man clarifies the importance of being "in the rest."

Numbers 15:37-41 - Part of the Shema - Fringes on your Garments for Remembrance

In light of the stoning of the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath, God describes a way to keep the remembrance of the commandments always before every person. All except women and children were required to wear fringes on the borders of their garments.

The remembrance would come by vision, by seeing these fringes.

The Mystery of the Tallit or Prayer Shawl

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/530127/jewish/Tekhelet-The-Mystery-of-the-Long-Lost-Biblical-Blue-Thread.htm

<http://www.angelfire.com/journal2/skylarks/page37.html>

Numbers 15:38 - "Speak to the children of Israel and you shall say to them that they shall make for themselves fringes (*tzitzit*) on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations, and that they shall affix a thread of *tekhelet* on the fringe of each corner."

These verses are part of the Shema, the Jewish morning prayer: **Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41**

The command is repeated later: "Thou shalt make thee twisted cords upon the four corners of thy covering, wherewith thou coverest thyself." (**Deuteronomy 22:12**)

When the SHEMA was recited, the fringe was grasped in the hand.

The prayer shawl would have two kinds of threads attached to the corners, white wool (or whatever the garment was made of) and blue wool - the *tekhelet*.

The blue thread of the fringe is called the "*SHAMESH*," meaning "servant." This is similar to the "servant candle" that stands in the midst of the other candles, and is used to light the Hanukkah menorah.

Blue pointed to the heavens, where God dwelled.

The Prayer Shawl

The *tallit* is the Jewish prayer shawl - a rectangular garment usually 4x6 feet - with a hole in the middle, like a poncho, and generally white with blue or black stripes, and it has tassels on each of its four corners called *tzitzit*. The *tallit* can be large (*tallit gadol*) and cover a person's entire body. Generally this is worn as a shawl in the synagogue.

A smaller garment (*tallit katan*), is generally worn underneath one's shirt. For a Jewish person, the *tallit* is typically used in every major life cycle event — from circumcision to bar/bat mitzvah, to marriage and even death. But it is most frequently used in prayer.

In the ancient world, all people - Jew or Gentile - wore some kind of garment like this, but the commandment was for Jews was to add the *tzitzit* on the four corners, which would set them apart from other nations.

- **Ezekiel 16:6** - "I spread my skirt over you and covered your nakedness: Yes I swore to you and entered into covenant with you; says the Lord God and you became mine."

- **Ruth 3:9** - "I am Ruth thine handmaid. Spread therefore your skirt (Hebrew, the corner of your garment) over your handmaid; for you are my near kinsman."

- **Psalm 91:4** - He shall cover (*sakkach* - the root of *sukkah*, to cover, to weave together) thee with his feathers, and under his wings (*kanaph* - wing, skirt, corner of garment) shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

- **Psalm 133:2** - "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard: even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts (*kanaph*) of his garment."

The Hebrew term "*kanaph*" can mean wing, skirt, corner of a garment

- **Zechariah 8:23** - "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: In those days, it shall come to pass that 10 men will take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying: We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

- **Malachi 4:2** - "But unto you that fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings (*kanaph*)."

This was fulfilled in Jesus' ministry:

- **Matthew 9:20** - "And suddenly a woman who had a flow of for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment."

These tassels, or fringes, were enlarged by the Pharisees to exhibit their punctilious fulfillment of the Law (**Matthew 13:5**)

Finally, this idea is displayed in John's vision in Revelation:

- **Revelation 7:15** - "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell (*skēnoō*) among them."

"dwell among them" = *skēnoō* - "will spread his tabernacle over them"

The *tallit* is sometimes used as the *Huppah* or marriage canopy. It is also used as a burial shroud.

The Blue Dye

The blue dye to make the blue thread, according to tradition, was one the most expensive to produce. This color was so expensive, that usually only royalty were to wear it. It was obtained from a species of snail called *Murex trunculus*, or *Chilazon*. It took some 12,000 of these to fill a thimble with blue dye, according to tradition.

When *tekhelet* is available, Jews are enjoined to add a *tekhelet* fringe to the *tzitzit*; when unavailable, they fulfill the mitzvah with plain white fringes.

About 1,000 years ago, the *chilazon* became completely unavailable. After a while, its exact identity became unknown. Recently, the marine snail *Murex trunculus* has been identified as possibly being the elusive *chilazon*, and many use its dye.

The kabbalists write that our current lack of *tekhelet* is consistent with the diminished spiritual state of Judaism. As such, most continue to wear only white fringes, awaiting the coming of Messiah, when Elijah himself will guide them in uncovering the identity of the *chilazon*.

This was the position of Rabbi Sholom DovBer, the fifth Rebbe of Lubavitch, who maintained that the *chilazon* will not reemerge until the coming of the Messiah.

Fringe Benefits

See <https://www.aish.com/jl/m/mm/Tzitzit.html>

Numbers 15:39 - "And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD..."

How will the *Tallit* and the fringe (*tzitzit*) cause someone to remember all the

commandments?

The numerical value of "tzitzit" is 600. Add to that the 8 strings and 5 double-knots on each corner, and you get 613 – the number of *mitzvot* in the Torah.

The knots are wound with 7, 8, 11, and 13 windings:

- Seven represents the perfection of the physical world, which was created in seven days.
- Eight is the number of transcendence that goes beyond nature.
- Eleven is the numerical value of *vav-hey*, the last two letters of God's Name.
- Thirteen is the numerical value of *echad* – one.

Prior to putting on the *tallit*, this prayer is said:

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with your commandments, and commanded us to wrap ourselves in the fringed garment."

Immediately after reciting the blessing, the Tallit Gadol is draped over the shoulders and then temporarily wrapped around the head while its end is thrown over the left shoulder. The reason for throwing to the left is because we want the *tzitzit* to protect us against the desires of the heart, which is tilted to the left, as is written in **Numbers 15:39** - "that ye seek not after your own heart..."

Some Jews keep it over their head for parts of the morning prayers, as a way to increase concentration and to give a feeling of being enveloped by God's presence.

A Guard Against Sin

There is a Talmud story about how the fringes are said to keep one from temptation and sin:

"There was an incident involving a certain man who was diligent about the mitzva of ritual fringes. This man heard that there was a prostitute in one of the cities overseas who took four hundred gold coins as her payment. He sent her four hundred gold coins and fixed a time to meet with her. When his time came, he came and sat at the entrance to her house.

"The maidservant of that prostitute entered and said to her: That man who sent you four hundred gold coins came and sat at the entrance. She said: Let him enter. He entered. She arranged seven beds for him, six of silver and one of gold. Between each and every one of them there was a ladder made of silver, and the top bed was the one that was made of gold.

"She went up and sat naked on the top bed, and he too went up in order to sit naked facing her. In the meantime, his four ritual fringes came and slapped him on his face. He dropped down and sat himself on the ground, and she also dropped down and sat on

the ground. She said to him: I take an oath by the Gappa of Rome that I will not allow you to go until you tell me what defect you saw in me.

"He said to her: I take an oath by the Temple service that I never saw a woman as beautiful as you. But there is one mitzva that the Lord, our God, commanded us, and its name is ritual fringes, and in the passage where it is commanded, it is written twice: "I am the Lord your God" (Numbers 15:41). The doubling of this phrase indicates: I am the one who will punish those who transgress My mitzvot, and I am the one who will reward those who fulfill them. Now, said the man, the four sets of ritual fringes appeared to me as if they were four witnesses who will testify against me."

The prostitute was converted. - Menachot 44a

The commentators explain that the *tzitzit* struck him, not literally, but psychologically – with the four corners appearing as witnesses against him.

In a similar way, Ezekiel was grabbed by his *tsitzit* (a lock of hair) and shown all the idolatry of Israel.

- **Ezekiel 8:3** - "And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock (tzitzit) of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy." (Talmud – Menachot 42a; Rema – Orach Chaim 11:14)

In essence, the remembrance of the Law challenges, tests and exposes the wickedness of our fallen human heart (its desires and intents) to cause us to repent.

- **Jeremiah 17:9-10** - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

The prayer shawl with its tassles, combined with the tefillin (phylacteries) on the arm and forehead, were to show how every aspect of life should reveal the mystery of God. Since most observant Jews didn't recognize Messiah when He came, these physical reminders can only be a type of the work of the Holy Spirit within us to help us see through to the presence of God with us, Emmanuel, Christ the hope of glory.