

י"א מרחשון תשפ"א

LIKE A COMMON THREAD

אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל ואם אקח מכל אשר לך ולא תאמר
אני העשרתי את אברם¹

FImagine having just led your team to a championship win. After contributing so much to the victory, you are named MVP and get various rewards, such as a bonus or even a car. You are probably still soaking in the victory, and perhaps may not have all your wits with you. When אברם helped the 5 kings come out victorious against the 4 kings, thus saving לוט from captivity, he refused any reward. אברם² comments that אברם refused not out of simply not thinking, but because הקב"ה had guaranteed him wealth, so he didn't want to take more than he was entitled to.³ To further drive home the point that he was not to take anything, no matter how small, אברם used the לשון of "אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל", "even a thread or a shoe strap." The מדרש⁴ brings down various מצוות that we got as rewards for these words, corresponding to threads and shoe straps. Corresponding to שרוך נעל are the מצוה of פסח⁵, הקרבן פסח, the משכן of עורות תחשים, and the חוט הסקרא זוכה to the חוט we were to the חוט (see further), the משכן, and the מצוות of יבום and ציצית. Focusing on this latter category, what exactly is the common thread (pun intended) between all of these things?

Let's analyze each of them individually, starting with ציצית. Perhaps the easiest of the 4, the מצוה of ציצית is wearing a בגד that has 4 corners with strings protruding from them. The ציצית, and the תכלת, symbolize many things. The ציצית have a גמטריא of 600, and each corner has 8 strings (which are really 4 strings folded over in half) and 5 double knots between each set of windings. These numbers add up to 613, reminding us of the מצוות תרי"ג.⁶ Additionally, each corner has windings in between the knots. There are 7 windings, then 8 windings, then 11, and 13. This adds up to 39, which is the גמטריא of ה' אחד. By wearing the ציצית, we have a constant reminder to look towards that we are tied (pun intended) to הקב"ה and His תורה and מצוות.

¹ בראשית יד.כג

² רש"י שם ד"ה "ולא תאמר"

³ ועיין מהר"ל גור אריה איך אברם ידע שזה אינו הבטחת הקב"ה

⁴ בראשית רבה מג.ג

⁵ עיין רבינו בחיי בראשית יד.כג

⁶ עיין במדבר טו.לט-מא

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When a man passes away without children, his brother is obligated to marry the widow. This is the מצוה of יבום. If the brother refuses, then he has to do חליצה, which involves the strap of a shoe (see introductory paragraph). יבום is interesting in that it permits that which is normally viewed as one of the worst עבירות, and you would even have to give up your life for it. Nowadays, the רבנן decreed that we won't be doing יבום for the right reasons, so the relationship will indeed be an illicit one, which both man and woman would have to die for. However, putting that aside for a moment, the fact that חקב"ה gave us the מצוה of יבום means that from His perspective, we are able to do the מצוה with the right intentions. The fact that He has this outlook on us is testament to the special relationship that we have with Him. This relationship is evidenced by the next item, the משכן. The פסוק that commands us to build the משכן⁷ says "ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי" "make for Me a מקדש and I will dwell in them." Why does the פסוק say בתוכם? Wouldn't it make more sense to say בתוכו, "in it"? The מדרש⁸ answers that חקב"ה was seeking a דירה בתחתונים, a lower abode. He wanted to live, כביכול, not just on Earth, but amongst His people. The מדרש continues that when אדם sinned, חקב"ה had to go up to the Heavens, and He kept ascending and distancing Himself from the people as long as they were sinning. Once the אבות came along, חקב"ה started coming closer, until שמים and ארץ met at סיני.

The last item on the list is the חוט הסקרא. The משנה⁹ tells us that a red line was painted halfway up the wall of the מזבח. This line separated the wall into an upper and lower half. Certain קרבנות had the זריקת הדם, or sprinkling of the blood, on the upper half, and others on the lower half. If the כהן did the זריקה on the wrong half, the קרבן is פסול. This line doesn't just separate the מזבח into two halves. This line is the demarcation point of two divergent categories of קרבנות coming together to be offered on the same מזבח. All of ישראל כלל now comes together to the same point to offer קרבנות to the עולם של עולם. The word קרבן is commonly translated as "sacrifice", which makes sense because we are sacrificing of our money for חקב"ה. However, the word קרבן comes from קרב, meaning to approach or come closer. By internalizing the messages of the קרבנות (not for now), we come closer to חקב"ה and appreciate Him all the more so.

This word חוט appears other times throughout תנ"ך and ש"ס, and we see some other examples of this relationship theme. Firstly, when רחב hid כלב and פנחס from the

⁷ שמות כה.ח

⁸ מדרש תנחומא נשא טז

⁹ מידות לה. (ג.א.)

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officers of יריחו, they promised to spare her and her family. In order to identify the house, they had her tie a חוט השני, a crimson thread, to her house. The פסוק¹⁰ compares הקב"ה's "lips" to a חוט שני. The comparison is that just as the spies kept their promise to רחב through the חוט שני, so too the חוט השני will keep His promises to us.¹¹ Additionally, it shows how we keep our promises and He trusts us to keep them, sort of like we saw by the חוט המשולש of מצוה. Again, שלמה המלך¹² employs this terminology, saying that the חוט המשולש, the three-link chain, cannot be easily broken. The גמרא¹³ interprets this to mean that one who fulfills the 3 מצוות of תפילין, ציצית, and מזוזה will be זוכה to stand up to challenges. Another גמרא¹⁴ says that לעתיד לבא, the יצר הרע will be shown to the צדיקים and רשעים. To the צדיקים, it will appear like a tall mountain, and to the רשעים it will be like a חוט השערה, a mere strand of hair. For those who overcame נסיונות to accomplish what they were supposed to, they will see exactly what the challenges were. They were able to sacrifice for the sake of the relationship, and will be worthy of reaping the rewards. However, for those who succumbed and lost the battle, the significance of their relationship with the רבש"ע is a mere hair. Because they treated עבירות lightly and brushed them away, it appears as something that can easily be brushed away and ignored, as the חוט השני will reciprocate to them. Lastly, the משנה¹⁵ speaks of the לשון של שער המשתלה. When the שער was pushed off of the cliff, representing the sins of בני ישראל, the red thread would turn white, signifying that the nation was forgiven.

To come full circle, אברם denied any reward for helping to win the battle. Everything אברהם did was for הקב"ה, and the 10 נסיונות are the best example. He blindly moved to a foreign land to ultimately get kicked out because of a famine, his wife was almost taken away from him twice, he circumcised himself at 99 years old, and he was willing to give up his son that was promised to him by הקב"ה, just because He told אברהם to do so. It is this merit that gives us the מצוות that are the most external signs of our special relationship. We should be זוכה to be מקיים the מצוות, and use all of the כוחות that אברהם and our other ancestors gave us to do our עבודה and cement our relationship with our Father and Creator as best as we can.

¹⁰ שיר השירים ד.ג.

¹¹ רש"י שם ד"ה "כחוט"

¹² קהלת ד.יב.

¹³ מנחות מג:

¹⁴ סוכה נב.

¹⁵ יומא טו:ז, סו: