

Dear Chavraya,

As I drew my talis closer around myself last Shabbos in approaching the Sh'ma, taking the *tzitzis* on its corners into my hand, I realized something wasn't right. As I came to the third paragraph of the Sh'ma, *parashat tzitzit/the portion of tzitzis*, I looked closely as I prepared with each mention of their name to kiss the strands wrapped around my fingers now. I realized that one of the eight strands, as there are meant to be on each corner, was missing from one corner's strands. With a great sigh, I looked down and saw one lone strand on the floor by my feet. Torn off when it had earlier become caught in the metal hinge of a folding chair, only a forlorn piece of about a quarter of an inch remained on my talis, a clipped wing telling of flights and fancy, of journeys once taken.

I paused for a moment, debating within myself whether to remove my talis, now *pasul/ritually unfit*, and put on another one. I could take the one from inside the reading table that Bobi had given me the money for, that she had cried into so long ago when I brought it to show her as she sat with me upon the edge of the bed in her room at Hebrew Senior Life, then Hebrew Rehab. It is where my dad is now, the passing of so many years. For a moment, I considered reaching just behind me to take dad's talis bag, from where it sits upon the shelf by the hearth in our *shtibl*. Somehow I didn't feel that I could wear dad's talis, and I didn't want to disturb the service by opening the reading table from which the prayers were being chanted. Most of all, I could not imagine taking off the talis that had been the *chuppah* beneath which Mieke and I were married.

Ritual items become much more through their use than they were intended to be in their making, or perhaps that is not so, perhaps that is their intent and purpose right from their beginnings, to become more than themselves. Perhaps that is our purpose, each one of us as the most sacred of ritual items, each one a *k'li kodesh/holy vessel*, as ritual items are called, meant to become more than ourselves, each one becoming more by becoming fully oneself, unbound, unlimited, drawn to the sky blue of the Heavens above, as the blue strand of the *tzitzis* described in the Torah is meant to remind. Every item that we invest with meaning beyond itself, that lifts us up and brings us back or shuttles us forward becomes a ritual object. Anything of precious association becomes a holy vessel in bringing the warmth of a loved one's hand to be felt upon our own, their gaze catching our eye, helping us to see beyond the reach of time and place, and deep within. My grandfather's pocket watch ticks away the years in my pocket, inscribed on the inside as a gift on the day of my becoming a rabbi, "from one beloved Victor, my father, to another, my son." Through the magnifying glass my mother gave me, I continue to see the little miracles of every day with her wonder, through her eyes, the lens of her soul.

That is the meaning of *tzitzis*, to help us to see more deeply, before and beyond, to see what is right and good, threads of connection that lovingly join, to God, to people. Strands of connection woven upon the loom of five verses in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Sh'lach-L'cha*, the verses that form *parashat tzitzit*, the source of the mitzvah to place fringes upon the corners of our garments, to look upon them and remember all the commandments of God, *u'zchartem et kol mitzvot Ha'shem*. Simply in seeing and remembering, in fulfilling that one

mitzvah, so the Holy Alshich says that it is as if we have fulfilled each day all six hundred and thirteen mitzvot / *k'ilu asinu et kulam yom yom*. A noun formed from the verb *la'tzitz/to glance, to peak, tzitzit* are about seeing, seeing the path more clearly, seeing the path from where we have come, seeing the path forward with a strand to hold along the way.

In the strand upon the floor I remembered our wedding. I remembered Bobi and something she had once said that came to me in the moment of glancing upon a fallen thread. Seeing my *tzitzis* peaking out from under my shorts, she offered a beautiful thought about the *laibtzudekel*, a Yiddish term for the small talis worn under the shirt: *a laibtzudekel nemt aroys aleh tzoros/a laibtzudekel takes away all sorrows*. I joked with her then, kind of like a *tzoros*-proof vest. If only it were so. Perhaps in some way it is, strands of memory so strong, even when the threads themselves tear and we are left alone, learning to reweave. In the approach to this Shabbos of *parashat tzitzit*, in the late-night light of the *shtibl*, I spread my talis upon the reading table and began to tie on new *tzitzis*, new threads of connection to guide and remind.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor