



GROWTH

At The

SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT SHELACH

A Legacy of Tzitzit

R' Avrohom Reuven Loketch leads the MEOR outreach initiative in Boston, Massachusetts, where he develops programs, teaches classes, hosts seminars, and organizes trips to Eretz Yisrael for Jewish college students in the area. Many of these young men and women have grown up with little or no connection to their Jewish roots. Rabbi Loketch and his team aim to ignite a spark of inspiration and guide them toward a deeper connection with authentic Judaism. One such student was Brian, whom R' Loketch first met in 2009 at Boston University. Though they formed a warm and friendly relationship, Brian remained resistant to religious practice. Whether it was Shabbat, kosher food, or even tefillin, he showed no interest in committing to mitzvot.

Two years later, in June 2011, Brian joined a 10-day trip to Israel with 40 other students. The group spent their first Shabbat in the serene Moshav Chiskin in the Golan Heights, and from there they traveled to Jerusalem. The students studied at Machon Yaakov in Har Nof and spent their afternoons exploring sites throughout the holy city. Something on that trip stirred Brian deeply. Upon returning to the U.S., he approached R' Loketch and said he was ready to commit to a single mitzvah — no more than that. Expecting a common starting point, the rabbi suggested refraining from using a phone on Friday night or avoiding non-kosher meat. But Brian had already decided. "I'm going to wear tzitzit every day," he said. R' Loketch, surprised but moved, didn't question his choice. He was simply grateful to see Brian take a meaningful step forward.

Later that summer, Brian visited his mother in Utica, New York. As Tisha B'Av approached, memories of his recent prayer at the Kotel resurfaced, and he felt a strong desire to attend shul for the solemn day. Though his mother was active in the local Reform temple, that wasn't where he wanted to go. "I'd like to go to the Orthodox synagogue," he told her. She agreed to drive him and even stay for the service. As they entered the synagogue, a large memorial plaque near the entrance caught Brian's attention. He approached it, examined the names, and froze. "Mom," he said, stunned, "you never told me your father was part of this synagogue."

"I'm so involved with the Reform temple, I just didn't think it was important," she answered quietly. While they stood there, an elderly man passed by and noticed their interest. "Did you know that man?" he asked, pointing to the name. "Yes," Brian replied. "He was my grandfather."

"He was a wonderful man," the gentleman said warmly. "Everybody loved him."

"What made him so special?" Brian asked. The man smiled. "Many things. But one I'll never forget: he loved the mitzvah of tzitzit. He used to give a nickel to any boy who came to shul wearing them. The boys would line up, proudly lifting their shirts to show their tzitzis. He was so proud. He always wanted every boy to wear them."

Brian stood speechless, eyes wide, before bursting into tears. The very mitzvah he had chosen to begin his journey — completely on his own — was the one his grandfather had cherished and promoted decades earlier. In that moment, Brian felt the Divine orchestration clearly. The merit of his grandfather's quiet chessed had rippled forward through generations and helped awaken something in Brian's soul. From there, his spiritual growth continued, step by step, until he fully embraced a Torah lifestyle and became a true ba'al teshuvah. [1]

[1] From R' Paysach Krohn, "The Glittering World of Chessed" (Artscroll) p. 34-36

Hanging In There

Last week, I sent a congratulations text to an amazing cousin of mine who recently celebrated a graduation. Aware that my schedule has been especially busy lately, the response came with a thoughtful check-in. "Hanging in there," I replied. Moments later, my phone buzzed again: "By a thread or a rope?"

The mitzvah of tzitzit, which is introduced in this week's Parsha, is a unique one which has correspondence to all others in the Torah. "You should see [the strings] and remember all of G-d's commandments" (Numbers 15:39).

Tzitzit isn't just another layer of fabric; it's meant to serve as a constant reminder of the everlasting relationship and unquestionable bond that we have with the Creator. No matter when in history or where on earth, the strings on all 4 sides of the garment signify how we, nationally and individually, defy all natural odds and remain holding on strong to our Divine source. We're not merely hanging by a thread — we're grasping 8 strings, because our mere existence is unnatural and miraculous [1]. Throughout history there have been overbearing, painful winds of annihilation and assimilation, but these strings carry a message that reverberates today louder than ever: hold on tight!

[1] In Jewish thought, "8" represents the supernatural, and the 4 corners of the garment allude to the four 'corners' of the earth.