



# SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

**KORACH / קרח**

**WHERE IS THE TECHEILET?**

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**WHERE IS THE TECHEILET?**

**A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE**

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## KORACH / קרח

### WHERE IS THE TECHEILET?

## KORACH

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As an American citizen one is expected to know something of your country's history and its symbols. Take the American flag for example. The fifty stars represent the fifty states and the thirteen stripes represent the thirteen original colonies that made up our country hundreds of year ago. The colors red white and blue were specifically chosen for together they represent unification. The colors of the Israeli flag also have meaning. The colors blue and white are the colors of the tallit (more accurately *techeilet* and white). The design is even like the tallit.

In truth the tallit is like the flag of the Jewish people. Just like a soldier is buried wrapped in the flag of his country Jews are buried wrapped in a tallit, the "flag" that identifies him as a Jew.

In this week's parsha we read a story about the Jewish flag, the Tallit.

When Korach began his uprising he started with an attempt to prove that Moses had thought up the Torah's mitzvos on his own, that they had not been given by G-d. According to the midrash, Korach posed a direct challenge to Moses about the laws of tzitzit. "If the whole garment is dyed *techeilet* why does it still need the four *techielet* strings?" he asked. He immediately ordered 250 completely *techeilet* tallitot. He and the 250 elders who joined him in his revolution put them on and began to celebrate.



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What was their argument about? Why would coloring your tallit blue, free you from the obligation of attaching tzitzit to it?

Last week we read in the Torah about wearing tzitzis. They are meant to remind us to do G-d's mitzvos, as in the verse, "and you shall see them and remember all of G-d, and you shall do them."

But how in fact do the tzitzit remind us of the mitzvos or what in fact do they remind us of?

Rashi explains that the name tzitzit comes from the Hebrew word "meitzit", looking. When we look at the tzitzit we will remember the mitzvot. Also the numerical value of the Hebrew word tzitzit is 600, add the eight strings and five knots required in kosher tzitzit and you get 613, the total number of the mitzvos they are supposed to remind us of.

Still, a hint by way of name origin and numerical value doesn't constitute a good reminder.

Rather there is a better way. *Techielet*, that sky blue color Jews colored their tzitzit with. The sight of this sky blue color reminds us of heaven and, of course G-d. Rabbi Yochanan said, "One should only pray in a room with windows so that he might see the sky and be reminded to turn his heart to heaven."

Now we can understand Korach's argument. Since the tallit is meant to remind us to turn our hearts to heaven by the blue string we attach to it, why indeed should a



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tallit that is entirely blue still need the four blue strings? The whole tallit is one big reminder to turn your heart to G-d, which is the main purpose of the *techeilet*.

These days, basically since the Temple was destroyed, *techeilet* has disappeared. It has been generations since we lost it completely. The *techeilet* dye was squeezed from the "*chilazon*" fish that would visit the seas around Israel only once in seventy years. We don't know where to find it so we can't get the *techeilet*.

But about one hundred years ago, the Radziner Rebbe claimed to have found the "*chilazon*" fish and started a campaign to reinstitute this custom. However, most Jews didn't accept this finding. Then again, about twenty years ago, some Jews from the settlement movement claimed that the Redziner Rebbe was in fact in error, but they were certain that they had discovered the right fish. Still, most Jews didn't accept this either and *techeiles* is still not worn in most communities.

The question is why don't we find generations of Jews turning the world over trying to find this fish? Jews throughout the generations have sacrificed everything for the smallest mitzvos. Why have we not sacrificed life and limb to keep the *techeilet* tradition alive?

Well, the answer lies in Chassidut. According to Kabala the colors blue and white represent two paths in the service of G-d. White represents *chesed*, or love of G-d. *techeilet* blue represents *gevura* or fear of G-d. The two colors together remind us of both types of mitzvos – positive and negative.



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The Rebbe explains the Jewish people saw their inability to find the *techeilet* as a sign that our service of G-d must be mainly out of love. These days we must teach our children about Judaism lovingly, without shouting at them or forcing it upon them. This then is the reason for our not scrambling to reinstate the techeilet tradition. And I will paraphrase Rashbi who said, "Our redemption depends on love (dearness)."