

THE LAW OF THE FRINGES (TZITZIT)

A “WEDDING RING” FOR YHVH’S PEOPLE TO WEAR IN REMEMBRANCE OF THEIR LOVE COVENANT WITH HIM

by Ya’acov Natan Lawrence

Shofars, Davidic worship dance, kippahs, *talits*, a Torah scroll and *tzitzit* all have something in common. They are hallmark symbols of Messianism. When a Christian discovers the Hebrew roots of his faith, like a hand fitting into a glove, it is not long before he is acting out his renewed faith in a highly demonstrable manner. Outsiders may view the wearing of beards, *talit* and kippahs as exhibitionism, but to the Messianic, who truly feels that he has returned to the roots of his faith, they are symbols of a faith that are more than superficial in nature. They represent a connectedness to his spiritual family tree, to the nation of Israel and eventually to the God of Israel, YHVH Elohim, the originator of that faith, family tree and nation.

As a wedding ring symbolizes the covenantal agreement one spouse has for another, so the blue fringes worn on the corners of one’s garments are an outward symbol of one’s spiritual commitment and devotion to the Elohim of Israel through obedience to his instructions in righteousness as found in the Torah portion of the sacred Scriptures.

Indeed, it is not because of man-made tradition, but because of a direct command in the Torah that born-again Israelites wear *tzitzit*, for we read in Numbers 15:37–41,

And YHVH spoke unto Moses, saying, “Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes [*tzitzit*] in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribbon of blue. And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of YHVH, and do them; and that you seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to go a whoring, that you may remember, and do all my commandments, and be set apart unto your Elohim. I am YHVH your Elohim, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your Elohim: I am YHVH your Elohim.”

This command of YHVH is serious enough that he repeated it again in Deuteronomy 22:12,

You shall make you fringes upon the four quarters [wings] of your garments, wherewith you shall cover yourself.

Let’s elucidate on what is said in these two passages:

- ✎ This command is for the Children of Israel. It applies to men, women and children, although in rabbinic Jewish tradition it is just the men who wear fringes. There is the idea that when Torah speaks of “Children of Israel” it is referring only to the men, while the term “House of Israel” refers to both men and women, and since the former term is used in Numbers 15:38 this command pertains only to men. This notion, however, is debatable.
- ✎ The Israelites are to make fringes [*tzitzit*, Strong’s H6734] on the four borders or corners [*kanaph*, Strong’s H3761 meaning *wings, mantel or skirt*] of their garments. The word *tzitzit* (צִיצִית *tzadik-yud-tzadik-tav*) means *tassel or lock (of hair)* and so hung down from the four corners of one’s garment. The *Stone Edition Chumash* notes that the word *tzitzit* is related to the word *betzeytz* (בֵּתְצֵיץ *hey-tzadik-yud-tzadik soffit*) meaning *to peer at something intently with sparkling eyes* (p. 817). The only place this word is used in Scripture is in the Song of Songs 2:9. Here the beloved (Yeshua) is peering, gazing or peeping with sparkling eyes of love through the window at his bride. The wearer of *tzitzit* needs to remember this when he gazes intently at the *tzitzit* hanging from his garments.

- ✎ Out of each corner fringe is to be a ribbon [cord or thread] of blue [i.e. *techeilet* blue]. According to one Levitical Jewish expert on this subject, in ancient times the regular threads of the garment extended past the corners of the garments to form a tassel with a blue thread woven into each corner tassel. Nowadays one blue thread is woven into three strands of white thread. All four threads (three white and one blue) are somehow woven or tied into the four corners of one's garment. In the *Stone Edition Tanach* (OT) in Numbers 15:38 it reads "a thread of turquoise wool." The word *wool* is not in the Hebrew, and is a rabbinic insertion.
- ✎ The Hebrew word for blue used in our Numbers passage is not the generic Hebrew word for blue, but rather is a specific type of blue: a turquoise, sky or cerulean-type blue. There is debate among the rabbinate as to the source of that blue. Some say it derives from a sea squid, and some from a sea snail, both of which are found in the Mediterranean Sea. Whatever the case, threads made from both sources are readily available for purchase from Israeli sources. Why blue and not some other color? According to rabbinic tradition, the *techeilet* blue thread helps one to focus on his duty to YHVH since *techeilet* is similar to the color of the sea, the sea to the sky, and the sky to Elohim's throne of glory. This round-about means of focusing on Elohim's throne teaches that people should look for ways to direct their attention toward higher aspirations (*ibid.* p. 817). Most orthodox Jews wear all white *tzitzit*. There are various reasons given as to why they no longer wear blue. Some say that it is because the source and recipe for the exact color of blue has been lost. Others say that Jews stopped wearing blue out of mourning for the destruction of the Temple. Despite the traditions of men which make of none effect YHVH's Word (Mark 7:7–9), Torah commands us to wear blue, and that is YHVH's final word on the matter. YHVH expects his children to do the best that they can to follow his instructions, whether they know the exact shade of blue or not.
- ✎ The fringes are to be looked upon by the wearer for the purpose of remembering to do all of YHVH's commandments so that one does not follow one's evil inclination and fall into idolatry and spiritual whoredom by turning away from YHVH. These fringes are to remind us that we are set-apart (holy), and that our Elohim has called us out of spiritual Egypt and has set us apart as a unique people who belong to him. Therefore, we cannot be or act like the heathens. To be able to look upon the fringes means they must be worn externally where one can see them. This is contrary to many religious Jews who wear them on the inside of their clothing.

Scripture gives no clear directions on what the fringes or tassels should look like or on how to tie them. As can be expected, many traditions have arisen regarding tying *tzitzit*. Over the ages, an elaborate system of a certain number of knots and wraps has evolved into which has been encoded, through Hebrew numeration rules where each number represents to a letter in the Hebrew alphabet, various messages. The most common means of tying *tzitzit*—the Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewish methods both have the following message encoded in their respective *tzitzit*:

- ✎ The numerical value of the word *tzitzit* is 600, and there are eight threads and five knots, for a total of 613, the number of commandments found in the Torah (365 negative [for the number of the days of the year] and 248 positive [for the parts of the human body]).
- ✎ The five knots in each tassel signify the books of the law; the Torah, which is the foundation of YHVH's word.
- ✎ There is one winding of seven wraps and one of eight for a total of fifteen wraps. The number fifteen is written by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet *yod* and *hay*. Next there is a winding of eleven wraps, which is written by the letters *vav* and *hay*. Next there is a winding of thirteen wraps, which signifies the Hebrew word *echad* and is numerically equivalent to *one*. Therefore, the number of the windings spells out the words, *YHVH is one*.
- ✎ There are five sets of two knots when multiplied equals ten representing the Ten Statements or Commandments on the two tablets of stone with five commandments on each stone.
- ✎ Additionally $7 + 8 + 11 + 13 = 39$ which is the number of Books in the Tanakh.

Eventually, the Jews stopped wearing visible fringes on four-cornered garments sometime early in the common or modern era. No one knows for sure when this happened, but it is likely to have been a result of Jewish persecution at the hands of the Romans. Wearing *tzitzit* was a dead giveaway that one was Jewish, so to avoid persecution *tzitzit* were placed on a four cornered cloth called *talit* or *talith*. These were easily concealed and were brought out and worn only in privacy or in Jewish-friendly gatherings.

The word *tal* means *little* and *ith* means *tent*. Each man's *talit* became his personal prayer tent or closet in which to be alone with his Heavenly Father. A *talit katan* is a small *talit* worn as an undergarment, while a *talit gadol* or, what is commonly called, a prayer shawl, is a large *talit* that is worn like a cape or poncho over the top of one's garments.

It is common for men to wear these in religious gatherings, during times of prayer, while teaching Scripture or doing ministry, while worshipping and by a groom in a wedding. More and more women are wearing a *talit*. This is especially acceptable if her *talit* is more feminine in nature, thus not violating the Torah commandment that forbids women from wearing clothes that resemble those of man (Deut. 22:5).

Pertaining to the deeper spiritual significance of wearing *tzitzit* we read in Psalm 25:3 and 5 "On you [YHVH] do I wait all the day..." *Wait* is the Hebrew word *qavah* (*Strong's* H6960) meaning *to wait, look, wait for, hope, expect, to bind together (by twisting)*. Could this be a loose reference to the *tzitzit*, which is twisted and bound together in a series of wraps and knots and which the wearer is to *look upon* and *remember the commandments of YHVH*? This word is referring to a place of intense intimacy with YHVH where we trust our lives with him and know that the outcome is in his hands.

Other places *qavah* is used:

Isaiah 40:31— They that wait upon YHVH shall mount up ...

Psalm 37:9— Those that wait upon YHVH shall inherit the earth

Psalm 37:34— Wait upon YHVH and keep his way.

Psalm 52:9— Wait upon his name [i.e., be bound or twist together with his covenant names which is tied into the *tzitzit* itself].

Psalm 69:6— Let none that wait upon YHVH of Hosts be put to shame.

Psalm 130:5— I wait for YHVH, my soul does wait, and in his word do I hope.