

The Tallit: Garment Of Glory!

NUM 15:38-41 Speak to the people of Israel, and **bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a thread of blue. And it shall be to you for a fringe, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them;** and that you seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, which incline you to go astray; **That you may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; I am the Lord your God.

DEU 22:12 **You shall make fringes upon the four quarters of your cloak, with which you cover yourself.**

One should always be heedful of the commandment to wear **tsitsit**, for the Torah equated and connected all other mitzvot with it, as it is written 'And you shall see it and remember all of the commandments of Hashem and you shall do them.' (Rambam, Hil. Tsitsit, 3;13)

This is a funny subject. It remains one of the two most difficult things for Gentiles to adopt (the other being tefillin, which of course, even Jews find difficult to wear). I've watched movie after movie of Jesus, and rarely do they show him wearing a tallit.

Others have shown other Jewish men wearing them - but always the villains in the movie! Never Joseph, nor his family, nor Yeshua's talmidim (disciples)...no wonder you can't get Christians to wear them! "Show me in the Bible where such a thing is commanded, and I'll do it!" they say about some things. Apparently, the Tallit is not one of them. The tallit is also known by the silly name "prayer shawl". I've never heard a Jew say "Prayer shawl". The Tallit comes in different sizes and colors, from the **tallit qatan**, a small talit worn under the clothing, to a Tallit gedolah (the more common variety). I tend to prefer the larger size tallitot, which are 72" wide or so. The purpose of the talit, strange as it may seem, is merely to hold the ritual fringes, the tzitzit. For various reasons we won't get into here, suffice it to say that most Jews do not wear the blue thread anymore, keeping them all white. The tallit usually comes with a number of stripes across it (usually black), with each number standing for a different meaning. When purchasing a tallit, it is best to buy one that appeals to you - but be sure to visit the congregation you wish to attend before buying one. What if you get a brightly colored tallit, like a Gabrieli or an Agam, and the congregation you end up attending at wears only the orthodox black and white? These are more than fashion concerns! It might be felt that you are not giving enough reverence to the tallit, the Temple in Jerusalem, the western wall, Yeshua, or even Bibi Netanyahu (I have no idea - everyone takes their beliefs seriously, as they should, and like thinkers tend to congregate together. Should you attend a congregation where everybody wears the orthodox tallit, you should too; unless of course, it's because the congregation is poor and that's the least expensive tallit you can buy). There are many locations to get Tallitot in all sizes, such as Atara Melech ministries, which specializes in Tallit Gedolim (see <http://www.messianic.com>; the front page has a direct link to Atara Melech), or the MJAA, which has a smaller selection.

At this point, I recommend "The Tallit - Garment of Glory" by Rabbi David M. Hargis. The book goes into great detail about the meaning of the Tallit, its biblical usage, and etc. You can purchase it through the Messianic.Com address, by internet or mail order. But what is a Tallit? There are many biblical references to it: It was the "seamless garment" worn by Yeshua and gambled for by Romans, the garment that touching it healed. The exact numbering of the word tsitsit adds to 613, the number of the commandments. The Tsitsit is an "OT", a visual reminder of Adonai's covenant with us, and the 613 commandments. The word Ot is unusual; it comprised Aleph and Tav, the first and last letters of Emet. Note that the middle letter is Mem, the first letter of Mashiach. Note the middle two letters of Mashiach are the first two letters of Yeshua's name reversed, which brings us back to the middle letter of Yeshua's name - Vav! Ot can be seen as Aleph Vav Tav, or Aleph (the first) and* Tav (the Last). The only letter not used in Yeshua's name is the Ayin, which stands for the Hebrew word for "Eyes" - Which brings us back to Ot, a visual reminder. *The letter Vav as a prefix means "And".

So the Greek way to say this is Alpha and Omega. Yeshua is saying, "I am the first and the last, the truth, the direct object of Torah." Et is the Hebrew word to show the direct object of an action, a sentence, or an originator of an action (it has no translation). Notice the last letter of Et and Ot are also the first and last letters of tsitsit (tsitsit might also be seen as an anagram of the three words Righteousness, Yeshua (salvation), Torah - Tzedek, Yeshua, Torah repeated twice. The first for Messiah's coming as suffering servant, and the second for his return as triumphant King Messiah). Is the tsitsit a garment of glory? It is a living symbol of Messiah's sacrifice, and return, a living symbol of truth, Messiah, and Torah, all rolled into one. Conclusion: Have you ever noticed that the word Amen is an anagram of Emet, Mashiach Natan, or "The truth Messiah Gives?" How many of you have noticed continued references here to Revelations? It's not intentional, but as I researched the Tallit, it kept pointing that way! The Tallit is a symbol, something we wear in prayer. Reluctance to wear one is odd when you research it, and hardly understandable. When you finally get one, the blessing for it is "Baruch ata Adonai, Elohaynu Melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitsvotav l'hitatef b'tsitsit". Blessed are you YHVH our G-d, king of the universe, who has sanctified us with your commandments on wearing tsitsit. Try it, you'll like it!

Q: How Important is the Wearing of Tzitzit?

A: The **tzitzit** (pronounced tsee-tseet, known in English as 'fringes' or 'tassels') are worn by Orthodox Jews and Torah-observant Messianic Jews today because G-d commanded the Israelites to do so forever: *The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels (tzitzit) on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God.'* (**Numbers 15:37-41, NIV**).

During Bible times, the Jews (and other peoples of the region) wore four-cornered garments. In the above Scripture (and Deuteronomy 22:12) G-d commands the Jewish people 'throughout the generations to come' to wear fringes on the corners of their garments so as to remember G-d's commands. Since this command was never rescinded, we believe that all Jewish men, including Messianic ones, should wear fringes. When people stopped wearing four-cornered garments, some Rabbis ruled that the law only applied to when one is wearing a four-cornered garment. Those who were not so interested in doing their best to fulfil this law were satisfied with only wearing a four-cornered garment with tassels during prayer, (especially in synagogue) as a prayer shawl, or tallit. Those who wished to do everything in their power to fulfil G-d's commands created a four-cornered garment to be worn under one's shirt, called a tallit katan ('katan' means small). Since in the western world we no longer wear four-cornered garments, Orthodox Jews wear a tallit katan.

Because it is normally worn as an undergarment, the fringes are made long enough to extend outside of one's trousers. This is important, since the tassels are meant to be seen so as to remind us of G-d's commands. Some more liberal 'branches' of Judaism have done away with the wearing of tzitzit and the tallit.

The way in which the fringes are traditionally tied has ancient Rabbinic origins. Although various versions of 'mystical' significance has been placed on the traditional method of tying the fringes, it is unclear where this method originated. Since we have no reason to think that it is anti-Biblical, we continue as Messianic Jews to tie them the same way.

Another Rabbinic interpretation concerning fringes is that they should no longer contain the blue thread. The Torah commands that tzitzit contain a thread of tikhales (blue). According to tradition, the dye for this color came from a species of the snail family called Chilazone. According to the Talmud, the Chilazone appears only once in seventy years (Menachot 44a). Rabbinic literature indicates several locations for Chilazone, but the elusive snail is apparently no longer available.

Another tradition suggests that the blue thread was removed because in the time of the Roman occupation, the Romans would not allow anyone to wear royal blue. Many historical purists in Israel today are wearing the blue thread anyway. Others reject the idea that because the specific blue dye which was supposedly always used in Bible times is no longer available, that the tzitzit should be white! Obviously any blue is more blue than white! Many Messianic Jews and Messianic gerim (proselytes) wear the fringes simply because it is something that G-d commanded, and also for the purpose of identifying with the Jewish community. When worn by Messianics, the fringes normally do contain the blue cord so as to be Scripturally accurate, and are sometimes worn attached directly to belt loops or pinned inside the trousers rather than to a separate four-cornered undergarment. It is, after all, the fringes that are commanded, not the garment.

Yeshua himself, being perfect in his Jewishness as in all else, naturally wore fringes, as is described in Scripture in Matthew 9:20, concerning the woman who had had a hemorrhage for 12 years. She touched the tzitzit [Greek 'kraspedon,' fringe or tassel] on His robe.

As always, traditions must be tested against Scripture before being accepted into Messianic Jewish practice. Here is something which on first glance seems to be a tradition, but which is Scripturally commanded and was followed by Yeshua and His disciples in the practice of their Judaism. It is incumbent upon us to walk in His footsteps by living as He and His disciples did.

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