

# Why the Hassle over Tassels?

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One of the areas of Torah which a lot of groups reject today is the subject of wearing "fringes" or "tassels" attached to a four cornered garment. Even today only the Orthodox attempt to follow this Torah mitzvah, today and most of them disregard the mitzvah about the "blue thread" in the fringes. Many Sacred Name groups and Messianics show contempt for this Torah mitzvah as ritualism and worthless and claim it has been abolished by the Renewed Covenant. Is this true? The Word of Elohim says:

- *"Again, YHWH spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Speak to the children of Yisrael: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the mitzvot of YHWH to do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do ALL My mitzvot, and be HOLY for your Elohim. I am YHWH your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your Elohim: I am YHWH your Elohim" (Numbers 15:37-41).*

What about this mitzvah? Is it a relic of an old ritual which no longer has any true significance and need not be observed? But is this true? The UONYC believes strongly that we are descended from the "lost ten tribes of Yisrael," and have impressive evidence to back up that claim. Although our ancestors went into captivity millennia ago, and adopted pagan customs, religious ideas, and holidays, does this mean we have no need to repent, and return to the Torah commands of our fathers?

## Renewed Covenant Witness

Yahshua HaMoshiach, was a Yehudite, and lived a sinless life. He set us the example of how we ought to live. Yochanan tells us: *"He who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6)*. Kepha adds that Messiah left *"us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Pet.2:21)*. Did Yahshua the Messiah, our template for living a holy life wear "fringes" on the corners of His garments? Let us find the answer:

- *"And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, 'If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.' But Yahshua turned around, and when He saw her He said, 'Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.' And the woman was made well from that hour" (Matt.9:21-22).*

The Jewish New Testament, by Dr. David Stern explains what the "hem" of Yahshua' garment was.

- *"A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years approached him from behind and touched the tzitzit on his robe. For she said to herself, 'If I can only touch his robe, I will be healed.' Yahshua turned, saw her, and said, 'Courage, daughter! Your trust has healed you."*

The Book of Mark records the same event, but adds some features to the account:

- *". . . a large crowd followed, pressing all around him. Among them was a woman who had had an hemorrhage for twelve years and had suffered a great deal under many physicians. She had spent her life savings; yet instead of improving, she had grown worse. She had heard about Yahshua, so she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his robe; for she said, 'If I touch even his clothes, I will be healed.' Instantly the hemorrhaging stopped, and she felt in her body that she had been healed from the disease. At the same time, Yahshua, aware that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' His talmidim [disciples] responded, 'You see the people pressing in on you; and still you asked, "Who touched me?"' But he kept looking around to see who had done it. The woman,*

frightened, and trembling, because she knew what had happened to her, came and fell down in front of him and told him the whole truth. 'Daughter,' he said to her, 'your trust has healed you. Go in peace, and be healed of your disease'" (**Mark 5:24-34, JNT**).

**The Jewish New Testament Commentary** explains:

- "A woman who had . . . a hemorrhage approached him from behind and . . . touched his tzitzit. She was in a state of ritual impurity because of her hemorrhage. She touched the holiest part of Yahshua's garment. No wonder she approached from behind -- she was afraid; this is also why she hesitated to answer Yahshua's question, 'Who touched my clothes?' (Mark 5:29-33). For normally the impure defiles the pure (see Haggai 2:11-13; also the Talmud, Toharot). But in this case, the opposite happened: the purity of Yahshua the Messiah and of his tzitziyot ["tassels," or "fringes"] remained uncompromised, while instead the cause of the woman's impurity was instantly removed. In the following incident, the raising of the dead girl, this principle is exemplified even more strongly, since Yahshua himself initiates contact with what is regarded in Judaism as the primary source of all impurity, a dead body (v.25) . . ." (**comment on Matthew 9:20**).

What are these "tzitziyot" on the garments? David Stern, the author of **the Jewish New Testament**, explains:

- "Tzitzit (plural tzitziyot). Observant Jewish men in Yahshua's time and today have worn fringes on the corners of their garments, in obedience to Numbers 15:37-41, the third of the three Torah passages recited in the Sh'ma portion of the synagogue service. These fringes are made in a special way and have a unique appearance. Their purpose is to remind Elohim's people to obey his mitzvot. Since they are not merely decorations, the usual renders of Greek kraspedon -- 'hem,' 'fringe,' 'border,' 'tassel' -- are replaced here by 'tzitzit.' Today Jewish men wear tzitziyot on a tallit gadol ('large tallit'), which is not an article of clothing but a ritual cloth donned primarily for synagogue worship, or on a tallit katan ('little tallit'), which is an undergarment especially designed with corners for the tzitziyot. But Yahshua wore his on his robe, a heavy blanket-like over-garment similar to that worn by Bedouins today."

These "tassels" were commanded by Elohim in the Torah to be worn by His people, to remind them to keep His mitzvot. They are in full view, and therefore would be a constant reminder of Elohim's Torah. Even today you can sometimes see the tassels hanging out over the belts of Yehudites who wear a four-cornered undershirt, and pull the tassels to the outside of the garment. These tassels are tied into knots, as a reminder of all 613 of the Torahs of Moshe (of which there are 248 prohibitions or negative commands, and 365 affirmations or positive commands). The numerical value of the letters of the word *tzitzit* is 600; there are eight threads in each "fringe," and five knots; add these all up and you get 613, the number of Elohim's mitzvot.

### **Thread of Blue**

Each tzitzit was to have a blue thread (techelet) running through it. During the Biblical period, blue was probably the most expensive color to produce. It was generally reserved for kings and the very wealthy. Historically, the only source for the blue was a small gland in the murex snail. It took some 12,000 snails to fill up a thimble of blue dye. In 200 B.C.E., one pound of cloth dyed blue cost the whopping sum of \$36,000 in terms of today's American dollar. By 300 C.E., the cost had soared to \$96,000. This indicates that Lydiah, mentioned in Acts as being a seller of purple, was a very wealthy lady (**Acts 16:14**).

Why was each tassel inclusive of a thread of blue (techelet)? Of the primary colors, "red" represents man (Adam's name was actually "red," for the red clay from which he was made). "Blue" is the color representative of the heavens, and of Elohim. "Purple," the combination of "red" and "blue," is the color of the Messiah, Yahshua, and the coming King. As Elohim who became a man, He combined the two colors, forming His own color, "purple."

Therefore, for each person to have blue in his tassels was symbolic of having something of the Divine -- a connection with Elohim. This served to remind each person not only of Elohim's mitzvot, but of their direct connection to Elohim, as He said: "I am YHWH your Elohim who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your Elohim. I am the YHWH your Elohim" (**Num.15:41**).

Such an expensive thread of blue would probably have been passed down from generation to generation, from father to son as one of his precious legacies.

### Symbol of the King

The fringes, in a garment, were symbolical of his authority. We find an interesting story in the I Shemuel, where David sneaks up on King Shaul in a cave at En Gedi, and cuts off his tassels.

- *"Now it happened, when Shaul had returned from following the Philistines that it was told him, saying, 'Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi.' Then Shaul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats. So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Shaul went in to attend to his needs, (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.) Then the men of David said to him, 'This is the day of which YHWH said to you, "Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you."' And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Shaul's robe. Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Shaul's robe. And he said, 'YHWH forbid that I should do this thing to my master, YHWH's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of YHWH.' So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Shaul" **(I Samuel 24:1-7)**.*

David's heart smote him because he knew that to cut off a king's tassels was stealing his authority, emasculating his spiritual connection with Elohim, depriving him of his nobility. At En Gedi, David had literally taken Shaul's "authority" and at that point he could probably have seized the throne over Yisrael. But David chose not to do it, but to leave the timing in Elohim's hands. After David prostrated himself before Shaul, showing him the tassel he had cut off his robe, Shaul was impressed with his charity and having his own life spared.

- *"You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when YHWH delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may YHWH reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Yisrael shall be established in your hand" **(I Samuel 24:17-20)**.*

Another example of the "power" represented by a man's tassels is illustrated by the Book of Ruth. In chapter three she goes to Boaz, her near kinsman, in the middle of the night, at the threshing floor, and lays down near him, sleeping at his feet. He awoke with a start, and asked, "Who are you?" Ruth replied:

- *"I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt [Hebrew, "corner of thy garment"] over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman" **(Ruth 3:9)**.*

The Hebrew word translated "skirt" here is *kanaph* and means "an edge or extremity," "of a garment or bed-clothing." Thus this passage, obscured by English translations, refers to the fringes -- the *tzitzit* of Boaz's robe -- being cast over Ruth, symbolizing his taking her under his "authority," as in becoming her husband.

When the woman with the hemorrhage of blood therefore touched the "tassels" of Yahshua's garment, she was touching the symbol of His power and authority. He noticed it when "power" went out of Him. She was healed by this power, activated by her trust.

### Wrong Use of Tzitziyot

The fringes were commanded by Elohim to be worn by Yisrael, to remind them of their connection to Him and of all of His mitzvot. However, by the time of the Second Temple period some of the Yehudim had perverted them into signs of social status and piety. The wealthier and holier you were, the longer your tassels. During the time of Yahshua, the tassels of some of the Pharisees were so long that they dragged on the ground.

Yahshua rebuked this display of vanity, saying,

- *"They tie heavy loads onto people's shoulders but won't lift a finger to help carry them. Everything they do is done to be seen by others; for they make their t'fillin broad and their tzitziyot long, they love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogue... (Matt.23:4-7, JNT).*

This passage in Matthew, therefore, should teach us that it is not wrong to wear "tassels" or "fringes" in our garments as commanded in the Torah. However, we should not exaggerate them, making them "long," to draw attention to our supposed "holiness."

The lesson for us is that it is important, in Elohim's sight, that we perform Elohim's mitzvot and to keep His Torah -- including the wearing of prayer shawls (tallitot) at the appropriate times, and the *tzitziyot* -- and to do so from sincerity of heart, in humility and loving obedience to Elohim. We should follow the example of the Messiah by "walking in His steps" (I Pet.2:21). We should not be overly concerned with outward "appearances" or wear "tassels" to impress others with our righteousness.

- *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will REJECT YOU from being priest for Me; because you have FORGOTTEN THE TORAH OF YOUR ELOHIM, I also will forget your children"(Hosea 4:6).*
- *"And now, O priests, this mitzvah is for you. If you will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to My name,' says YHWH of hosts, I will send a CURSE upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your descendants, and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts . . . 'For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the TORAH at his mouth; for he is the messenger of YHWH of hosts. But you have departed from the way; you have caused MANY to STUMBLE AT THE TORAH. You have CORRUPTED THE COVENANT of Levi,' says YHWH of hosts. Therefore, I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people. Because you have not kept My ways, but have SHOWN PARTIALITY IN THE TORAH" (Malachi 2:1-9, NKJV).*