



ARE WE A "FRINGE" GROUP?

BY GLENN MCWILLIAMS OF TK TORAH KEEPERS

Numbers 15:38-41 *Speak unto the children 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 ribband of blue: ³⁹and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of YHWH, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: ⁴⁰that ye may remember, and do all My commandments, and be holy unto your Elohim. ⁴¹I am YHWH your Elohim, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your Elohim: I am YHWH your Elohim.*

Deuteronomy 22:12 *Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself.*

Twice in the Torah the children of Israel are commanded to place fringes upon the corners of their garments as a reminder of the commandments of YHWH. The word "fringes" in these two passages is actually translating two different Hebrew words. In the first reference, the word "fringes" is translating the Hebrew word **tzitzit** (*tsade, yud, tsade, yud, tav*), which may be translated as "**floral or wing-like projection,**" "**a forelock of hair,**" "**fringe,**" or "**tassel.**"¹ The exact etymology of this word is debatable. It is possible that the root of the word **tzitzit** is the word **tzitz** (*tsade, yud, tsade*), which means "**bloom**" or "**flower.**"² From this we may understand that the **tzitzit** were to be a form of ornamentation or decoration.

It is also possible that the word **tzitzit** is part of a **play on words**. The word **tzutz** (*tsade, vav, tsade*), which in some grammatical forms becomes **tzitz** (*tsade, yud, tsade*), may be translated as "**to look**" or "**to gaze upon.**" The word **metzitz** is used, for example, in the Song of Solomon.

Song of Solomon 2:9 *My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh (metzitz) forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.*

Regardless of which of these two words **tzitzit** is derived from, we should recognize that **both are references to things that involve our eyes seeing.** Flowers, blossoms, ornamentation, and decorations are all meant to be looked at or gazed upon. It is clear from the commandment that the **tzitzit** or fringes were to be seen by the children of Israel. Thus the word **tzitzit**, while referring to a flower, blossom, tassel, or fringe, may, when looked at or gazed upon, remind the children of Israel of their covenant with YHWH.

Numbers 15:39 *And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may **look upon it, and***

remember all the commandments of YHWH, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring.

While the word for "look" in this passage is *ra'a*, not *tzutz* or *metzitz*, the name *tzitzit* may still indicate that these ornaments were to be visible to the children of Israel.

The second word translated as "fringes" is the Hebrew word *gadyl* (*gimmel, dalet, yud, lammed*), which may be translated as "thread," "twisting," "tassel," "festoon," or "wreath."³ Here we may think of something braided.

***Deuteronomy 22:12** Thou shalt make thee fringes (*g'dilim*) upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest thyself.*

Once again, we are commanded to place braided threads upon the corners of our garments. **We may ask why the Torah uses a different word in this instance.** I would suggest that it is to give us greater detail. The word *gadyl* comes from the root word *gadal* (*gimmel, dalet, lammed*), which may be translated as "great," "large," "grow," "expand," or "become great."⁴ This same root may also mean "plaited" or "braided." Here we may think of a thread growing large or great by being braided with other threads until the thread becomes a rope. By using the word *gadyl*, the Torah gives us another detail concerning the fringes or tassels that are to be worn. From the word *gadyl* we may understand that the fringes are to be braided.

The idea that the fringes are to be braided is further supported by a third word that is used in conjunction with the *tzitzit* - the Hebrew word *patyl* (*pey, tav, yud, lammed*), which means "a thread," "twine," or "twisted or braided cord."⁵ We are commanded that the *tzitzit* should have a *patyl* of blue upon it.

***Numbers 15:38** Speak unto the children 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 **ribband** (*patyl*) of blue.*

While the English word "ribband" evokes images of a thick stripe of satin cloth, the Hebrew simply means twisted, braided thread or twine. Thus it would seem that the threads of the tassel are to somehow be braided with or bound by a thread of blue.

The word "blue" is the translation of the Hebrew word *techelet* (*tav, khaf, lammed, tav*). While there is great debate over whether *techelet* is a specific shade of blue or the blue dye created from a specific snail or sea creature, **I see nothing in the text that identifies what shade of blue this thread or cord is to be.** I feel comfortable teaching that the word *techelet* simply means "blue." I do not believe that the word *techelet* implies that the dye must be one particular shade of blue or that it must come from a specific animal. Snails and sea creatures were rare in the wilderness, while indigo was very common. Hundreds of snails must die to create just a few ounces of blue or purple dye. We should remember that *techelet* was used in the construction of the Tabernacle, the veils, the coverings for the holy furnishings, and for the priestly garments. A great deal of dye would have been used in the making of these objects; therefore, it would seem logical that the children of Israel would have used a resource more readily available to them in the wilderness than rare snails and sea creatures.

While the Torah does command the use of *techelet* thread in the making of the *tzitzit*, there is no

requirement given concerning the **other** colors of thread which may be used in making the tassels. Traditionally, *tzitzit* were made out of white thread, with one blue thread tying the tassel or fringe together. There is, however, no prohibition given in the Torah regarding the use of other colors of thread in the making of the *tzitzit*. We should also note that there are no specific directions given concerning the manner of tying or braiding the *tzitzit*, the required number of strands, or their required length.

The next question we must answer concerns **where** these tassels or fringes are to be placed. The Hebrew word ***begeed*** is a somewhat generic word referring to everything from undergarments to outer garments. The Hebrew word ***kesuf***, translated as "vesture," simply means "covering," and is likewise used in a somewhat generic way to describe every layer of clothing. Thus, it is difficult from these two words alone to determine onto what garment we are to attach the *tzitzit*. Two other details may help bring clarity to this issue. In the second reference to these fringes, **it is very clearly stated that the fringes are to be tied to the "four corners" of our vesture**. The Hebrew word ***kanaf*** (*kaf, nun, fey*) may be translated as "wing," "extremity," "edge," "border," "corner," or even "skirt." The connection of the *kanaf* of our garments with wings is a very powerful image in the Scriptures.

Exodus 25:20 And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings (*kanaf*) on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings (*kanaf*), and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be.

Deuteronomy 32:11 As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings (*kanaf*), taketh them, beareth them on her wings.

Ruth 2:12 YHWH recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of YHWH Elohim of Israel, under whose wings (*kanaf*) thou art come to trust.

Psalms 17:8 Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Thy wings (*kanaf*).

Psalms 36:7 How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O Elohim! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings (*kanaf*).

Psalms 57:1 Be merciful unto me, O Elohim, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in Thee: yea, in the shadow of Thy wings (*kanaf*) will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

Psalms 91:4 He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings (*kanaf*) shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

We may likewise recall the words of Yeshua, who desired to be Jerusalem's covering and protection.

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Another powerful reference to the **kanaf** as "wings" is found in a reference to the Messiah.

Malachi 4:2 But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings (**kanaf**); and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

Was it this prophecy that gave the plagued woman the courage to take hold of Yeshua's **kanaf**?

Matthew 9:20-21 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and **touched the hem of his garment**: ²¹ for she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

Clearly the word **kanaf** seems to be associated not only with wings but also with the idea of "covering." This concept of **kanaf** having the function of a covering may be seen in a number of examples from the Scriptures.

Deuteronomy 22:30 A man shall not take his father's wife, nor discover his father's skirt (**kanaf**).

Deuteronomy 27:20 Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt (**kanaf**). And all the people shall say, Amen.

Ruth 3:9 And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt (**kanaf**) over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

Here we clearly see that the **kanaf** are associated with **some type of external garment** used for covering oneself. That the garment with *tzitzit* upon it was an identifiable garment is made clear in the writings of the prophet Zechariah.

Zechariah 8:23 Thus saith YHWH of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt (**kanaf**) of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that Elohim is with you.

There are at least two biblical garments that seem to fit the description of the garment carrying tzitzit. **The first is a tunic-like garment that was worn over another outer garment.** This tunic-like garment had four corners and was clearly visible to others. **A second blanket or cloak-like, outer garment was often worn to protect against the elements** of wind, sand, dust, rain, and heat. This larger garment was often used as a tent for shade or a blanket to keep one warm at night. It is this outer garment that is referred to in the above passages from Ruth as well as in the teachings concerning the receiving of a pledge.

Exodus 22:26-27 If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: ²⁷for that is his covering (kesut) only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto Me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.

Deuteronomy 24:12-13 And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: ¹³in any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before YHWH thy Elohim.

Deuteronomy 24:17 Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge.

Both of these garments are still with us today, but they have changed over time. **The larger, blanket-like outer garment is evident today in the modern tallit or prayer shawl.** While this large, four-cornered garment was a standard piece of clothing in days gone by, the tallit or prayer shawl of today has been relegated to times of prayer. **An adaptation of the tunic-like garment has been preserved for us in the tallit katan or little prayer shawl** with the tzitzit attached that is worn as a four-cornered undergarment. This later garment was developed during a time of persecution when it was illegal to wear tzitzit. By wearing the tallit katan concealed beneath other clothing, the believer could still fulfill the commandment to wear tzitzit without overtly endangering his life. While this practice is understandable in times of persecution, the commandment of **the Torah requires that the tzitzit be visible.** It is possible that the cloak and the tunic, as well as any other four-cornered garments, were festooned with tzitzit. **Since neither cloaks nor tunics play much part in our modern wardrobe, we may ask how we are to wear tzitzit today.** Putting on a tallit or prayer shawl for prayer is indeed a fulfilling of the commandment to wear tzitzit. But is this limited usage truly consistent with the spirit of the Torah?

If the purpose of wearing tzitzit is to encourage one to remember the covenant, keep the covenant, and avoid the temptation to follow one's own eyes and heart to chase after other elohim, then **it would seem that the spirit of the Torah is commanding that tzitzit should be worn continually,** not just at times of prayer. The spirit of the Torah seems to suggest that the tzitzit are to be visible as we walk through the temptations of the world. That the tzitzit are to be on the "four corners" of our garments seems to indicate that no matter which direction we turn or to which corner of the earth we are sent, the tzitzit would remind us that we are always to keep the covenant, even to the four corners of the earth.

Fulfilling the spirit of the commandment to wear tzitzit may be accomplished in several ways. The tzitzit may be worn on a tallit katan or little prayer shawl worn under the clothing like a tunic with the tzitzit themselves still being visible. Tzitzit may be directly tied on belt loops or pinned to the hem of a

garment.

It is also fitting to create an appropriate, tunic-like garment to which *tzitzit* may be attached to wear over one's clothing. There are also shirts that have splits up each side to create four corners that will accommodate *tzitzit* being tied onto them. **What seems to be most important is that *tzitzit* be worn and that they be visible.** The length, manner of tying, and color(s), other than blue, used to make the *tzitzit* are left to the imagination of the children of Israel. What is commanded, however, is that we wear them.

Another question that may be raised at this time is **who is to wear *tzitzit*?** The rabbis have declared that the large, blanket-like outer garment as well as the smaller tunic are to be considered men's clothing. Therefore, the rabbis reason that both the larger prayer shawl as well as the little prayer shawl that are derived from these ancient garments are likewise men's garments. Since *tzitzit* belong to the prayer shawls, and since the Torah forbids women from wearing men's clothing, the rabbis reason that women should not wear *tzitzit*.

Deuteronomy 22:5 The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto YHWH thy Elohim.

This rabbinic teaching has caused many of the children of Israel to stumble and violate the Torah's clear commandment to wear *tzitzit*. The Torah does not designate that *tzitzit* be tied only to the garments of the men. The Torah is very clear on this matter. The children of Israel are to wear *tzitzit*. "The children of Israel," as a title, refers to ALL of those who would identify themselves as a part of the covenant people of YHWH regardless of bloodline, age, or gender. Wearing *tzitzit* is a part of keeping the covenant. Since all of the children of Israel are called to keep the covenant, then all of the children of Israel should wear *tzitzit*. It is, therefore, appropriate for men, women, and children to don *tzitzit*. Men, as well as women and children, are vulnerable to temptation, and, therefore, should avail themselves of every encouragement to remember the covenant and to keep it.

By wearing *tzitzit*, we also make it possible for our brethren identify us. Since those who seek to keep the covenant seem few and far between, it is always a joy and a blessing to identify another Torah-keeper. Seeing that we are not alone in the world is, in itself, a great encouragement to keep the Torah.

Therefore, if not for our own sake, then for the encouragement of our brethren, we should all faithfully fulfill this simple commandment and wear *tzitzit* on the corners of our garments.

¹ The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words, James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., Thomas Nelson Publishing, Pg. 767

² Ibid., Pg. 766

³ Ibid., Pg. 396

⁴ A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language For Readers of English, Ernest Klien,

MacMillan Publishing, Pg. 92

⁵ Ibid., Pg. 758