

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Tzitzits

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Do you believe that Messianics should wear *tzitzits*/fringes/tassels?

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Anyone who has been to a Jewish synagogue on *Shabbat*, and many Messianic congregations for that matter, has encountered *tzitzits*, or more likely encountered *tzitzits* on a *tallit* or prayer shawl. Perhaps if one lives in a metropolitan area with a large Jewish community, one has also encountered or seen an Orthodox Jewish man or boy with fringes extending from around his waistline. The employment of some kind of fringe or tassel on a four-cornered garment, undoubtedly connects people to the past and to the Ancient Near East. The employment of the tassel or fringe as a kind of status symbol should not go unnoticed, especially given David's strong apprehension about cutting off the corner of Saul's robe when he was sleeping (1 Samuel 24:5-6).¹

Many would classify the *tzitzits*, fringes or tassels, along the lines of Biblical dress and grooming, yet it cannot be denied how the *tzitzit* actually has a very significant religious and spiritual quality. As the Torah instructions detail, the purpose of the *tzitzits* is for the wearer to look upon them, and be reminded of the importance of God's commandments:

"The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God. I am the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the LORD your God'" (Numbers 15:37-41).

"You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself" (Deuteronomy 22:12).

There is no dispute in the three major branches of Judaism today—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform—about the literal nature of *v'asu l'hem tzitzit al-kanefei b'gedei'hem* (ועשו להם ציצת על-כנפי בגדיהם), "that they shall make themselves *tzitzit* on the corners of their garments" (Numbers 15:38, ATS). The *tzitzit* is mainly a "tuft, fringe, tassel" (*CHALOT*).² While there are degrees of variance present over the application of this instruction, the commandment regarding *tzitzits* or fringes/tassels, is something that is observed in the broad Jewish tradition. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* offers a basic summary of how *tzitzit* is approached and employed in much of Judaism today:

¹ "It came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. So he said to his men, 'Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed'" (1 Samuel 24:5-6).

² *CHALOT*, 306; also *Jastrow*, 1280.

TSITSIT (צִיצִית), fringes attached to the four corners of garments. *Numbers* 15:37-41 commands that a blue thread be added to the *tsitsit* at the four corners to remind the Israelites of the commandments and prevent them from going astray. The mnemonic and preventative roles have been a matter of speculation. Some modern scholars have suggested that the law in *Numbers* evolved as the theological rationalization of an originally common ornamentation. The fringes have also been explained as a sign of rank or dignity, an emblem of Israel's status as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. Ancient Near Eastern art shows figures with fringes decorating corners or ends of seams of garments. Mesopotamian documents reveal that fringes (Akk. *sissiktu*) on garments were considered extensions of the person and could represent him in legal acts and magical rituals. Since modern dress rarely includes four-cornered garments, a special one (known as *tsitsit*, *arba' kanfot* [four corners], or *tallit qatan* [small **tallit*]) is worn during the day by observant male Jews (including boys) beneath the outer clothing. In Haredi circles, the custom of wearing the *tsitsit* over the outer clothing is gaining ground. The fringes are attached to this four-cornered garment with a hole in the middle, through which the head is placed. A blessing is recited when putting on the *tsitsit*. The *tsitsit* consists of four long strands drawn through a small hole about one-and-a-half inches from the corner. The two parts of the strands are tied together by a double knot. The longest strand (*shammash*) is then wound seven, eight, eleven, and thirteen times around the other seven halves of the four threads. A double knot of the *tsitsit* should not be less than eleven-and-one-half inches.³

The interjection that the *tzitzits* or fringes specified in the Torah were not a practice unique to Ancient Israel, but were actually in some form common on some Ancient Near Eastern forms of clothing, certainly can be used to support the thought that the *tzitzit* is to connect the wearer to the past. One feature of the *tzitzit*, specified in *Numbers* 15:38, is that it is to have *petil tekheilet* (פֶּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת), “a cord of blue,” “a thread of blue” (Jerusalem Bible-Koren), “a thread of turquoise wool” (ATS), or even “an indigo twist” (Alter). The term *tekheilet* (תְּכֵלֶת) is defined in standard lexicons along the lines of “violet, i.e. violet thread and stuff” (BDB),⁴ or “purple wool” (CHALOT).⁵ Jastrow includes the description, “purple-shell, a bluish or cerulean dye, purple-blue wool esp. the purple-blue thread used for the show-fringes.”⁶ As recorded in the Talmud, there was a special dye, taken from a small mollusk or sea snail, from which the bluish *tekheilet* was taken for the *tzitzit*:

“Said Abbaye to R. Samuel b. R. Judah, ‘As to the blue thread, how do you dye it?’ He said to him, [Following Cashdan:] ‘We bring the blood of the hillazon-mollusc, along with other ingredients, and put them together in a pot and boil them. Then we take a little out in an egg shell and test it on a piece of wool, and throw away what remains in the egg shell and burn the wool’” (b.Menachot 42b).⁷

The blue or *tekheilet* used for the *tzitzit* does bear some significance, certainly for how *tekheilet* is associated in the Torah and Tanach for the garments of the Levites, as well as royal garments of authority:

“They shall also make the ephod of gold, of blue [*tekheilet*] and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of the skillful workman” (Exodus 28:6).

³ Victor Hurowitz, “Tsitsit,” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, 707.

⁴ BDB, 1067.

⁵ CHALOT, 390.

⁶ Jastrow, 1668.

⁷ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

“[A]nd the sash of fine twisted linen, and blue [*tekheilet*] and purple and scarlet *material*, the work of the weaver, just as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Exodus 39:29).

“Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue [*tekheilet*] and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced” (Esther 8:15).

There is certainly some Rabbinic discussion in the Talmud regarding the importance of the *tekheilet*:

“It has been taught on Tannaite authority: R. Meir would say, ‘Why is blue singled out among all the colors for use in the show fringes? Because blue is like the sea, and the sea is like the firmament, and the firmament is like the throne of glory: “And there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone” (Exo. 24:10), and “The likeness of a throne is the appearance of a sapphire stone” (Eze. 1:26)’” (b.Menachot 43b).⁸

The association of the *tzitzits* or fringes with the priesthood is further highlighted in view of how mixtures like that of wool and linen were prohibited for the clothing of normal, civilian Israelites (Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:11). Yet, it is to be witnessed how *tzitzit* were often produced by a mixture of wool and linen, especially in light of how tapestries for the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:1) and garments of the priests (Exodus 28:6) were often of mixed fabrics. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Deuteronomy 22:11-12, paraphrasing the instruction, reflects how the *tzitzit* could be a mixed fabric:

“You shall not clothe nor warm yourselves with a garment combed (carded) or netted, or interwoven with woollen and linen mixed together. Nevertheless on a robe of linen thread you may be permitted to make fringes of woollen upon the four extremities of your vestments with which you dress in the day.”⁹

It should not go unnoticed how today, in most Jewish settings, the *tzitzit* worn are all white or off-white. Much of this relates to the formula for the traditional dye for the *tekheilet* or blue, being widely lost in Jewish history. In his *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, Ronald L. Eisenberg, in describing many of the traditions and customs associated with the *tzitzit*, summarizes how,

*“This blue was made from an expensive dye that was extracted from a sea snail (*chilazon*) by a few families on the Mediterranean coast (Men. 42b). After the destruction of the Second Temple, the secret of obtaining this exact shade was lost, and the use of the blue thread in the fringes was discontinued. Recently, some claim to have discovered a close relative of the snail, and *tallitot* with blue fringes are now available. The blue stripes now woven into many *tallitot* symbolize this ancient *tekheilet*.”¹⁰*

While there are certainly going to be continuing discussions and debates among religious Jews as to the validity of whether some have rediscovered the right formula from antiquity for the *tekheilet*—the falling out of seeing *tzitzits* with a thread of blue, and seeing all-white *tzitzits* up until very recently, is entirely due to the forces of history. In his Numbers commentary, Jacob Milgrom offers the following useful explanation, for why all-white *tzitzits* have been seen in post-Second Temple Judaism:

“Tsitsit have undergone many changes in Jewish practice, and a brief review of their history is indicated. The requirement of the violet cord was suspended in rabbinic times (Mish.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ BibleWorks 9.0: Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on the Pentateuch.

¹⁰ Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 380; also Toby Janicki, *Tzitzit: You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2011), pp 43-44.

Men. 4:1; Num. R. 17:5). The Jewish community following the two Roman wars was so impoverished that many could not afford even the one violet-dyed cord required for each *tsitsit*. Moreover, the dye industry apparently declined and the *tekhelet* became scarce (Men. 42b). To be sure, a cheap counterfeit violet had been developed from the indigo plant but the rabbis disqualified it as *tekhelet* (Sif. Nu. 115; BM 61b, Men. 42b-43a). These factors contributed to the suspension of the violet cord requirement, and since then *tsitsit* have been totally white.”¹¹

Mainly those, who believe that the formula for *tekheilet* has been rediscovered, tend to be Jewish religious sects associated with groups like the Temple Mount Faithful, who would obviously need *tekheilet* for a reconstituted Tabernacle and a rebuilt Third Temple, for purposes beyond those of the *tzitzits*. While there are other Jews who find the *tekheilet* blue offered by these organizations intriguing, to say the least, Messianic groups tend to be the most excited about it, often thinking that it is a sign that the return of Yeshua is nearing. What cannot go unnoticed, though, is how there are a variety of Messianic people, who think that Rabbinic rulings from the post-Second Temple era, at least allowing for all-white *tzitzit* without a blue cord, were widely wrong. In his 2011 resource, *Tzitzit: You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment*, Toby Janicki makes the following, useful observations, responding to this thought:

“Some might feel that this means that the rabbis’ ruling overrode the commandment to have a thread of blue in the *tzitzit* and is therefore abolishing the Torah. Rather, the sages upheld the Torah by prohibiting the use of counterfeit *techelet*. They knew that people would be inclined to use substitutions, but substitutions do not fulfill the commandment and they cheapen the meaning of true *techelet*. Other people might attempt to purchase the true *techelet* at extreme expense and hardship, or worse yet, be tempted to purchase the imitation *techelet*, thus violating the Torah. Therefore, they ruled to protect both the authenticity of the commandment and human dignity; they felt it was better to do half of the *mitzvah* correctly rather than to do all of it incorrectly.”¹²

There are, going back to ancient times, different traditions present in how the threads of the *tzitzit* were to be tied. The two major tying patterns of the fringes or tassels witnessed today, in the Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewish communities, are associated with various Jewish traditions of gematria, where Hebrew letters represent certain numerical values, and thus the number of knots tied in the *tzitzit* is supposed to communicate something to the wearer about God’s commandments. Eisenberg offers the following summary from his *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*:

“There are eight threads (four doubled over as they are drawn through the perforation in the garment) on each of the four corners of the tallit. Thus the total number of threads is 32, the numerical value of the Hebrew word ‘*lev*’ (heart). Since the Pentateuch respectively ends with a *lamed* (ל) and begins with a *bet* (ב), the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* can be compared to the entire Torah.

“In each collection of eight threads, one is longer than the rest and is wound around the remaining seven threads in either of two different ways. Among Ashkenazic Jews, there are four series of rings of 7, 8, 11, and 13 windings, respectively. The sum of these numbers equals 39, the numerical value of the Hebrew words ‘*YHVH echad*’ (God is one). Thus when looking at the fringes, one is constantly reminded of the fundamental Jewish principle of monotheism. Among Sephardic Jews, the pattern of windings is 10, 6, 5, 6, numbers that, respectively, represent the letters in ‘*YHVH*.’

¹¹ Jacob Milgrom, *JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 412.

¹² Janicki, *Tzitzit*, 43.

“The Rabbis noted that the numerical value of the Hebrew word ‘tzitzit’ (fringes) is 600. When combined with the eight threads and five knots on each fringe, this adds up to 613—the precise number of mitzvot in the Torah. Thus by looking at the fringes we are to ‘recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them’ (Num. 15:39).”¹³

It is safe to recognize how until the destruction of the Second Temple, for sure, *tzitzits* or fringes/tassels were attached to most regular Jewish clothing worn throughout the day. But, as clothing style developed, and Jews in the Diaspora found themselves wearing clothing adapted to new environments and climates, the four-cornered *tallit* (טלית) emerged as a separate garment.¹⁴ Some of the adaptation for the fringes or tassels to be mainly worn on a *tallit* or prayer shawl, within the confines of one’s home or synagogue—and not necessarily all of the time—was most probably due to anti-Jewish actions in the Middle Ages.¹⁵ With the exception of many in the Orthodox Jewish tradition today, most in the Conservative and Reform Synagogue—and by extension the Messianic Jewish community—observe the command to wear fringes or tassels by employing the *tallit* at various times of private prayer and corporate worship. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* offers a basic summary of how the *tallit* (Ashkenazic *tallis*) is approached and employed in much of Judaism today:

TALLIT (טלית), four-cornered cloth with fringes (cf. *Nm.* 15.38), worn as a prayer shawl during the Shaḥarit and Musaf services. It is called *tallit gadol* (large *tallit*) to distinguish it from the *tallit qatan* (small *tallit*), or **tsitsit*, worn beneath the outer garments. The *tallit* is donned before the **tefillin* are put on (on those days when *tefillin* are worn). After the recitation of a special blessing, the *tallit* is wrapped around the head and then dropped to the shoulders. The *tallit* must be at least large enough to cover the head and upper body of a youngster. In some areas, particularly in eastern Europe, only married men wore the *tallit*. Sephardim wear it from the age of *bar mitsvah*, as do Jews of German descent, and this has become a widespread practice. The *tallit* should be made of wool with wool fringes attached, but it may be made of other fabrics, in which case the fringes must be made of the same fabric. Today, prayer shawls are often made from silk. Unless an alternative is unavailable, a linen *tallit* should not be used. “To glorify the *mitsvah*,” some prayer shawls have a band (**atarah*) across the top. At the Minḥah and Ma’ariv services, only the officiant wears a *tallit*; on Yom Kippur worshippers wear their prayer shawls at all five services; and on Tish’ah be-’Av, the *tallit* is worn at the Minḥah service instead of the Shaḥarit service. Priests called to give the **Birkat ha-Kohanim* cover their heads and hands with their *tallit*. Women are exempt from wearing the *tallit* because the commandment is related to a specific time, but in recent years, it has become the practice for many non-Orthodox women to wear a *tallit*. The biblical prescription ordains that a blue thread be added to the fringes, but although some Hasidic sects still attach a blue thread, most Orthodox Jews do not, since the proper process for making the blue dye (**tekhelet*) is still unclear. The *tallit* is usually decorated by several stripes running from top to bottom near the ends. This design and the blue color of the thread inspired the pattern of the Zionist banner, which was later adopted as the flag of the State of Israel.¹⁶

George Robinson’s *Essential Judaism* further elaborates on some of the main protocol typically observed when employing the *tallit*, which during morning prayers is put on first before the *tefillin*:

¹³ Eisenberg, pp 380-381.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp 379-380.

¹⁵ Cf. Barney Kasdan, *God’s Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle* (Baltimore: Lederer, 1996), 125; also the summary provided by Janicki, *Tzitzit*, pp 11-17.

¹⁶ Peter Lenhardt, “Tallit,” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, 668.

“The final paragraph of the *Sh’ma* is a passage from Numbers 15:38 instructing the Israelites to wear fringes on any four-cornered garment as a reminder of Adonai’s commandments. Male Orthodox Jews, even small boys, will wear an undershirt (*tallit katan/small tallit*) with four corners and fringes (*tzitzit*) from the moment he awakens until he undresses at night. Most Jewish men (and many Jewish women in Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform, and even some Modern Orthodox congregations) will wear a prayer shawl, a *tallit gadol/large tallit*, at morning services, *musaf*, all day on Yom Kippur (even into the evening), and for *minkhah* at Tisha b’Av, in recognition of this *mitzvah*...

“Usually a *tallit gadol* will have an embroidered neckpiece to indicate where the collar is. The neckpiece is called the *atarah/crown* and is there, in part, to strengthen the fabric at the point at which it will bear the most strain. To put on a *tallit*, one holds it spread out in both hands with the neckpiece at the top, then recites the blessing...

“If you have borrowed another congregant’s *tallit* for only a few minutes, it is not necessary to recite the blessing; however, if you are wearing a *tallit* that belongs to the synagogue and will have it on for an extended period of time—say the length of the morning service—you should recite the blessing. Many worshippers like to cover their heads with the *tallit* while reciting the blessing, fulfilling the commandment by ‘wrapping’ themselves and taking a moment for quiet meditation on the significance of this commandment. The *tallit* should be draped over the shoulders, hanging down from the front of the body so that the *tzitzit* lie at the four corners or directions around the person.

“Like priests in the Temple in Jerusalem who wore turbans to mark their awareness of the presence of the Almighty, a Jew who wears a *tallit* adds a sense of formality and solemnity to prayer. At the same time, wearing a *tallit* helps one to feel sanctified in the service of God. Putting the *tallit* over one’s head during the *Amidah* allows a worshipper to experience both the public and private nature of Jewish prayer simultaneously.

“In traditionally observant congregations, it is the *minhag* for many to press the fringes to the eyes and to kiss them three times during the recitation of the last section of the *Sh’ma*, when saying the word *tzitzit*. When the Torah comes past your seat during the *hakafah*, you may extend your *tzitzit* to touch it, then kiss them. When called to the Torah to read the blessings, it is customary in most congregations for you to touch the *tzitzit* to the place in the scroll where the reader will begin, and then to kiss them, and to repeat this gesture where the reader finishes.”¹⁷

There is, for certain, a diversity of styles for the *tallit*, as witnessed across the Jewish spectrum. Traditionally, the four-cornered *tallit*, ranging from the size of a scarf to the size where most of the body can be covered, tends to be all-white or off-white with either blue or black stripes. Of course, there are many other styles of *tallits*, with their design often imbued with some degree of symbolism for various Jews, beyond them being aesthetic or artistic. As Eisenberg describes,

“It is typically made of wool, though cotton or silk may be used. Some have black or blue stripes, the number and pattern of which have mystical significance. As a color of mourning, the black stripes may serve as a visual reminder of the loss of the Temple. Today, some *tallitot* are made of various colors, inspired by kabbalistic symbolism or aesthetic preference. Most Jews wear only a small, scarflike *tallit*, since the biblical commandment specifically refers to the wearing of the *tzitzit*, not the *tallit* itself. However, others prefer large *tallitot* that cover most of the body, so as to qualify as a ‘garment’ on which the fringes may be hung (Deut. 22:12).”¹⁸

¹⁷ George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), pp 23-25.

¹⁸ Eisenberg, 378.

Beyond the likelihood of different styles of *tallits*, conveying certain religious symbolism to different Jewish sects, is how there is also some certain social associations to be made in today's Judaism with the *tallit*.¹⁹ The Torah instruction of Deuteronomy 22:12 regarding *tzitzit*, precedes a reference to "If any man takes a wife..." (Deuteronomy 22:13),²⁰ and so it is thought among many that the *tallit* should only be used by married men. Certainly, outside of any synagogue services, wearing *tzitzits* on a *tallit katan*, will often denote an Orthodox level of Torah observance. Many Messianics who wear *tzitzits*, outside of a congregational environment, are unaware of this social feature, and what it might communicate to Conservative and Reform Jews, in particular.

Over the past several decades, the issue of females wearing the *tallit*, and hence *tzitzits*, has become especially pronounced, and is today widely common in Conservative and Reform Judaism. Females wearing the *tallit* has often been opposed on the basis of Deuteronomy 22:6 and the *tallit* traditionally being a man's garment, although women wearing *tzitzits* is something that has been witnessed in Jewish history, as seen in the record of the Talmud:

"Judah would put show fringes onto the aprons of the women of his household. Every morning he would recite the blessing, '...who has commanded us to wrap ourselves around in fringes.' But since he put them onto the aprons of the women of his household, it must have regarded it as a religious duty that does not depend upon the advent of a particular point in time to become operative, so why does he say such a blessing every single morning?" (b.Menachot 43a).²¹

From the Torah itself, much surrounds the perspective one takes regarding the opening line of Numbers 15:38: *dabeir el-b'nei Yisrael* (דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). In its most literal sense, this would be "Speak to the sons of Israel" (LITV), although Jewish versions in English do not tend to render *b'nei Yisrael* as "sons of Israel," perhaps implying only males, but instead have the more inclusive: "the Children of Israel" (ATS, Keter Crown Bible, Fox²²) or "the children of Yisra'el" (Jerusalem Bible-Koren), "the Israelite people" (NJPS), or "the Israelites" (Alter).²³ Given how *b'nei Yisrael* is frequently employed in the Torah to refer to the whole, sometimes broad population of the community, to limit this to only male Israelites would not at all seem textually appropriate. With *b'nei Yisrael* approached from the perspective of it being either "children of Israel" or just "Israelites," many find a strong textual validation for females being permitted to wear *tzitzits*. On the whole, though, today's Messianic community would not seem to demonstrate an official "friendliness," as it were, to women wearing *tzitzits* and *tallits*,²⁴ even though it can be encountered in some places.

Generally speaking, today's Messianic Jews will fall somewhere within how Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews observe the commandments to wear *tzitzits* or fringes, with a preference often demonstrated for the application for the latter two. Some of today's Messianic Jews wear the tassels or fringes with a cord of blue, but others do not. Beyond this, from the writing witnessed within the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, would be a style of observance consistent with the broad Jewish practice as well.²⁵

¹⁹ Ron Isaacs, *Kosher Living: It's More Than Just the Food* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), pp 222-223.

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

²¹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

²² Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 736.

²³ The CJB, as a Messianic version, also has "the people of Isra'el."

²⁴ Cf. Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, pp 126, 130; Janicki, *Tzitzit*, 47 and his reference to "Jewish men"; *Can Women Wear Tzitzit and Tefillin?*, 27 January, 2014. *First Fruits of Zion*. Retrieved 11 November, 2014, from <<http://ffoz.org>>.

²⁵ Tim Hegg, *Introduction to Torah Living* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002), pp 165-167.

That Yeshua the Messiah Himself wore fringes or tassels on His own garments is widely and properly acknowledged in the Messianic world.²⁶ The actual term employed in the Greek source text of the Gospels is *kraspedon* (κράσπεδον), often rendered by the English “fringe” or “tassel,” but notably defined by a lexicon like *BDAG* as, “*tassel* (תִּצִיט [tzitzit]), which an Israelite was obligated to wear on the four corners of his outer garment, acc. to Num 15:38f; Dt 22:12.”²⁷ The CJB (and also the TLV) is a notable Messianic version that makes reference to the Hebrew *tzitzit*:

“A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years approached him from behind and touched the *tzitzit* on his robe” (Matthew 9:20, CJB).

“They begged him that the sick people might only touch the *tzitzit* on his robe, and all who touched it were completely healed” (Matthew 14:36, CJB).

“Wherever he went, in towns, cities or country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the *tzitzit* on his robe, and all who touched it were healed” (Mark 6:56, CJB).

“[She] came up behind him and touched the *tzitzit* on his robe; instantly her hemorrhaging stopped” (Luke 8:44, CJB).

Of particular importance is how it is not generically the edge of Yeshua’s clothing that sick or infirm persons reached out for; sick or infirmed persons reached out toward the *tzitzit* exuding from the edge of Yeshua’s clothing. It is to be recognized, though, that in His negative admonitions to the Pharisaical leaders, Yeshua did condemn their method of using them (as well as their method of using *tefillin*)—but given Yeshua’s own wearing of the *tzitzits* or fringes, His word of Matthew 23:5 cannot at all be taken as a dismissal of the value of wearing *tzitzits* or fringes:

“Everything they do is done to be seen by others; for they make their *t’fillin* broad and their *tzitziyot* long” (CJB).

In his 2011 publication on *Tzitzit*, Janicki draws some useful conclusions on the sort of fringes or tassels that the Lord Yeshua could have employed:

“[T]he Master’s *tzitzit* would have been attached to a four cornered blanket-like sheet that he would have worn throughout the day except in the house or during strenuous labor. He would have worn this over his linen tunic-like garment (*chaluk*). His *tallit* would have most likely been made of wool, possibly even with stripes running along two of the ends. The Master would have worn this either over his shoulder or doubled over like a sheet. It is also possible, based on the expensive seamless under-tunic he wore (John 19:23), that the Master owned a finer quilt style of *tallit* that the scholars and sages wore.”²⁸

Just as the issue of females employing *tallits* and *tzitzits* has arisen in the Jewish community, and has now been widely received by Conservative and Reform Judaism—certainly related to this would be whether non-Jewish Messianic Believers should employ *tallits* and *tzitzits*, being as they are, a part of the Messianic movement. Writing in 1996, in his *God’s Appointed Customs*, Barney Kasdan as a Messianic Jewish writer draws out the prophetic importance of the *tzitzits* or fringes/tassels, in how people from the nations will seek out Israel’s God and the Jewish people. He states,

²⁶ Kasdan, *God’s Appointed Customs*, pp 128-129, Janicki, *Tzitzit*, pp 19-23.

²⁷ *BDAG*, 564.

²⁸ Janicki, *Tzitzit*, 20.

“To this day, the *tzitziyot* remind Israel that God has consecrated the Jewish people to himself. It seems that in the last days even the nations will have a greater appreciation of God’s covenant with the Jewish people. In seeking the faith of the God of Israel, many non-Jews will reach out in a rather unusual way.”²⁹

Zechariah 8:23 is quoted as an important Tanach reference: “Thus said the LORD of Hosts: In those days, ten men from nations of every tongue will take hold—they will take hold of every Jew by a corner of his cloak and say, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (NJPS). Kasdan further asserts how non-Jewish Believers can indeed wear a *tallit* and *tzitzits*, but fairly advises how observing this does not all of a sudden make them “Jewish,” meaning that their ethnicity and background somehow totally changes:

“The non-Jews...enjoy the spiritual blessings purchased by the Messiah. If a Gentile believer chooses to wear a *tallit*, this can be a beautiful statement of his faith in the God of Israel. In a Messianic Jewish worship service, such a practice can be a positive testimony of the Gentile believer’s stand with the Jewish people...Once again, it is a question of personal conviction that must be sincere. However, care should be taken not to confuse the issue by thinking that a *tallit* is going to transform a Gentile into a Jew.”³⁰

In his 2011 publication *Tzitzit*, obviously having to factor in the significant number of non-Jewish Believers who have entered into the Messianic movement since the late 1990s, Janicki goes into some of the Rabbinic discussion about non-Jews wearing *tzitzit*, where some sources are more permissible and open-minded about it than others.³¹ Some of the major prohibition present in Judaism about a non-Jew wearing *tzitzit* involves one imitating a Jewish person, and using a false action as a means to accuse him of a crime. As it witnessed in the Talmud,

“Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: He who purchases from an Israelite in the marketplace a garment that already bears show fringes — lo, the blue thread is assumed to be validly dyed. If he purchases it from a gentile, or a merchant, it is valid. If he buys it from a common person, it is assumed to be invalid, and that is so even though they have said, ‘Someone is not permitted to sell to a gentile a garment that bears show fringes unless he removes the threads that belong to it.’ *What is the operative consideration? Here they explained it:* because of what a whore might say [if she got it, with fringes, from a gentile in exchange for her services; she might then use it in evidence against a Jew]. R. Judah said, ‘It is a precautionary ruling, lest on a journey a Jew join a gentile wearing it, and the latter kill him.’ [The Jew would assume the other was also a Jew and so would trust him, and the other would kill him unawares.]” (b.*Menachot* 43a).³²

Janicki is one, like many in the Messianic movement, who does hold to various complementarian presuppositions on distinctions among God’s people—and with this does not believe that non-Jewish males have to necessarily observe the Torah instruction on *tzitzit*, although he does believe that Jewish males have to observe it. He does, however, think that some non-Jewish males can observe the Torah instruction on *tzitzit* voluntarily. In his deliberations on this, he makes a number of important observations on how in the more independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots sectors, one will find people keeping the Torah commandments of Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12, in ways that sit very much outside of normative Judaism:

²⁹ Kasdan, *God’s Appointed Customs*, 127.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

³¹ Janicki, *Tzitzit*, pp 47-49.

³² *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

“As a non-Jewish follower of the Master myself, I have chosen to implement the practice of tzitzit in my life. Although the tzitzit for me as a non-Jew are not obligatory, I find the discipline rewarding. Its symbolism gives me a sense of solidarity with Israel and the Jewish community. At the same time I realize that, for Gentiles, the practice of tzitzit can be fraught with pitfalls...

“[Consider] the case for the Hebrew-roots Gentile who goes out into public wearing the signs of Jewish identity. Too many times, well-meaning Gentile believers in Messiah take a mitzvah such as tzitzit and run with it. Whether it’s adding crazy colors to the tzitzit, attaching them to one’s belt loops or key chains, wearing them without a head covering, or even using them to convince themselves and others that they are Jewish, it comes across as disingenuous and, frankly speaking, silly looking...

“I’d like to offer a few guidelines to help prevent...pitfalls. First and foremost, if a Gentile decides to take on the practice of tzitzit, it should be done in the traditional manner, with sensitivity to the rulings of the rabbis. Judaism has preserved rich and beautiful traditions in the *tallit gadol* and the *tallit katan*. Gentile believers like myself would be foolish to try and reinvent the wheel. Rather, it would behoove us to honor the family that we have become a part of.

“Second, a Gentile believer who wears a *tallit katan* throughout the day would be well served to tuck in his tzitzit so they are out of sight and not attracting attention. It also might be best to reserve the use of a *tallit gadol* for the privacy of his personal prayer time. As we have stated, tzitzit are a visible sign to both the world and other Jews that one is Jewish (and for that matter practicing Orthodox Judaism). Wearing them visibly can be like false advertising, and it communicates disrespect for the Jewish people. The Jewish community generally perceives Gentiles wearing tzitzit or praying with a *tallit gadol* in public as offensive. It looks like deception to Jews, and to non-Jewish believers, it looks something like kids playing cowboy—dressing up Jewish. Additionally when Gentiles wear visible tzitzit and do things that violate Orthodox tradition it can be a stumbling block rather than an opportunity to witness to the Jewish people as some might think. While I do not want to be dogmatic, non-Jews who take up this mitzvah should consider keeping its observance private, tucking their tzitzit in, and refraining from wearing a *tallit gadol* during public services...

“For Gentile believers, when the mitzvah of tzitzit is observed in a manner sensitive to greater Judaism and in a manner that preserves distinction, it can be a beautiful reminder of who they are in Messiah and of his call to righteous living. Non-Jews are free to embrace this mitzvah, but they are not less in the eyes of God if they choose not to do so. If you are a Gentile considering the mitzvah of tzitzit, it might be best to seek the council of one’s local Messianic Jewish rabbi before deciding whether or not to apply this mitzvah.”³³

In much of the broad Messianic movement, including Messianic Judaism and not limited to just the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement—there is considerable variance with how the Torah instruction regarding *tzitzit* is employed. There is certainly an Orthodox Jewish level of observance present among some, who employ the *tallit katan* during the daytime and the *tallit gadol* during prayer times and worship services. Most Messianic Jews follow the lead of Conservative and Reform Judaism, with the *tzitzit* worn on the *tallit* during *Shabbat* services, and perhaps also during various private prayer times. Many of these will also have *tzitzit* with the *tekheilet* blue from Israel, but some will have a more common synthetic blue.

No sector of the broad Messianic movement has been unaffected by the significant sub-culture of *tzitzits* that has emerged. The most common manifestation of this has been seen among those who wear white and blue-synthetic fringes on belt loops. There have been many other

³³ Janicki, *Tzitzit*, pp 50, 51-52.

usages of *tzitzits*, beyond that of them being attached to some form of clothing, in an attraditional manner. I have personally seen fringes attached to the backpack someone was wearing, any form of jacket or vest worn, people putting *tzitzits* on a diaper-like garment for their dogs, as well as heard stories about houses having white and blue ropes attached to their four corners. Some of these admittedly are the extreme exception.

Most important to be aware of is how there has been a large cottage industry that has developed, with various multi-colored *tzitzits* with a synthetic blue cord present. Some of these *tzitzits* are white, with a synthetic blue cord, *and* perhaps even a synthetic red cord to presumably represent the blood of Yeshua. Other types of *tzitzits* are even more creative, appearing in multiple colors of the rainbow. Yet, unless *tzitzits* are either white with the *tekeilet* cord of blue, or all white/off-white, they stand outside of the window of what would be recognized as legitimate Torah *halachah* by most of today's observant Jews.

When it comes to the issue of today's Messianic movement, and what is rightly classified as a religious symbol in the *tzitzit*, I myself identify with the philo-traditional camp. I am not really pleased when I see anyone wearing homemade fringes on beltloops, as I think this does more to provoke unnecessary mocking and complications, than it does to honor the Torah instruction. I have certainly been through a phase when I did this myself, but when in the presence of non-religious Jews, this would create more challenges than not in establishing a friendship or relationship of sorts.

Being in the philo-traditional sector when it comes to *tzitzit* does not mean—that while recognizing the value in the Orthodox Jewish application of the Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12 instruction *for them*—that I would be among those who would practice it. To wear *tzitzits* or fringes/tassels all the time, could mean that to my Reform Jewish neighbors that I would be identifying with the values of the Orthodox Jewish community—with which I largely do not. I would think it perfectly legitimate to instead follow the standard Conservative or Reform practice of wearing *tzitzit* on a *tallit* or prayer shawl, during *Shabbat* services on Saturday and in private times or prayer, to fulfill the Torah instruction. Fewer problems arise when non-Messianic Jews see individuals wearing a *tallit* at a worship service, with traditional liturgy employed and the Torah scroll canted from, than perhaps in any other setting.

While I believe that Messianic Jewish men observing the Torah instruction on *tzitzit*, in wide conjunction with Conservative or Reform Jewish norms, is indeed appropriate—issues regarding non-Jewish Believers and women wearing *tzitzit* are not going away. As an egalitarian who believes that today's Messianic movement should be inclusive, I certainly think that the *b'nei Yisrael*, the “children of Israel” or “Israelites” referenced in Numbers 15:38, includes both males and females, and I have no issue in principle with females employing the *tallit* and *tzitzit* as the Conservative and Reform Jewish movements now allow. Similarly, given how *b'nei Yisrael* in the Torah is a frequent reference to the entire assembly of people, of both native Israelite and sojourner alike,³⁴ there should be little difficulty for non-Jewish Messianics to likewise honor the

³⁴ Obviously, this is contingent on context and usage. R.J.D. Knauth, “Israelites,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, 453 points out how, “within the laws placed at Mount Sinai, beyond the general designation of the collective congregation of the ‘children [sons] of Israel [Heb. *b'nai Yisrael*, בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל],’ a distinction is regularly made between the ethnic Israelite (brother, native, Hebrew, etc.) and the ethnic ‘alien’ living within the congregation or envisioned as later living within the land of Israel.”

Many places where the sons/children of Israel or Israelites are addressed, it is to the mixed community of natives and sojourners alike. Other places, attention needs to be fairly given to where there are differences, especially as the sojourners in Ancient Israel had once been outsiders who later entered into the community.

For some further observations, consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, “Torah Keeping for the *Gerim*/Sojourners in Ancient Israel.”

instruction on *tzitzit*, in a manner consistent with their fellow Messianic Jewish brethren and the wider Jewish community. In observing the commandment to wear *tzitzit*, there are always localized congregational issues of protocol that one must consider as well, though, which you will have to evaluate for yourself.

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