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A "JEWISH JEWELS" Teaching

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# TALIT



*"... to make for themselves  
garments with fringes."*

*Numbers 15:38*

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*"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel: 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 commandments of the Lord and 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 commandments, and be holy for your God'."*

*Numbers 15:37-40*

## Garments with fringes ...

### A Holy Garment

The *talit* (pronounced tah-leet, Sephardic) or talis (pronounced tah-lis, Ashkenazic) is a special holy garment worn primarily by Jewish males during prayer. It is also called a “prayer shawl.” When religious Jews prepare to pray, they hold the *talit* in both hands lovingly and reverently since the *talit* as a holy garment must be put on with dignity, integrity and humility. Three steps are traditionally followed when putting on a *talit*: 1) The four fringes are inspected to make sure that they are intact (not torn or tangled) 2) The *talit* is held open and the following blessing is said: “Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, asher kid-shanu b’mitzvotav, v’tzivanu l’hit ateyf ba-tzi-tzit.” Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves in (a tallit with) fringes. 3) The *talit* is gently brought over the head, covering it momentarily to emphasize the feeling of being protected, (some Jews say Ps. 36: 8 and 11 at this time) and then brought down over the shoulders.

The *talit* is not worn at night by traditional Jews because an ancient rabbinic teaching said that it should only be worn when there is sufficient light for the fringes (*tzitzit*) to be easily noticed. Some Messianic Jews, including Neil, have decided not to follow this teaching of the rabbis in our days of electric lighting, and wear their *talitot* (plural of *talit* pronounced, tah-lee-toat) whenever they worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. We believe that Mesianic Jews should have liberty in the Messiah to create their own traditions as they are led by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures.

*Talitot* come in various sizes, colors and designs. Although most *talitot* have white back-grounds, and are made of wool, many other materials such as silk and linen are also used. The *talit* is generally worn by males during the morning prayers as well as during all Day of Atonement services. It is also present at all of the major occasions of a Jew’s life: circumcision, bar mitzvah, wedding and burial.

We wrapped both of our boys in a *talit* when they were dedicated to the Lord at Temple Aron HaKodesh in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. Jonathan and Jesse both received a *talit* before their Bar Mitzvah, and Lord willing, they will both get married under one.

It is traditional for a bride to present her groom with the gift of a *talit* before the wedding. He gives her a ring; she gives him a *talit*. Just as the ring symbolizes her fidelity to her husband, his wearing the *talit* represents his fidelity to his wife. (See Numbers 15:39) Each of the four corners of the *talit* has 8 strings, totaling 32, the numerical value for heart, “lev.” With the gift of a *talit* to her groom, the bride is saying, “I give all my heart to you.”

That’s exactly what we at Jewish Jewels want to do with Yeshua, our Heavenly Bridegroom. As we seek to restore His original Jewishness, we are putting a *talit* back on Him, saying to Him as we do: “I give all my heart to You.”

### Talit in the Holy Scriptures

The origin of the *talit* is found in the *Torah* in the book of Numbers Chapter 15, verses 37-40: “*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels (fringes, KJV) 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 commandments of the Lord, and 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 commandments, and be holy for your God.’*”

The English word garments is *begeg* in Hebrew. The word fringes is *tzitzit* (pronounced: tseat-tseat). The special garment that bears the fringes has had various names over the years, but today is universally known as *talit*. The *tzitzit* give the *talit* its religious significance because they are a reminder of the Lord’s commandments. When one looks at or touches the *tzitzit*, God’s Word is brought to mind. The above Scripture makes it clear that this Word is not only to be remembered but obeyed. God’s children are to remember Him, be consecrated unto Him and follow Him. The message of the *tzitzit* really is: “Thy will not mine, O Lord.” (Tying a string on one’s finger “to remember something” probably originated with the *talit* and *tzitzit*. What we’re supposed to remember is the Word of the Lord!!)

### God's Talit

The rabbis say that Ps. 104:2 “*Who covered thyself with light as with a garment*” refers to God’s *talit*. Certainly our God covers us, protects us and gathers us under His wings and heals us of all our diseases as we touch His *tzitzit* by faith.

God meets with us in the secret place of prayer. A *talit* can be a special prayer closet, a place to hide oneself with the Lord, a place of intimacy. Jew and non-Jews can wrap themselves in a *talit* and touch the *tzitzit* that represent the commandments, the name, and the healing power of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Like the Israelites of old who stood in the entrance to their tents as Moses entered the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:8), we can stand in our tents as our faithful High Priest, Yeshua, intercedes on our behalf.

### The Talit in Ancient Times

Four-cornered garments were common in ancient times. Another word for *talit* is *arba-kanfot*, literally four-cornered. The *talit* of antiquity was like a long toga that covered the entire body and held the *tzitzit* (fringes). Since this garment was worn at all times, the *tzitzit* were worn at all times. When clothing styles changed, a small *talit* called a *talit katan* was developed which

fits over the shoulders, covers the chest and back and is usually worn under a shirt. The fringes, however, are sometimes worn on the outside. This kind of *talit* is worn by most Orthodox Jews today at all times. The larger, fancier *talit*, the *talit gadol*, is worn on the outside at prayer services.

The *tzitzit* today not only represent the Commandments of God, they also carry the Name of God. The fringes are tied in such a way that the sacred tetragrammaton YHWH is spelled out in the knots and loops. (Hebrew letters have numerical equivalents). But in ancient times an individual's *tzitzit* were tied in a unique pattern that represented the person's individual identity and position of authority. A *tzitzit* pressed into wet clay could serve as a signature. A piece of a *tzitzit* could be sent to validate the contents of a letter. There are a few passages in the Scriptures that clearly show the relationship between *tzitzit* and a person's authority. When David cut off the "skirt" of Saul's robe in I Samuel 24:4, he was actually snipping off the *tzitzit* of his garment, representing the King's authority. That's why Saul said: "*And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.*" (I Sam. 24:20) [See also I Samuel 15:25-28]

In Temple times, the priests wore clothing that was a mixture of wool and linen. Israelites did not wear this combination of fabrics in their everyday dress. However, the *tzitzit* that they affixed to their garments were linen with one wool thread (the blue one). Every Israelite, both male and female, had one part of their garment that was priestly! (We are a royal priesthood. See I Peter 2:9.)

### The "Mantle" of Elijah

Elijah's mantle was most probably a *talit* that had *tzitzit* in its four corners. We read in I Kings 19:19 that Elijah threw his mantle over Elisha when he called him to be his successor. The Hebrew word used here for mantle is *aderet* which means glory or honor. Elijah's *talit* was a garment of glory. It was also different from most because it was made of camel's hair. Because of this, it is speculated that the *talit* of Elijah was passed down through the generations (preserved by the priesthood) and eventually owned by Zacharias, the father of John the Immerser. John, as you recall, appeared at the River Jordan clad in "camel's hair." Before John was born, an angel of the Lord had told Zacharias that his son would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah... (Luke 1:17). He was indeed the forerunner of the Messiah, and his spirit, the spirit of repentance, must precede the second coming of Yeshua as well.

The *talit of Elijah*, bestowed with its God-given power and authority, was used to part the waters of the Jordan River: "*Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.* (2 Kings 2:8) After the Lord took Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha, his disciple, picked up Elijah's *talit*, struck the waters of the Jordan, and they parted again.

### More References in the Tenach

In Numbers chapter 24 we read that the prophet Balaam, at the request of Balak, king of Moab, ascended Mt. Pisgah overlooking the camp of Israel. He came there to pronounce a curse, but looking at the valley below he saw something beautiful: Jewish men in their "tents" (garments with fringes). Instead of a curse, a blessing was said! It is indeed a beautiful sight when every Jew becomes a mini-tabernacle for the presence of God (see I Cor. 6:19 also).

Zechariah 8:23 is another very interesting verse that refers to the *talit*: "*Thus saith the Lord 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 of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.*"

The "skirt" mentioned in this prophetic verse is really the *talit* bearing the *tzitzit*. Non-Jews are already beginning to cling to the *tzitzit* of a Jew. They are embracing a Jewish Jesus, seeking to know more about their Jewish roots, being drawn to Israel as their spiritual home, even using a *talit* in prayer. This was confirmed to us by an Orthodox Bible teacher in Jerusalem who also owns a small Judaica shop in the Jewish Quarter. He is convinced that the number of non-Jews buying *talitot* from him is related to the prophetic fulfillment of Zechariah 8:23.

### The "Thread of Blue"

In Numbers Chapter 15, the Lord instructed the children of Israel to include in the *tzitzit* a blue thread. Where is the blue thread today? You will not find the blue thread on traditional *talitot* because the source of the special purple-blue dye is no longer known. This color, *techeleth* in Hebrew, came from an animal known as the *chilazon*. The precise identity of the animal is no longer known although some believe it was a murex snail that lived in the Mediterranean between Tyre and Haifa.

The blue stripes on many *talitot* have replaced the blue thread. If this reminds you of the Israeli flag, it's not by accident. At the birth of the Jewish State, three people, in separate locations and without contact, designed similar flags each inspired by the *talit*.

Originally each *tzitzit* on a Hebrew *talit* had a blue thread, (longer than the rest) called the "*shamash*" (literally *servant*, the same word used for the 9th candle at Hanukkah that lights all the rest). The blue thread was wrapped around all the other strands. It is "given" (Hebrew *natan*, Num. 15:37) to the *tzitzit* just as our Messiah was given by the Father as the fulfillment of the Law.

The blue-purple color has traditionally been the color of royalty (blue blood, royal blue, something blue at weddings). This is because the blue dye was extremely expensive. In ancient times it took 10,000 snails to produce 1 cubic centimeter of dye. One pound cost approximately two years' wages. A woman in the New Covenant Scriptures named Lydia sold cloth made with this dye (see Acts 16:14). For this reason, it is assumed that she was very wealthy. Because of its cost, a person who wore a lot of blue was generally prominent in society. (By 300 A.D. a pound of blue Sidonian silk sold for over \$90,000.)

A *tzitzit* with a blue thread was something to be valued; the fringes were usually passed down in the family. For Messianic Jews today, the blue thread is an obvious reminder of our Messiah Yeshua, the living Word of God, the Servant/King, our High Priest, the One who perfectly fulfilled all the commandments. For this reason, many Messianic Jews have begun to incorporate the blue thread in their talitot. (They don't concern themselves with the technicalities of the blue dye.) Neil now has a talit with a blue thread, reminding him of his priestly calling.

### Talit in the New Covenant

It has been estimated by some that there are as many as 47 references to the Jewish *talit* in the New Covenant. Certainly Yeshua as an observant Jew wore a *talit*. The New Covenant uses other words to refer to this special garment, including cloak, tent, vesture, napkin and garment.

Probably the most famous passage dealing with the *talit* is found in Luke 8:40-56. This passage actually includes two *talit* stories, one about the healing of Jairus' daughter and the other about a woman with an issue of blood. In summary, Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, fell down at Yeshua's feet, imploring Him to come to his home because his only daughter, age 12, was dying. Immediately following this, a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years and had spent all her living on doctors, came behind Yeshua and touched the "border of his garment" (His *tzitzit*) and immediately she was healed. Shortly thereafter, a messenger came telling Jairus that his daughter had died. Yeshua responded by saying: "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole." Yeshua went to Jairus' house, took the girl by the hand and said, "Talitha cumi" (See Mark 5:41). Her spirit returned and she arose, healed.

Following are a few thoughts about the two stories in Luke Chapter 8:

1. The woman with the issue of blood was unclean according to Torah – Everything she touched would be unclean.
2. This woman had probably been to the hot spas by the Sea of Galilee which were famous for their healing properties, and where blood letters (doctors) and pagan shrines for healing abounded.
3. One's *tzitzit* were usually touched by family only.
4. Yeshua was approachable, inviting people to familiarity.
5. To touch Yeshua's *talit* was to make contact with His authority, the Word of God, God's Name, and the Living Word. Healing resulted.
6. The same thing happened with Jairus' daughter. Yeshua probably said, "Arise to my *talit*" and the *tzitzit* touched her. She was restored to life by the power of the living Word.

Another encouraging, faith-building passage about *talit* is found in Matthew 14:34-36:

*"When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment (the tzitzit). And as many as touched it were made perfectly well."*

Touching the *tzitzit* of Yeshua's garment resulted in healing every time. Faith made contact with the living Word, as represented by the *tzitzit*. This concept of healing connected with the fringes did not begin with the New Covenant. We find in Malachi 4:2 a verse that says: "But to you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings..." The Hebrew word for "wings" in this verse is "k'nafim," the same word used for the corners of a *talit* where the *tzitzit* are attached.

The principle is the same in the Old and the New: – reaching out and touching the Lord by faith brings healing (His Word, His authority, His Name are sources of healing).

There is nothing magical about a *talit* or the *tzitzit*. But there is something supernatural and miraculous about Yeshua and His Word!

Other references to the *talit* in the New Covenant include Matthew 23:5 (a warning about enlarging the *tzitzit* to appear important), John 19: 23-24 (Yeshua's tunic – His *talit* – at the crucifixion was acquired by a soldier by casting lots) and John 20: 6-8 (the folded *talit* was a silent witness to the resurrected Lord). Also in Acts 18:3 we find the apostle Paul making "tents." Could these really have been "*talitot*"?

A wonderful passage from the Book of Revelation gives us a picture of our Messiah returning to conquer His enemies, wearing a *talit* dipped in blood. His Name will be spelled out in the loops and knots of the *tzitzit* that touch His thigh:

*"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war...He was clothed with a robe (talit) dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God...And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords."*

### What about Women?

According to rabbinic law, women do not have to wear the *talit* because their first obligation is to care for their family and home. However, even during ancient times women wore *talitot*. The Talmud tells the story of Rabbi Judah the Prince who personally attached fringes (*tzitzit*) to his wife's apron!

While we do not encourage women to wear a *talit* in a public synagogue worship service (mainly because it could be a stumbling block to the salvation of a Jewish male), we see nothing wrong with a believing woman having her own *talit* to use as a special place of prayer, a place to hide herself under the shadow of the Almighty, a place of covering and protection, a place of security like the one Ruth found: "Spread the corner of your *talit* over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." Ruth 3:9 (NIV)

Covering oneself with a *talit* inspires awe and reverence for God in prayer. This certainly applies to women as well as to men.