

Tzitzit Study

By Yochanan Zaquantov

As we examine what distinguishes a Karaite Jew, we want to look at what we are required to wear according to that which is written. In wearing them, what mitzvah are we keeping? Can Women and children wear them? How exactly does it say to make a Tzitzit from the text? Can we know this? In my mind we can know these things.

Let examine first the commands for Tzitzit in the Tanakh. Tzitzit (Tzadie-Tzadie-Tav) which you will see spelled transliterated as Tsistit or Sisith. It is a feminine noun which is derived from a masculine noun Tzitz. It is reference number 6734 and found in the NEHC 1071 and the BD on page 851.

Bamidbar/Numbers 15:38,39 (37-41)

37 Yehovah said to Moses as follows: 38 Speak to the **Israelite people (Benei Yisrael בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל)** and instruct them to **make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments (v'asu lahem Tzitzit al kan'fei big'dei hem – and you all make to you fringes to corners in cloth/garment וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִת עַל-כַּנְפֵי בְּגֵדֵיהֶם)** throughout the ages; let them attach a **cord (petil פֶּתִיל)** of **blue (tekelet תְּכֵלֶת)** to the **fringe (Tzitzit צִיצִת)** at each **corner (HaKanaf הַכַּנָּף)**. 39 That shall be your **fringe (letzitzit לְצִיצִת)**; **look at it and recall (ure'item oto uzekhar'tem – and you look on it and remember וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וְזָכַרְתֶּם)** all the **commandments of Yehovah (et kol mitzvah Yehovah אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה)** and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. 40 **Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to Eloheykhem.** 41 I Yehovah am Eloheykhem, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be Eloheykhem: I, Yehovah Eloheykhem.

First, Israelite people is Benei Yisrael. This is the common term used to address not just the men but woman and children too. Remember Hebrew as the masculine language states things in a masculine tone for mixed groups even though it may be just 1 man there. Thus in speaking Moshe addresses the Israel people not just the men in this commandment. So these things being commanded are for Men, Women and Children.

Second, the beged or garment/coth, which is reference number 899, would not have been a fitted garment like today. Most garments were a series of four corner garments over a tunic. Thus the top garment would have been the one it was attached to. Also, the place to attach it to is not the edges as some might interpret but the corners. We will examine

Kanaf to see why I say that. Also, the Petil or cord as it is translated it not necessarily just a thread of blue. We will examine it too.

We are also to look on it as our sign of the mitzvah we are to keep. By looking on it, it is to bring to our mind the Mitzvah or Min Tzavah which mean from command or commandment.

Yehez'qel/Ezekiel 8:3

3 He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me **by the hair of my head (batzitzit roshi בְּצִיצַת רֹאשִׁי)**. A spirit lifted me up between heaven and earth and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the Penimith Gate that faces north; that was the site of the infuriating image that provokes fury.

In this example we see Tzitzit used to describe a coming from his hair and some translators use the word lock like that of Samson. While not the same word why describe it as Tzitzit unless it resembled what he saw as a Tzitzit.

Shofetim/judges 16:19

13 Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have been deceiving me all along; you have been lying to me! Tell me, how could you be tied up?” He answered her, “If you weave seven **locks of my head (mach'lefort roshi מַחְלְפוֹת רֹאשִׁי)** into the web.”

Looking at these does not tell us how they are made but it does say why we do it and where do we wear it. So let us dig a little deeper to examine where this word is derived from and what its base meaning is. The word Tzittzit is derived from is the Masculine noun Tzitz (Tzadie-yod-Tzadie). It is found in the BDB on page 847 and in the NEHC on page 1071. It is reference number 6692 and derives its meaning from the verb Tzutz.

Tehillim/Psalms 103:15

15 Man, his days are like those of grass; he blooms **like a flower of the field (ketzitz hasadeh ken yatzitz – like flower the field so he flowers כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה כֵּן יֵצֵיץ)**;

Here it is used to describe a flower. Like that you might see for a tassel which resembles a flower. This the end hangs loses like pedals of a flower.

Yeshiyahu/Isaiah 28:1

28:1 Ah, the proud crowns of the drunkards of Ephraim, Whose glorious beauty is but wilted **flowers (v'tzitz וְצִיץ)** On the heads of men bloated with rich food, Who are overcome by wine!

Again a flower is shown.

Yeshiyahu 40:6-8

6 A voice rings out: “Proclaim!” Another asks, “What shall I proclaim?” “All flesh is grass, All its goodness **like flowers** (**batzitz** **בְּצִיץ**) of the field: 7 Grass withers, flowers (Tzitz **צִיץ**) fade When the breath of Yehovah blows on them. Indeed, man is but grass: 8 Grass withers, flowers (Tzitz **צִיץ**) fade—But the word of Eloheynu is always fulfilled!”

We see used in the figurative sense for man but described as flower. So what does this Noun come from. The Verb Tzutz (Tzadie-Vav-Tzadie). It is reference number 6692. It is found on page 1059 in the NEHC and on page 847 in the BDB.

In its simple form it is found ...

Yehez'qel/Ezekiel 7:10

10 Here is the day! See, the cycle has come round; it has appeared. The rod has blossomed (tzatz **צָץ**); arrogance has budded,

This sounds very similar to another account I am sure you are familiar with of a rod blossoming. Though this talk metaphorically as the cycle coming to a close. The blossoming is what a flower does which ties it to Tzutz and Tzitzit is reflective of that blossoming look.

Numbers 17:23 (8)

23 The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Pact, and there the staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had sprouted: it had brought forth sprouts (vayatzetz tzitz **וַיֵּצֵא צִיץ**), produced blossoms, and borne almonds.

It had bloomed a bloom or flower. So we can see from these that the Tzitzit must in some way resemble like a flower.

So what is another place in the Tanakh where a Tzitzit is listed but not not said as Tzitzit. That is Devarim/Deuteronomy 22:12.

12 You shall make tassels (**gedilim** **גְּדִלִים**) on the four corners (**al-arba kan'fot** **עַל-אַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת**) of the garment [yours] (**kasut'kha** **כְּסוּתְךָ**) with which you cover yourself.

Here we see the word Gedilim which is translated as Tassels. Reference number 1434. It us also to be on the corners or Kanaf. The garment here is k'sut which is the covering and reference number 3682. You can see this in Shemot 21:10 one of the things you must give the woman or in the covering (kasut) the poor gives you in Shemot 22:26 (27) which you must return to him. Thus this also tells us the place to put is the outermost covering (kasut). But what is gedilim? Lets look further in Melekhim Aleph/I kings 7:17. Lets start in verse 15.

15 He cast two columns of bronze; one column was 18 cubits high and measured 12 cubits in circumference, [and similarly] the other column. **16** He made two capitals, cast in bronze, to be set upon the two columns, the height of each of the two capitals being 5 cubits; **17 also nets of meshwork with festoons of chainwork (gedilim ma'aseh shar'sh'rot – a weave of chainwork גְּדִלִים מַעֲשֵׂה שַׁרְשְׁרוֹת** for the capitals that were on the top of the columns, seven for each of the two capitals.

So these tassels were woven in Devarim/Deuteronomy 22. Gedilim is another word for Tzitzit referring to its look also. But what is this chainwork, which is referred to as Shar'sh'rot or Shar'sh'rah in the singular. It is reference number 8333.

Shemot/Exodus 28:14

13 Then make frames of gold **14** and two **chains (shar'sh'rot שַׁרְשְׁרוֹת)** of pure gold; braid these like corded work, and fasten the corded **chains (shar'sh'rot שַׁרְשְׁרוֹת)** to the frames.

In relating these back to gedilim the shar'sh'rot were the image of the Gedilim. A chainwork. A kind of braid like how they bent the pure gold into chains and so a Tzitzit should be braided, also. Below are two other places this word is used.

Shemot/Exodus 39:15

15 On the breastpiece they made **braided (shar'sh'rot שַׁרְשְׁרוֹת)** chains of corded work in pure gold.

Divrei HaYamin Bet/2 Chronicles 3:5, 16

5 The House itself he paneled with cypress wood. He overlaid it with fine gold and embossed on it palms and chains (**shar'sh'rot שַׁרְשְׁרוֹת**).

16 He made chainwork (**shar'sh'rot שרשרת**) in the inner Sanctuary and set it on the top of the columns; he made a hundred pomegranates and set them **into the chainwork** (**bashar'sh'rot בשרשרות**).

Here we see that the braid or chain work was very strong. Now this gave us another part of the Tzitzit. Next, what about the color. In Numbers 15:38, let them attach a **cord** (**petil פתיל**) of **blue** (**tekelet תכלת**) to the **fringe** (**Tzitzit ציצית**) at each **corner** (**HaKanaf הכנף**). Therefore these should be a petil tekelet.

Were else do we find tekelet used? It is reference number 8504.

Shemot 25:4, 26:1, 27:16 for one of the three colors of linen used for coverings and other items used in the Mishkan. There are more but for time we will not list them all. Also, there has been much discussion on what Tekelet is some say a snail and some a deep sea creature. In the wilderness, where would they get these? There is no indication what color the blue was to be but simply blue.

So what is this cord or Petil which some state is but a thread of blue. Petil is reference number 6616. It is a masculine noun and in Hebrew is Pey-Tav-Yod-Lamed.

It references it in Shemot/Exodus 28:28, 37

28 The breastpiece shall be held in place **by a cord of blue** (**bif'til tekhelet בפתיל תכלת**) from its rings to the rings of the ephod, so that the breastpiece rests on the decorated band and does not come loose from the ephod.

If this was a single thread how would it hold it in place.

36 You shall make a frontlet of pure gold and engrave on it the seal inscription: "Holy to Yehovah." 37 Suspend it **on a cord of blue** (**al-petil tekhelet על-פתיל תכלת**), so that it may remain on the headdress; it shall remain on the front of the headdress. 38 It shall be on Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may take away any sin arising from the holy things that the Israelites consecrate, from any of their sacred donations; it shall be on his forehead at all times, to win acceptance for them before Yehovah.

Clearly from these references, if it was just a thread they would not have been able to hold up pieces of metal so this must be more substantial than a single thread.

Shemot/Exodus 39:3,21,31

3 They hammered out sheets of gold and cut **threads** (petilim פְּתִילִים) to be worked into designs among the blue, the purple, and the crimson yarns, and the fine linen.

Here is where some will get the idea that it is a thread in the singular because it is threads in the plural here.

21 The breastpiece was held in place **by a cord of blue** (bif'til tekhelet בִּפְתִילֵי תֵּכְהֵלֶת) from its rings to the rings of the ephod, so that the breastpiece rested on the decorated band and did not come loose from the ephod—as Yehovah had commanded Moses.

Again here is Petil and it must be strong enough to hold the breastplate which was made with linen gold and the twelve stones. Not to mention the Urim and Thumim.

31 They attached to it a **cord of blue** (petil tekhelet פְּתִילֵי תֵּכְהֵלֶת) to fix it upon the headdress above—as Yehovah had commanded Moses.

Like before, we see that it must be strong than a thread.

Bamidbar/Numbers 19:15

14 This is the ritual: When a person dies in a tent, whoever enters the tent and whoever is in the tent shall be unclean seven days; 15 and every open vessel, with no lid **fastened down** (patil 'alav – cord on it פְּתִיל עָלָיו), shall be unclean.

From these we see that the Petil was more than a thread but more like threads in a chained or braided fashion. In the last example even possibly a form of rope. Therefore, Tzitzit must contain a braid of blue in it. So what about the white like Karaites use? It is a traditional way to do it. Nothing says you could not have another color with the blue.

Lastly, where do we connect it to the outer garment? We are told in Hebrew to us the Kanaf. But what is the Kanaf? It is reference number 3671. We find it used first for the wings of the Bird.

Bereshit/Genesis 1:21

21 God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and **all the winged birds** (kol of kanaf כֹּל-עוֹף כָּנָף) of every kind. And God saw that this was good.

Here we see the Kanaf of the bird is its wing.

Bereshit/Genesis 7:14

14 they and all beasts of every kind, all cattle of every kind, all creatures of every kind that creep on the earth, and all birds of every kind, every bird, **every winged thing (kol Kanaf כָּל-כַּנָּף)**.

A winged thing like the birds. Things that fly with wings or Kanaf.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 4:17

15 For your own sake, therefore, be most careful—since you saw no shape when the LORD your God spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire—16 not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman, 17 the form of any beast on earth, the form of any **winged (kanaf כָּנָף)** bird that flies in the sky,

Again the bird is used.

Then it is used for clothing.

Devarim 22:12

12 You shall make tassels **on the four corners (al-arba kan'fot עַל-אַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת)** of the garment with which you cover yourself.

There is four corners to a cloth which shows us here that Kanaf like the wing of a bird is pointed and flaps in the wind.

Numbers 15:38

38 Speak to the **Israelite people (Benei Yisrael בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל)** and instruct them to **make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments (v'asu lahem Tzitzit al kan'fei big'deihem – and you all make to you fringes to corners in cloth/garment וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִת עַל-כַּנְפֵי בְּגֵדֵיהֶם)** throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the **fringe (Tzitzit צִיצִת)** at each **corner (HaKanaf הַכַּנָּף)**.

Again we are told to the Tzitzit to the corner or Kanaf at the end of the verse. But earlier it uses the word Kanaf in the plural Kan'fei to designate that they are more than one on a cloth or begged.

Ok, we have learned today that:

1. Tzitzit were to resemble a bloom at its end and made of braids like a chain work with blue threads worked into the chain.
2. Tzitzit were to be worn on the outer garment/cloak on the corners of the cloth.
3. The seeing of the Tzitzit was used to bring to our minds Yehovah's Mitzvot, which we are to keep.

The important thing to remember that in their days they did not have fitted garments like we do today. Therefore what is the purpose of the Tzitzit today, it is to remind us of our obligation and therefore the seeing of the Tzitzit is what is required. So how can we wear them. You could make a four-corner cloth and attach them to it. You could attach them to your clothing as long as they are visible to you. I have at times worn them on my belt loops, some have worn them on a belt. The hem of a dress is another place. Wear the Tzitzit on the ends of a tunic shirt on the kanaf or corners. The point is to wear them and you to see them.