

# Tzitzit

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These weeks we read a series of chapters that deal with errors of human judgment and poor choices. The impact of such mistakes is often far greater than we envision or anticipate. At the end of last week, we read about Tzitzit, the fringes they used to wear on their outer garments which were like square blankets with a hole in the middle to put one's head through. Over time as fashions changed the Tzitzit were put on the Talit we use for prayer. And people started wearing a smaller four cornered garment with Tzitzit under their outer garments.

The purpose of these Tzitzit was to have a constant reminder of one's values and moral code. Each time one was tempted to do the wrong thing, seeing a ritual symbol of Torah would hopefully get us to re-consider, to think twice. This also was the reason for wearing a kipa that developed during the Talmudic era.

In recent times the Ashkenazim have taken increasingly to wearing their Tzitzit out, whereas Sepharadim traditionally always wore them covered. There are different ways of expressing one's Judaism, but the idea of Tzitzit is that being reminded visually of our difference is very important because otherwise we humans have a tendency to do the wrong thing.

There is a Midrash that says that Korah challenged Moses over the issue of Tzitzit. The law ordered a blue thread, Tehelet, to be added to the others. Korah dressed his protesters in completely blue garments as if to make fun of the idea that a single blue thread should validate the command or not. It is easy to laugh at any tradition or convention. And this proves his motives were not legitimate. Nowadays, we have lost the dye for Tehelet and most of us no longer have the blue thread, though some Hassidim think they know where the blue dye came from.

This week too, the word Tzitz is used when Aaron is confirmed as High Priest after being challenged by Korah. All the claimants bring an almond twig and only Aarons 'bursts into bloom'. The word for bloom or blossom is Tzitz too. Blossoms, are often ignored and taken for granted. But blossoms fade to make way for fruit! It is good to appreciate them and enjoy their beauty and determine to see the good and the beautiful in life, when we remember! But they do not last. So, it is with the fringes we wear. Unless they remind us constantly of our obligations, moral as well as ritual they are no more than a decoration, meaningless pieces of thread.