

# The *TZitzit* Project

*Rabbi TZiPi Radonsky*

Who would have ever thought that in the summer of 1999 while working as an intern at Elat Chayyim when Jo Milgram taught me how to tie *tzitzit* and I made my first *Talit katan*, literally small prayer shawl and is usually worn under clothes with the *tzitzit* showing outside the clothes. that I would have fallen in love with the process and that act would have been like a ripple affect in my life and to so many people.

Today I make *tzitzit* as a way of offering Hebrew Wisdom to help heal any closed places that might stop the flow of universal healing energy - love. A *tzitzit* can be used as an amulet to hold onto to perhaps bring some grounding and connection to their G!D in places that are uncomfortable. I wanted the person to have something that I made that had meaning to me.

I remember the many faces and stories as they told me about their relationships with their *tzitzit*. Ellen looped it around her button on her shirt wearing it proudly. Arlene made a bracelet around her wrist and wore into surgery; she was sure this was part of her quick healing. Myer tied it on his bedpost at the hospital reminding him of the importance of his faith in his sterile environment far from family. Netta tied it securely around her wrist as she went off to Israel for two months. She called and asked for another one while she was gone as the first one got dirty.

Helene took several *tzitzit* for her journey to South Africa to see her mother who was very ill. She took one each for her mother and her father. When they buried her mother they took the three *tzitzit* and created a Shin on her body before the casket was closed. In her orthodox home this was a blessing on her mother's life.

This process of making *tzitzit* for healing began when Rabbi Fred called me to visit before his shoulder surgery and to offer some prayers with him. I did not want to go empty handed yet what do you bring someone before they are going into surgery? The idea came for the *tzitzit*. He loved the idea and had them tape the tied thread on his leg. He was sure that this brought him through. Several weeks later one of his

congregants had a heart attack. Rabbi Fred brought him his *tzitzit* and assured the man this would bring him through. The man is well.

In Judaism the prayer shawl, *talit* in Hebrew, with *tzitzit*, fringed and knotted tassels, at each corner, is perhaps one of the world's oldest and most used ritual objects. Originally intended to distinguish the Jews from others, the prayer shawl is considered a "talisman", an amulet meant to bring the wearer closer to the Divine. When I wrap myself in the *Talit* I imagine that I am being held in the arms of my G!D and the prayer I chant with my head covered is: 'How precious is Your kindness, Oh God! Humans take refuge in the shadow of your wings. May they be sated from the abundance of Your house; and may You give them to drink from the stream of Your delights. For with You is the source of life-by your light we shall see light. Extend kindness to those who know You and Your righteousness to the upright of heart.'

Amulets vary according to their time and place of origin. Nevertheless, religious objects commonly serve as a connection to the Mystery in different societies; as we read in *Sefer Yetzera*, the oldest book in Hebrew Wisdom, when your heart strays come back to *makom*, the place. EE Cummings said it similarly, you may travel afar always coming back to where you started and as David Wagoner writes 'and know it for the first time.'

I had originally given them to Jewish people or a few 'Jew' friendly people. Then I started to give them to non-Jews and they seemed Ok about it. Then Amy Jo Levine, a New Testament scholar and an Orthodox Jew who teaches at Vanderbilt University, came to Greensboro where I was living at the time and spoke about the similarities between Jesus and the Hebrews. She spoke of Jesus as a rabbi who wore a prayer shawl with *tzitzit*. When she quoted from the New Testament that a woman had reached out to Jesus' *tzitzit* for healing I knew that this symbol was very powerful and important for all people.

This information then made the whole project universal and not just Jewish and this information inspired me to do more. This was a way of

spreading Hebrew Wisdom, to take down the fences and begin to see our different paths to the same Place. I was watering the tree outside the fence.

I began making the *tzitzit* with cotton thread. Then Rabbi Eli Havivi said why don't you use the real *tzitzit* thread. So I ordered the materials from Israel and now all the pieces have both the white and blue threads that are also on *talitot*, prayer shawls.

Ruthie called me from the waiting room after she heard that Richard was going to be OK after his open-heart surgery. In telling me this she included the story about how after Richard had gotten undressed he asked if his hospital gown had a pocket. He then reached into his pant pocket and took out the *tzitzit* I had given him several years ago for hip surgery and placed it into his hospital gown pocket.

Stories galore!!

And now the Talmud story of the Zona who enticed a *talit katan* wearing man into her boudoir and during his undressing he saw his *tzitzit* and remembered his connections to his God and could not follow through with the encounter. When he explained his behavior she was so moved that she followed him and then later converted to Judaism. These fringes are meant to remind us of our holiness, Divine connection and to keep us at our highest good.