

## Fringe Benefits: Women and *Tzitzit*

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The biblical law to tie fringes (*tzitzit*) on the four corners of one's garment is found in two places in the Torah. In Numbers (15:38–40) it says:

Speak to the children of Israel and tell them they should make fringes on the corners of their garments for generations; and they should place on the corner fringes, a twisted thread of blue. It will be to you as fringes and when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of God and you will do them; and you will not follow after your heart and after your eyes by which you are seduced. In order that you remember and do all my commandments and be holy to your God.<sup>1</sup>

In Deuteronomy (22:12), the law of fringes follows immediately after the prohibition of mixing wool and linen (*shatnez*), where it then says:

Tassels (*gedilim*) you shall make for yourself on the four corners of your clothing with which you cover yourself.

The Hebrew terms *tzitzit* and *gedilim*, as well as defining what constitutes a garment, are discussed in great detail in Rabbinic literature.<sup>2</sup>

The most important rabbinic discussion relating to women and their traditional exemption from the commandment of fringes can be found in a Midrash

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<sup>1</sup> Translations from the Hebrew texts are by the author.

<sup>2</sup> The biblical commandment refers to a type of outer clothing, *tallit*, whose four corners would require fringes. The talmudic discussion mostly revolves around this kind of garment, except for one story of a man who was "saved" from his near sin with a prostitute by his *tzitzit* (*Menachot* 44a). Here, the *arba kanfot* seem to refer to an undergarment. The rabbinic legislation of wearing a *tallit katan* in order to fulfill the law at all times was later codified as standard practice by the *Rishonim*. For one possible historical explanation, see Vallentine's *Jewish Encyclopedia* (London, 1938) 48: "It may be assumed that the *arba kanfot* originates from the times of persecution when Jews were afraid to exhibit the *tallit gadol*." Although the terms are often used interchangeably when discussing *tzitzit*, there are separate blessings for each garment.

Halakha, expounding on the verse in Numbers<sup>3</sup> which sets the parameters for obligation:

God said to Moses, and they shall make for themselves fringes. Even the women are implied. Rabbi Shimon exempts women from *tzitzit* because women are exempt from positive commandments limited by time. This is the rule: Rabbi Shimon says: [regarding] all positive commandments which are limited by time, women are exempt; these laws apply to men, not to women; to those fit [to observe the law], not to those unfit [to observe the law]. Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava says, specifically the Rabbis exempted the veil of a woman from fringes and only obligated a *tallit* (shawl) because there are times when her husband covers himself with it.

This passage raises at least two major concepts which define the nature of the commandment of *tzitzit*: the question of time and the question of person. Seemingly, women would be included in the command given by God to Moses, but Rabbi Shimon learns that the law of *tzitzit* does not include women. Furthermore, a garment meant exclusively for women is exempt, while “unisex” clothing requires fringes.

The Babylonian Talmud (*Menachot* 40–43) expands the discussion to include many other aspects of the law. When is the blessing made on the *tzitzit*: when you attach the fringes to your garment or when you wear them? What if the clothing is owned but never worn and stays folded in your drawer? What about borrowed garments? What if the garment is owned by two people? Is the law still valid if we do not have the blue dye required in the Biblical passage? What if a garment has more than four corners? What type of material requires *tzitzit*? Textual interpretation of the law’s proximity to the prohibition of *shatnez* teaches us that the law of fringes supersedes the law of mixed materials, meaning one could put wool fringes on a linen garment.<sup>4</sup> A completely different textual inference interprets *tzitzit* (and *tefillin*) to be exclu-

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<sup>3</sup> *Sifre* 115, in Horovitz’ critical edition; *Sifre* 61, in edition printed with Malbim; *Shalach*, Section 8, in *Sifre* edition printed with the Gaon of Vilna (*Gra*) and Naphtali Berlin (*Netziv*).

<sup>4</sup> This applied to the biblical law of *tekhelet*, the special blue-dyed thread included in the fringes. Since today we cannot identify that dye with certainty, attaching *tzitzit* to clothing which would constitute *shatnez* is prohibited.

sively male clothing,<sup>5</sup> although this did not become normative rabbinic thinking.<sup>6</sup> Regarding who exactly is included in the law of *tzitzit* and who is not,

the rabbis taught: all are obligated in [the law of] fringe: priests, Levites, and Israelites, converts, women and slaves. Rabbi Shimon exempts women because it is a positive commandment limited by time and [from] all positive commandments limited by time, women are exempt... What is the reasoning of Rabbi Shimon? It has been taught [in a *beraita*] regarding "and when you see it" (Numbers 15:39), this excludes clothing worn at night.<sup>7</sup>

The rationale of Rabbi Shimon is that since fringes are required only on clothing worn during the daytime, when they can actually be seen, *tzitzit* must be a time-limited commandment. Since women abide by the legal principle which exempts them from the obligation to observe positive laws which are limited by time,<sup>8</sup> mandating *tzitzit* on the corners of one's garment cannot be required of females.

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<sup>5</sup> *Targum Yonatan*, Deuteronomy 22:5.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps because fringes themselves appear as the non-gendered object of a commandment, not an ordinary garment. Perhaps also, because the Rabbis reject the position that simply wearing each other's garments without the intent of looking like the opposite gender is an "abomination." See *Nazir* 59a. *Rambam* places the law of cross-dressing as part of the prohibition against idol worship and R. Caro applies the law to larger practices of sexual immorality. Neither halakhic source associates *tzitzit* with gender-related clothing.

<sup>7</sup> *Menachot* 43a.

<sup>8</sup> A fuller discussion of the principle of women's exemption from most positive commandments which are limited by time, and their inclusion in almost all the negative commandments, can be found in *Kiddushin* 34–36. The *beraita* quoted in *Kiddushin* 33b asks: "What are the commandments which are time limited? *Sukka*, *lulav*, shofar, *tzitzit* and *tefillin*." The rule and its exceptions are discussed at length, addressing the previously mentioned commandments, although not elaborating on *tzitzit*. The status of women's obligation is analyzed by focusing on such laws as studying Torah, affixing a *mezuzah* on the doorpost, rejoicing on the festivals, assembling in the Temple every seven years, eating matzah on Pesach, bearing children, redeeming the firstborn and fearing one's parents. See also *Berakhot* 20b for a shorter debate. The law of *tzitzit* is not mentioned in that context.

The question of time is essential to women's exemption from *tzitzit*. In at least two other citations,<sup>9</sup> a *beraita* is quoted stating clearly that the law of fringes is meant to be observed only "when you see it" (Numbers 15:39), meaning, during the daylight hours. This statement was implemented with the ruling that a blind person's garment requires *tzitzit*, because other people can see the fringed clothing, even if the blind cannot. The Jerusalem Talmud<sup>10</sup> lists *tzitzit* as a commandment which is *not* limited by time, but explains that

Rabbi Shimon exempts women since [he considers] fringes a positive commandment limited by time since a night garment does not need fringes. Rabbi Laya said: the reasoning of the Rabbis [that *tzitzit* are not time limited] is that certainly if one had a garment meant for both day and night, it would require fringes.

*Sifre* offers this conclusion (without mentioning the disagreement over time raised in reference to women): "A garment meant for both day and night is obligated in *tzitzit*."<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Yehuda also saw the law of *tzitzit* as a commandment not limited by time. "Rabbi Yehuda attached (blue-dyed) fringes to the aprons of the women of his household"<sup>12</sup> and "Rabbi Amram the Pious would

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<sup>9</sup> See *Shabbat* 27b and *Zevachim* 18b.

<sup>10</sup> *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 3:3 [6b].

<sup>11</sup> The Netziv explains that in the *Sifre* cited earlier, Yehuda ben Bava's point that a garment shared by men and women requires *tzitzit* is based on the model of a garment worn for both day and night. In fact, the halakhic resolution defines the law of *tzitzit* as limited by the type of garment worn during daylight: if one wears pajamas during the day, even garments with four corners, they do not require fringes. There are conflicting opinions about day clothes worn at night.

<sup>12</sup> *Menachot* 43a. Rabbi Yehuda used to recite the blessing each morning and the Talmud addresses the question of how he could include women, since by saying the blessing in the mornings, he was indicating that the law was indeed limited by time. The Chatam Sofer explains that Rabbi Yehuda's inclusion of women could be learned from a different source: the juxtaposition of *tzitzit* to remembering the Exodus. "The *Beit Yosef* brings a Midrash that at the time of the splitting of the Red Sea, the angel Gavriel decreed that the waters should part in front of them on the merit of the fringes they [would] wear in front, and the waters behind them on merit of the fringes they [would] wear in the back. And if so, since women were present at the same miracle, they would be obligated in *tzitzit* even though the night is free from the obligation." See *Responsa of Chatam Sofer*, part 1, OC 195.

hang (blue-dyed) fringes on the aprons of the women of his household,"<sup>13</sup> Yet, the view of Rabbi Shimon was dominant and is the one used as the basis for the later halakhic exemption of women.<sup>14</sup>

Almost all sources acknowledge the non-obligatory status of women when it comes to laws limited by time. In his counting of the 613 commandments, *Rambam* lists sixty specific positive precepts which he feels are operational at all times and in all places for the average adult Jewish male. Of those, women are obligated to keep forty-six laws and exempt from observing fourteen specific ones. *Tzitzit* is listed as one of the fourteen exemptions for females.<sup>15</sup> What does the status of exemption mean? Are those people who are not obligated, nevertheless permitted to perform the precepts? Despite the differential in the reward factor, does the law allow for optional performance?<sup>16</sup> Are there negatives consequences which might limit the possibility of women to perform those laws from which they are exempt? *Rambam*<sup>17</sup> codifies the law, first answering several issues about the time for the required fringes and the timing of the blessing:

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<sup>13</sup> *Sukka* 11a. Rabbi Amram attached the *tzitzit* but did not cut them until he determined which act (attaching or cutting) was essential to the commandment, thereby providing a model for the law of *sukka* covering.

<sup>14</sup> See *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot, Hilkhhot Tzitzit*, end of chapter, where Rabbi Shimon's exemption for women is stated as law without debate. (However, the issue of a minor performing the precepts is presented with multiple opinions.)

<sup>15</sup> Maimonides, *Sefer haMitzvot*, Positive Laws, last paragraphs.

<sup>16</sup> See *Kiddushin* 31a, *Avoda Zara* 3a and *Bava Kamma* 17a and 38a for Rabbi Chanina's principle: "Just like someone who was not obligated receives a reward for observing the law, how much more so for the person who is obligated to keep the law and observes it. For Rabbi Chanina said, greater is the person who is commanded and does it, than one who is not commanded and does it." The rationale behind this statement is both theological and psychological. The person who is doing God's will is on a "higher" plane than one who is observing the law for any other reason, no matter how spiritual. *Tosafot* say that a person will exercise greater care in fulfilling the law if it is the word of God. Furthermore, it is human nature to rebel when ordered to do something, so the person who overcomes his natural tendency to reject commands is rewarded for controlling his instincts. In the eyes of the rabbis, directing one's ego to serve God is a task worthy of greater reward.

<sup>17</sup> Maimonides, *Mishne Torah, Hilkhhot Tzitzit* 3:7,8.

The obligation of *tzitzit* is during the day and not at night, as it says: “and when you see it”—during the time of visibility. A blind person is obligated in *tzitzit* even though he cannot see, since others see his garment [with the fringes]. A person is permitted to wear *tzitzit* at night, whether on a weekday or on Shabbat, even though it is not the [required] time, provided that he does not recite the blessing. From when in the morning should the blessing be recited? When one can recognize the difference between the blue [fringe] in it and the white in it. And how does one bless on it? “Blessed are you God, our Lord, King of the Universe, who has commanded us to wrap in fringes.” Each time he wears it during the day, he recites a blessing before he wears it. He does not bless the *tzitzit* during the time he is making them, because the endpoint of the commandment is to wrap oneself in it.

Determining who is included in the law of *tzitzit*, *Rambam* states:<sup>18</sup>

For every person who is obligated to perform this commandment; if he wears a garment that requires fringes, he should put *tzitzit* [on the garment] and then wear it. If he wears it without the fringes, he has violated a positive commandment. However, clothing that requires *tzitzit*, as long as no one wears it, but it remains folded and set aside, is exempt from *tzitzit*, since the obligation is not on the garment, but rather on the person who owns the *tallit*.

One paragraph earlier, *Rambam* addresses the question of women:

Women, slaves and minors are exempt from the biblical law of fringes. According to the Rabbis, any child who knows how to dress himself, is obligated in *tzitzit*, in order to educate him in the commandments. Women and slaves who want to wear *tzitzit*, wrap themselves [in it] without a blessing. And this is the case with other positive commandments from which women are exempt. If they want to perform them without a blessing, they are not prevented.

*Ravad*<sup>19</sup> comments on *Rambam*'s assertion that women and slaves could voluntarily perform the precepts without a blessing.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:10.

<sup>19</sup> Avraham Ben David of Posquieres, on *Rambam*, *Mishne Torah*, *Hilkhot Tzitzit* 3:9. His actual statement opens with the line “specifically for fringes that are not from prohibited mixed materials.” Since the law of *shatnez* is a biblical prohibition, it can only be overridden by another biblical commandment, not by the rabbinic optional performance of

...And there are those who disagree and say [that these laws can be done] even with a blessing and they say that even the recitation of the blessing is voluntarily possible. And they bring support for their words from the first chapter of *Kiddushin*<sup>20</sup> from the words of Rabbi Yosef who said: At first, I used to say that whoever would tell me the law was in agreement with Rabbi Yehuda, who said that a blind person is exempt from the commandments, I would celebrate [make a party for the rabbis], because I am not obligated and I perform the laws. And if the law says that someone who is not obligated is not eligible to say the blessing, then he would have violated a prohibition, because he himself recited blessings, and if he could not recite the blessing, what reason would there be to celebrate?<sup>21</sup>

Thus, *Rambam's* option of voluntary performance is expanded by *Ravad* to include the possibility of reciting the blessing.<sup>22</sup>

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a law. (See note 4.) For a different perspective on *Ravad's* meaning see R. Yisrael Gustman *Collection of Lessons on Tractate Kiddushin* (Hebrew) (1970; reprinted in Jerusalem, 1991) lesson 20 (end).

<sup>20</sup> *Kiddushin* 31a.

<sup>21</sup> Rabbi Yosef was blind and used to perform the commandments. At first, he heard that Rabbi Yehuda had declared all blind people exempt from the laws, and he wanted to celebrate because he thought it was better to voluntarily observe the laws. *Ravad* infers that if Rabbi Yosef could not make the blessings to go along with those voluntary actions, why would he want to celebrate? It must be that he was allowed to recite the blessings as he performed the commandments and that was something worthy of celebration. (Rabbi Yosef later learned that one who is obligated indeed gets a greater reward, whereby he wanted to celebrate if anyone had told him the law was *not* according to Rabbi Yehuda.) See also *Bava Kamma* 87a.

<sup>22</sup> See also the *Hagahot Maimoniyot* on *Hilkhot Tzitzit* 3:40. There he cites *Rashi's* agreement with *Rambam* (performance without the blessings) and quotes the view of *Rabbenu Tam* (performance with the blessings). He concludes with the following statement: "And the Sar of Couzy [R. Shimshon, brother-in-law of the *Smag*] also wrote according to the words of *Rabbenu Tam*, that women can recite the blessing for *lulav*, *tefillin* and other [precepts]. And that is what *Rabbenu Simcha* wrote regarding blowing the shofar, that a woman who blows for herself should recite the blessing and we do not prevent her." The permissibility to recite blessings for the optional performance of laws focuses on at least two important issues. How can a person who is not commanded say the words: "Blessed are you, God... who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to..." prior to voluntarily undertaking an action? Also, would the optional recitation constitute a violation of the Biblical law against using God's name in vain? The

Twelfth century *Tosafists* have a strong tradition of affording women the opportunity to perform commandments from which they are exempt.<sup>23</sup> Rabbenu Tam bases his claim that blessings are permitted for voluntary performance on the examples of Michal who wore *tefillin* (and recited the blessing), the wife of Yonah the prophet who went up to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festivals, and the women who were granted permission to lay their hands on a sacrificial animal in order to “give the women spiritual satisfaction.”<sup>24</sup> “And women are permitted to recite blessings on the positive commandments which are limited by time, even though they are exempt from that specific commandment.”<sup>25</sup> In *Tosafot* we find the wording even stronger than *Ravad’s*:

why would Rabbi Yosef celebrate if he was losing out on the blessings of *tzitzit*, *lulav*, *tefillin*, *Megilla*, *chanukka* lights, *sukka*, and *havdala*, *kiddush* of the [Shabbat] day, and the blessings of *Shema* for *shacharit* and *arvit*, as well as all the blessings? As we learn in chapter *HaMeine’ach*, if one wants to be pious, he should observe all the blessings.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, Rabbenu Tam says that we cannot equate the status of a blind person or a minor performing optional commandments with women’s performance of the laws, because both blind men and young boys are still part of the same large

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*poskim* (codifiers) are divided, usually along the lines of the *Rishonim* cited above. This topic is addressed in some of the recent books on women and Halakha. See Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law* (Schocken, 1984) 41–43; Eliezer Berkovits, *Jewish Women in Time and Torah* (Ktav, 1990) ch. 4; Avraham Weiss, *Women at Prayer* (Ktav, 1990) ch. 6, nn16, 17. Also see Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism* (JPS, 1981) 39–104 for an overview of the status of women in Judaism. See the sources cited in Getsel Ellinson, *Serving the Creator* (WZO, 1986) ch. 4 (also available in Hebrew).

<sup>23</sup> For the detailed reasoning behind the inclusion and exemption of women in such laws as Chanukka, *Megilla* and *pessach*, plus their obligation in *birkat hamazon* and prayer, see the *Tosafot* on the following citations in *Berakhot* 20b, *Megilla* 4a, *Sukka* 38a, *Arachin* 3a and *Eruvin* 96b.

<sup>24</sup> *Eruvin* 96a–b. See discussion in the previous article.

<sup>25</sup> *Rosh haShana* 33a, *Tosafot*. See also the *Tosafot* in *Kiddushin* 31a which makes a similar statement.

<sup>26</sup> *Bava Kamma* 30a. Other ways to be pious are also mentioned there: being careful about all the laws of *nezikin* (damages) or keeping all the tractate of *Avot* (ethics). *Tosafot* in *Rosh haShana* cites the third option, reciting blessings.

group which has an obligation, males. Instead, *Tosafot* acknowledge that although females are exempt from time limited commandments, there are other laws women are obligated to perform. *Tosafot* also refer to the possibility of a woman being one of the seven called up to the Torah and permitted to recite the blessing.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the optional performance of any commandment plus the recitation of blessings is still rewarded by God.<sup>28</sup>

The *Rif*, R. Yitzchak Alfasi<sup>29</sup> codifies the opinion of Rabbi Shimon: "Everyone is obligated in *tzitzit*... Rabbi Shimon exempts women because it is a positive commandment which is limited by time and women are exempt, and the law is as Rabbi Shimon." The *Rosh*<sup>30</sup> there also cites the *Sifre* (after a lengthy analysis of Rabbenu Tam) and concludes "therefore, it appears that fringes [even] of mixed material is permitted on a man's shawl, whether on a man or a woman, either in the day or in the night even though it is considered a positive law limited by time." *Sefer Yeraim*<sup>31</sup> and *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*<sup>32</sup> both document the exemption of Rabbi Shimon as accepted practice, and the *Smag*

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<sup>27</sup> *Megilla* 23a continues "however, a woman is not called to the Torah out of respect for the congregation (*kevod hatzibur*)." In the *Tosafot* cited above, Rabbenu Tam rejects this example, as well as women's requirement to say the grace after meals (*birkat hamazon*) as proof of their equal status regarding the optional performance of laws.

<sup>28</sup> Whether or not one may make a vow and/or permanently obligate oneself in a commandment is a debate among the *poskim*. See the *Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 289:1 on women and counting the *omer* where he states that although women are not obligated: "they have taken it upon themselves as an obligation." *Abudarham* says that women are exempt from positive laws limited by time because "a wife is in service to her husband to fulfill his needs. If she was obligated in these laws, it is possible that in the midst of performing a precept, her husband would ask her to perform a service for him; and if she is fulfilling the commands of the Creator, 'woe to her' from her husband. If she would act on her husband's orders and leave the commands of her Creator, 'woe to her' from her Maker. Therefore, the Creator freed her from His commandments in order that she be at peace with her husband." See *Sefer Abudraham*, ch. 3. A similar claim by the *Levush* is addressed by Akiva Eiger when he comments on "women today who are strict and careful and eager in their observance of most positive laws limited by time." See *Responsa of R. Akiva Eiger*, sec. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Yitzchak Alfasi (*Rif*), *Halakhot Ketanot, Hilkhhot Tzitzit*, opening lines.

<sup>30</sup> Asher ben Yechiel, *Piskei haRosh, Hilkhhot Tzitzit* (s.v. "excluding").

<sup>31</sup> Eliezer of Metz, *Tzitzit*, sec. 401.

<sup>32</sup> Moshe of Couzy (*Smag*), Positive Commandment 26.

adds the opinion of Rabbenu Tam who permits women to recite blessings.<sup>33</sup> *Sefer haChinukh*<sup>34</sup> says that the law of *tzitzit* applies to males, in every place and at all times, but not to females. "And if the women want to wear a *tallit*, they may wear it without reciting the blessing according to the opinion of some of the commentators, and a few have said, even with a blessing." The overall tenor of the early Rabbinic opinion clearly exempts women from the law of fringes, but permits women who want to wear *tzitzit* to do so, even with the option of reciting the blessing.

The *Tur*<sup>35</sup> obligates the blind to have fringes and exempts women, citing the *Rambam*'s option of wearing *tzitzit* without reciting the blessing. "And he [*Rambam*] follows the view that explains that women may not bless something from which they are exempt. But Rabbenu Tam wrote that they could recite the blessing even if they are exempt, and it is better if they do not recite the blessing."<sup>36</sup> R. Yosef Caro<sup>37</sup> comments on the *Tur* with a review of Rabbi Shimon and the views of Rabbenu Tam, *Rif* and *Rosh*. He takes the *Rambam* one step further by explaining *Rambam*'s rationale for permitting the wearing of *tzitzit* without the blessing:

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<sup>33</sup> See the *Ran* (Rabbenu Nissim) to the *Rif* on *Rosh haShana*, ch. 4 and the *Ritva* (Yomtov ben Avraham Ashvili) on *Kiddushin* 31a. Both sources discuss women doing optional commandments, saying the blessings and getting a reward. The *Ritva*, in a discussion of the reasons why a person who is obligated gets a greater reward than one who volunteers, comments that even the person opting to keep a law gets some reward. "After all, from a goodness of heart and piety he placed himself in service of God's command. And specifically for a law that God commanded of others, he has the will to do. However, when a person, on his own, takes on a law which was never commanded in the Torah whatsoever, that is what is said about one who was never commanded and performs it, [he] is called a fool."

<sup>34</sup> Attributed to Aharon haLevi of Barcelona, Commandment 386.

<sup>35</sup> Yaakov Baal haTurim (*Tur*), OC 17.

<sup>36</sup> The *Bach* (R. Yoel Sirkes) and the *Derisha* (R. Yehoshua Falk Katz) both address the discrepancy between the *Tur*'s permission for women to recite the optional blessing over the shofar and his preference that women not recite the blessing for *tzitzit*. The *Bach* explains that women have already been accustomed to hearing the shofar and reciting the blessing, so there are "opinions on which to rely" if they continue to do so. However, if women were to ask for permission prior to saying the blessing, in cases like these which involve rabbinic dispute, they should be discouraged.

<sup>37</sup> *Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim* 17.

Regarding the law, we maintain it is like the *Rambam*, that when in doubt about reciting a blessing, we are lenient [and do not bless]. The *Igur* has written in the name of the *Maharil* about women who wear *tzitzit*, that it is silly and appears arrogant, and there was one woman in our neighborhood who wore it.

The *Maharil's* responsum<sup>38</sup> quoted by Caro raises several interesting points. He discusses the idea of women reciting optional blessings and addresses the issue of wearing fringes as possibly violating other prohibitions. Based on the *Hagahot Maimoniyot*,<sup>39</sup> the larger concerns which might pose a problem are wearing *shatnez* (which would also apply to men) and carrying "the extraneous" fringes on Shabbat, since *tzitzit* are not required of women.

The *Maharil* then explains that the law of *tzitzit* is not like other commandments since it is a "requirement of the garment," not of the person. This means that one is not obligated to go out and purchase a four-cornered garment to attach fringes, but only if one already owns such a garment does he have to put on *tzitzit*.<sup>40</sup> The only reason a man wears fringes is to

enter himself into the obligation as we learned from Moses. Did he [Moses] need to eat from the fruits or satisfy himself from the good of the land? Rather, Moses said "Many commandments were given to the children of Israel that cannot be observed except in the land of Israel. I will enter the land in order to fulfill all of them myself." These words apply to men. But women, what [meaning] does it have for them, because after all, they are not obligated. It

<sup>38</sup> Yaakov ben Moshe haLevi Moellin of Mainz, *New Responsa* 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Hagahot Maimoniyot, Hilkhos Tzitzit* 3:30. He explains the contrasting views of the *Bavli* and *Yerushalmi* Talmuds about whether the rabbis protested or not when Michal wore *tefillin* and the wife of Yonah went (up) to Jerusalem. "I found [an explanation] in the name of a great person that whenever there was the possibility of bringing non-sanctified meat into the Temple or showing the nudity of a woman's hair when wearing *tefillin* or carrying a shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the rabbis prevented her. However, when there is no 'whiff of a sin,' like with *sukka* and *lulav*, even though she is biblically exempt, the rabbis did not prevent her from doing it." The *Maharil* touches on why the law of *tzitzit* is not mentioned directly in this list (although the entire passage appears in the chapter on fringes).

<sup>40</sup> One might argue that if men are not required to go out and purchase *tzitzit*, since it is dependent on the garment, not the person, then men too should not be permitted to wear *tzitzit* on Shabbat. Indeed, there are those *poskim* who consider wearing a *tallit katan* to be carrying on the Shabbat.

also seems to me that the essence of the law of *tzitzit* is to remember all the commandments of God... and women are not included in the 613 commandments... they are a "people unto themselves."<sup>41</sup> Therefore, based on all the reasons mentioned, even though I have seen women wearing four cornered garments with fringes, and still today there is one woman in our neighborhood, it seems to me astonishing and is considered arrogant of them and they are called fools.<sup>42</sup>

Several aspects of the *Maharil's* comments shed light on new developments in the halakhic attitude toward females and fringes: a few women wearing *tzitzit* must have become more visible, there seems to be a rabbinic attempt to diminish women's inclusion in the 613 laws, and the issue of arrogance is introduced into the voluntary pursuit of commandments by women.<sup>43</sup> This shift is evident in the *Levush's*<sup>44</sup> strong wording that despite the legal permission granted women to wear *tzitzit*, even with the blessing and even though they receive a reward,

...it is still foolish and arrogant if they do so. Despite the fact that with other positive time-limited commandments women have been accustomed to observing them and reciting the blessing, what they are used to doing, they do; what they are not used to doing, they do not do. And with *tzitzit*, we do not find it done, except for one in a thousand, like Michal the daughter of Saul and others; therefore, they should not wear fringes.<sup>45</sup>

The notion of *yohara* (arrogance or pride) is mentioned in the halakhic literature in several cases of excessive piety where the rabbis debate its implications. A groom on his wedding night who claims he is able to concen-

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<sup>41</sup> *Shabbat* 62a.

<sup>42</sup> In the *Maharil's* book of customs, he mentions that the reason why he did not stop Rabbanit Bruna from wearing her *tzitzit* was because he thought she would not listen.

<sup>43</sup> See *Megilla* 14b where "Rabbi Nachman said: Arrogance is not becoming in women." His examples are two of the prophetesses, Devorah and Chuldah.

<sup>44</sup> Mordechai Yaffe, *Sefer Levush Malchut, Hilkhos Tzitzit* 17:2.

<sup>45</sup> Several later authorities take issue with the *Levush's* assumption that Michal wore *tzitzit*, since the texts only mention her wearing *tefillin*. (See *Eliya Rabba* 17:2 and the *Sdei Chemed*, ch. 9, sec. 15.) The *Levush* continues with a discussion of male garments on females and concludes that the law "does not apply to the daughter and wife of a king."

trate and recite the *Shema* might be seen as arrogant, as well as a person who refrains from work on the ninth of *Av*. A person who prays with the *tefillin* of Rabbenu Tam or who continues to wear mourner's clothes out of sadness for Jerusalem would be considered arrogant. However, a person who insists on eating in the *sukka* those things that can be eaten outside the *sukka* and a person who takes on the extra fast days of a *talmid chakham* do not demonstrate *yohara*. There are talmudic rabbis who feel that only those acts done publicly constitute arrogance, while actions done in private do not display "extreme pride." The social environment, common practice, and tone of the times all factor into the rabbinic determination of arrogant religious behavior.<sup>46</sup>

R. Yosef Caro codifies the exemption of women (and slaves) in the *Shulchan Arukh*<sup>47</sup> by explaining tersely "that it [*tzitzit*] is a positive commandment limited by time." R. Isserles<sup>48</sup> comments on the female prerogative, picking up on the exhibitionist nature of their observance:

In any case, if they want to wear [*tzitzit*] and recite the blessing, the option is theirs, like with other positive commandments that are limited by time. Yet, it appears arrogant and therefore women should not wear *tzitzit*, since it is not an obligation of the person, meaning a man is not obligated to buy a cloak for himself in order to observe the law of fringes.<sup>49</sup>

The *Taz*<sup>50</sup> comments that the concept of "obligation of the person" in the law of fringes differs from the "obligation of the object" in the law of *lulav*, where

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<sup>46</sup> There may also be a halakhic distinction between arrogance (*yohara*) and appearing arrogant (*michzei keyohara*). For an analysis of the parameters of excessive stringency in religious behavior, see Sara Weinstein *Piety and Fanaticism* (Aronson, 1997), especially ch. 7 on *yohara*. She quotes the *Sdei Chemed* who cites R. Israel Bruna's responsum on wearing *tzitzit* on top of one's clothing. R. Bruna considers it arrogant for students (in contrast to the rabbis) of that time to dress in such a manner. *Ibid.*, 201 n13. See also *Otzar haGaonim* 1:35–36 (ed. B. Levin, Haifa, 1928) where Rav Natrunai (some say Rav Hai) felt that holding one's *tzitzit* during the recitation of the *Shema* was "*derekh yehirot*." Yet, it is a common practice observed today.

<sup>47</sup> OC 17:2.

<sup>48</sup> Moshe Isserles (*Rama*), OC 17.

<sup>49</sup> See *Shulchan Arukh*, OC 19 where *tzitzit* are codified as "*chovat gavra*," the obligation of the person.

<sup>50</sup> David haLevi (*Turei Zahav, Taz*), OC 17.

women do recite the blessing even though *lulav* is also a positive law which is time-limited. Here, even a man has no biblical requirement to go out and purchase a garment with four corners, but rather if he wears such clothing, then he must attach *tzitzit*. On the other hand, a man *is* required to go out and buy a *lulav* to fulfill the commandment.

The *Magen Avraham*<sup>51</sup> agrees that people who voluntarily wear fringes can recite the blessing even though they are exempt because a person who optionally fulfills a commandment still receives a reward. "And they are able to recite [the blessing] 'who has commanded us' because since males are obligated, others also get a reward." This view of female observance as a subset of male obligation is also addressed by the *Pri Megadim*,<sup>52</sup> who hints at the deeper issue of gender relationships. Beyond the issue of a woman's ability to recite the blessing, she is not violating the prohibition of "adding to the law,"<sup>53</sup> since when the men are obligated, so are the women, since a "woman from a man was taken."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, as a result of their connection through the original act of Creation, they share in the larger framework of Divine service. The *Machatzit haShekel*<sup>55</sup> expands the spiritual dimension:

...if women would not be rewarded, they certainly would not be able to say a blessing and give praise for this law... Even though we do not serve God in order to get the reward, nonetheless, a precept that is rewarded helps us to acknowledge the great value of the act and to praise the Almighty who brought us toward this observance, allowing us to be sanctified through His commandments.

The *Arukh haShulchan*<sup>56</sup> summarizes the earlier sources and presents halakhic proof that women may indeed wear *tzitzit* and recite the blessing. However, he challenges that conclusion based largely on the *Rama* and actual practice.

<sup>51</sup> Avraham Gumbiner, OC 17.

<sup>52</sup> *Eshel Avraham, Yosef Te'omim*, OC 17.

<sup>53</sup> Deut. 13:1. This prohibition forbids someone from adding to the laws of the Torah.

<sup>54</sup> Based on Genesis 2:23.

<sup>55</sup> Shmuel haLevi Kallin, OC 17.

<sup>56</sup> Yechiel Epstein, OC 17:2-3.

Yet, in reality, we have not heard of this and we do not permit her to wear a *tallit*, even more so to say the blessing. This is not like *sukka* and *lulav* which happen once a year and is a precept for that moment. But the law of *tzitzit* lasts all year and it is not nice for women. Furthermore, all the [other] commandments are obligations for men too, therefore women may also observe them. But *tzitzit* is not an [actual] obligation as it says in [*Orach Chaim*] section 19, and we do not let women observe it. That is the meaning of what our teacher the *Rama* wrote that “in any case, if women want... it appears arrogant and therefore women should not wear *tzitzit*, since it is not an obligation of the person”; as if to say that it appears arrogant because it is done with regularity, and since it is not obligatory upon men unless they have a four-cornered garment, we do not allow this practice [for women]; this is the custom and it should not be changed.

R. Epstein’s conclusion raises the whole question of custom, *minhag*, and what constitutes those practices which have changed over time and place. As we saw earlier, the *Maharil* witnessed several women who did wear *tzitzit*, yet the *Arukh haShulchan* wrote that he had not heard of this practice. The notion of precedent as a factor in establishing acceptable practice, is an issue which is debated in all areas of halakhic literature. Synagogue protocol, communal structure, holiday customs, even marriage laws<sup>57</sup> have evolved from a delicate balance between law and custom. Custom often has the power of law<sup>58</sup> and the fact that in various communities women related to the commandments so differently, is also a reflection of the cultural fluctuations which have existed in the status of women.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See *Rambam, Hilkhoh Ishut*, 13–15 where the standards used to determine a husband’s exact obligation of providing for his wife were dependent on “local custom.”

<sup>58</sup> See Aryeh Kaplan’s detailed chapter on custom, where he cites hundreds of sources on this topic in his book *The Handbook of Jewish Thought* (Maznaim, 1979) 1:13.

<sup>59</sup> In addition to custom, the laws of women have their own gauge of acceptable religious behavior known generally as *dat yehudit*. This amorphous concept regulates traditional practices by setting a standard of commonly recognized activity which is in keeping with the subtleties of an observant lifestyle. Maimonides defines *dat yehudit* to mean “the customs of modesty practiced by the daughters of Israel.” See *Mishne Torah, Hilkhoh Ishut* 24:12. See the discussion in the previous article.

The *Chaye Adam*<sup>60</sup> draws a distinction between *tzitzit* and *tefillin*, acknowledging that women are exempt from the law of fringes because it is a positive law limited by time.

In any case, if they want to wear *tzitzit* and bless [on them], they may recite the blessing. That is the law with regard to all time-limited positive commandments, like *lulav* and *sukka* and others, except for *tefillin*, where if they want to be strict with themselves [to wear *tefillin*] we prevent them.

The *Mishna Berura*<sup>61</sup> explains that *Shulchan Arukh*'s exemption for women and slaves is based on the principle that all positive laws limited by time are learned from *tefillin*, which in turn is derived from the female exemption from the commandment to study Torah.<sup>62</sup> He concurs with the earlier reasoning that *lulav* differs from *tzitzit* because of the nature of the obligation placed on the person, not the object, although *Mishna Berura* points out that in practice, "we consider the law of fringes to be both an obligation of the person and an obligation not required of the person, and they are both considered a leniency."<sup>63</sup> Commenting on the *Rama*'s assertion that women who are not obligated may recite the blessing, *Mishna Berura* states that "even one who is not commanded and performs the law receives a reward. And they are able to say 'who has commanded us' [in the blessing] because since the men are commanded, they [those exempted] also receive a reward."

The *Kaf haChaim*<sup>64</sup> surveys the halakhic opinions which permit and forbid the recitation of blessings for the optional law of *tzitzit* and extends the ruling to blessings for other commandments done voluntarily. He concludes with an

<sup>60</sup> Avraham Danzig, *Hilkhot Tzitzit* 11:43.

<sup>61</sup> Yisrael Meir Hachohen (*Chafetz Chaim*), *Hilkhot Tzitzit* 17.

<sup>62</sup> See *Pesikta deRav Kehana* 22:5.

<sup>63</sup> A ruling that it is an obligation of the person enables someone to leave his four-cornered garment in the drawer without requiring it to have *tzitzit*, until he actually wears the clothing. A ruling that it is an obligation of the garment frees the person from being required to go out and purchase four-cornered clothing, rather he must attach *tzitzit* only if he already owns such clothing.

<sup>64</sup> *Yaakov Chaim Sofer*, OC 17:4.

intriguing source, a quote from the *Chida*<sup>65</sup> who wrote how originally he [the *Chida*] had been upset when he came to Israel and saw the women there reciting the blessing on the *lulav*, so he asked many learned rabbis of his time and they agreed that the women were wrong to do so.

After a while, I came across a collection of writings by our teacher, Yaakov of Marvege who asked directly of Heaven and was answered.<sup>66</sup> He asked this question and was told that if they [women] come to bless the *lulav* and shofar, they are permitted to do so... and since that time, I have been accustomed to tell the women to bless the *lulav* like their ancient custom. And if our master [R. Yosef Caro] who decreed that women should not bless, would see the responsum mentioned above, he certainly would have decided yes.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein<sup>67</sup> issued a responsum on the subject of religious women who have incorporated some of the struggles of the feminist movement into aspects of Jewish life, such as “women who observe the Torah and pray with a *tallit*.”<sup>68</sup> He reviews the role of women and the reasons why females are exempt from some laws, as well as the belief that Torah, both the written and the oral, were given by God at Sinai and cannot be changed, not toward greater leniency or strictness. Even if the rabbis have the power to issue a ruling (*takana*), its use is only short term and for a particular case. Furthermore, the fact that God exempted women from positive commandments which are time-limited must stem from a rationale unrevealed to us and not even known by great Torah scholars. Of course, for some aspects of God’s ways, the reasoning is known.

Ordinary women in the world are not wealthy and it is placed on them [the job of] raising boys and girls which is the more important work for God and the Torah. Therefore, God created nature such that for all living things, the female

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<sup>65</sup> Found in two places in the responsa of Chaim Yosef David Azulai (*Chida*): See the *Birchei Yosef* 654:2 and *Yosef Ometz* 92.

<sup>66</sup> Yaakov of Marvege was a *Tosafist* who authored *She'alot u'Teshuvot Min ha-Shamayim*, a collection of responsa that were conveyed to him in dreams.

<sup>67</sup> IM, OC 4:49.

<sup>68</sup> The wording of the question addressed to Feinstein implies a bias on the part of the questioner. Most “women who observe the Torah” might take on practices like *tallit* specifically because they are precepts in the Torah and not out of a feminist agenda.

raises the offspring. Human beings are no exception to the rule that the nature of the woman is more capable of raising children, so in this their lot is lightened by not obligating them in the study of Torah and in the positive time-limited laws. Even if the natural order of things are changed in the world, for all females and for all wealthy women for all time, and even when the child-care can be left to other people, like in our country, the law of Torah and even the law of the rabbis will not change. No battles will help because there is no power which can change anything even with the approval of the whole world, and the women who are stubborn and want to fight and change things, they are essentially denying the Torah...

R. Feinstein continues:

it is clear that every woman has the right to perform even those commandments that the Torah did not require of her and they are fulfilling a precept and receive a reward for doing it. Even according to the opinion of *Tosafot*, they are permitted to recite the blessing, and it is our custom that women observe the law of shofar and *lulav* and also say the blessing. Therefore, even *tzitzit* are allowed for a woman who wants to wear a garment which is distinguishable from men's clothing, yet has four corners on which she is able to attach fringes and fulfill the commandment<sup>69</sup>... However, clearly this only applies when the woman desires in her soul to observe the law although she was not commanded; yet, when it is not due to this intention, but rather stems from her resentment toward God and His Torah, then it is not a precept. On the contrary, it is a forbidden act of denial when she thinks that there will be any change in the laws of Torah which she took on.

R. Feinstein explains that women's exemption from those laws is no indication of the female's diminished sanctity.

In the area of sanctity, women are equal to men... for whenever we find [in the Torah] mention of the sanctity of Israel, it is also speaking of women; which is why women can recite the blessings with the formula 'who has sanctified us with his commandments' just like men even though the Torah does not obligate them. It is just a leniency due to whatever reasoning of God's, to make it easier for women as mentioned above, and not due to her inferiority, heaven forbid.

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<sup>69</sup> However, R. Feinstein says that a woman wearing *tefillin* should be prevented.

Yet, R. Feinstein advises the rabbi who posed the question to firmly protest against "those women who persist in their foolish and stubborn belief, since none of Israel's holy customs can be changed."

Over the past two decades several books have been written which address the topic of women and commandments, including the wearing of *tzitzit*. R. Moshe Meiselman<sup>70</sup> was one of the first to deal with the whole range of women's issues in light of the Halakha and after citing the classic sources, he acknowledges that while women may perform most optional laws from which they are exempt, Judaism assigns men a public role and women a private one. Regarding *tzitzit*, Meiselman relies on the *Rama's* concept of *yohara* to discourage women from voluntarily taking on "a doubly optional activity" and warns that "the *mitzvot* are not meant to be tools for ego trips." Menachem Brayer<sup>71</sup> authored a two-volume work on "the psycho-social and psycho-historical perspectives" of the role of women in Rabbinic literature. Commenting on *tzitzit* and *tefillin* and other commandments based on time from which women are exempt, Brayer formulates that the halakhic exemption was meant to encourage "women to assume the role of devoted wife and mother" which may be "the true way to find fulfillment and happiness."

In 1990, several books were published which broadened the discourse over women's halakhic participation, both works quoting extensively from sources which are inclusive of women's religious roles. R. Eliezer Berkovits<sup>72</sup> focuses on *tefillin* as the paradigm of optional observance for women and reviews the laws regarding specific rituals, blessings and prayer groups, concluding that "the status of women has fundamentally changed in comparison to previous generations." Therefore, contemporary women need to embrace spiritual outlets which increase their connection to Judaism, especially when the Halakha affords them that opportunity. R. Avi Weiss<sup>73</sup> analyzes the whole topic of women and prayer and by extension, clarifies the halakhic positions on women's roles. Particularly responding to the growth of Orthodox women's

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<sup>70</sup> *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (Ktav and Yeshiva University, 1978). See ch. 22 on *tallit*.

<sup>71</sup> *The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature* (Ktav, 1986). See vol. 2, ch. 11.

<sup>72</sup> *Jewish Women in Time and Torah* (Ktav, 1990). See ch. 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Women at Prayer* (Ktav, 1990). See chs. 1 and 8.

prayer groups, he touches on many of the options available, including the question of *tzitzit*. R. Weiss discusses the permissibility of making changes in custom and law for women when done “not to diminish the Torah, but to enhance their Jewish commitment and halakhic observance.” Two years later, an anthology on women and the synagogue entitled *Daughters of the King*<sup>74</sup> (with articles written primarily by women) included a personal vignette on wearing *tallit* and *tefillin*, as well as perspectives on observance from both the Orthodox and Conservative communities.

Michael Kaufman<sup>75</sup> in his book, briefly cites the halakhic sources on *tzitzit* and acknowledges *Rambam*’s permissive view, yet concludes with several restrictive opinions based on the *Rama*. Joel Wolowelsky<sup>76</sup> in his recent publication, calls for greater understanding and acceptance of women’s strivings for “broader participation in religious life.” Despite the reality that “the image of a woman in *shul* wearing a *tallit* probably evokes little sympathy even in the Modern Orthodox community,” Wolowelsky builds on Feinstein’s responsum and challenges the halakhic world to refrain from seeing every woman wearing a *tallit* in synagogue as “making some sort of demonstration in the women’s section.” He concedes that most observant Jews “have little association with specially designed women’s *tallitot*” and perhaps,

...these creative tallitot enable a woman to perform an optional *mitzva*, encourage *tzeni'ut* in dress, and work against the style-consciousness prevalent in many synagogues... When we hear a new proposal, we must make sure of what we are hearing... We also need not shy away from admitting that our discussions assume a changed perspective on the position of women within our religious community.

Aside from the halakhic responsa and rabbinic articles which address male and female roles and women’s relationship to optional commandments, the

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<sup>74</sup> Edited by Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut (JPS, 1992). See “On Wearing *Tallit* and *Tefillin*” by Dvora Weisberg. See also Judith Hauptman’s discussion of *tzitzit* in “Women and the Conservative Synagogue.”

<sup>75</sup> *The Woman in Jewish Law and Tradition* (Aronson, 1993). See ch. 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Women, Jewish Law and Modernity* (Ktav, 1997). See Introduction.

Hebrew literature has few references to women and *tzitzit*. R. Getsel Ellinson<sup>77</sup> compiled a three volume series of annotated textual sources relating to women, including the topic of *tzitzit*, which he places in the chapter entitled "commandments which women are not permitted to observe." The series *Techumin*<sup>78</sup> carried an article by R. Eliav Shochatman<sup>79</sup> analyzing the legal position expressed by the Rabbinat in response to women's prayer groups requesting to pray at the Wall. He addresses several aspects of the question, including women wearing *tallitot* and he includes a few of the classic sources, ranging from the *Rambam* to the *Arukh haShulchan*. He quotes from Meiselman's restrictive view and then refers to Feinstein's responsum on women, calling Feinstein's granting of permission "a single opinion among the scholars of our generation." Shochatman includes the opinions of the former Chief Rabbis who both express the view that women should not wear *tzitzit*, despite their apparent halakhic ability to do so. That position is challenged in separate articles by Shmuel Shilo and Rivkah Luvitz,<sup>80</sup> who both cite numerous rabbinic sources which allow women to wear *tzitzit*, and offer dissenting opinions on other aspects of women's prayer, as well.

It is clear from the halakhic texts that women are legally exempt from the commandment to wear *tzitzit*, but it is equally obvious that the majority of *poskim* enable women to observe this law by choice. This is part of the larger question of the voluntary performance by females of those laws from which they have traditionally been exempt. The sources cited in this article focus on a woman wearing *tzitzit*, while a derivative of the law is the actual making of the fringes and attaching them to one's clothing. The majority of codifiers (including some who feel women should not voluntarily take on this commandment), with a few notable exceptions, permit women to *make* or *tie* the *tzitzit*, in contrast to Gentiles who are prohibited.<sup>81</sup> The *Menorat haMa'or*<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Ha'Isha vahaMitzvot* (WZO, 1974). See vol. 1, ch. 5. Two of the three volumes have been translated into English.

<sup>78</sup> Published by Zomet (Alon Shevut, Israel).

<sup>79</sup> *Techumin*, vol. 15 (1995).

<sup>80</sup> *Techumin*, vol. 17 (1997).

<sup>81</sup> Some authorities make a distinction between the various processes of spinning the threads, twisting them and tying them onto the garment. See *Shulchan Arukh*, OC 14:1

promises reward for those women who do make *tzitzit*, expressing what seems to be the normative view in this area:

And even the women, who are exempt from the law of fringes, receive merit when they are occupied with them; as we have learned in *Bava Batra* [74a] that in the sea there is a hidden chest [covered with precious stones] reserved for the wife of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, where the *tekhelet* is kept for the righteous in the world-to-come.

The *Menorat haMa'or* and others<sup>83</sup> write of the sanctity and power contained within the *tzitzit*, and the special aura surrounding those who wear them. The Talmud<sup>84</sup> equates the wearing of fringes to keeping all the laws of the Torah and the person who wears *tzitzit* is worthy to receive the face of the Divine Presence (*Shekhina*). The Talmud describes how the Jewish people are constantly surrounded by God's laws: *tefillin* on their head and arms, *tzitzit* on their clothing and *mezuzot* on their doorposts. The Midrash<sup>85</sup> elaborates: "There is nothing for which God did not give Israel a commandment," explaining that the acts of plowing, planting and harvesting the field all have specific laws. There are rules for kneading bread and preparing food, for taking a baby bird from its nest, and covering the blood of slaughtered animals. Regulations exist for shaving one's head, building a house and burying the dead. So too, "when we cover ourselves with clothing, we were told to attach fringes." The functional rationale for the fringes is to deter us from yielding to the pervasive temptations we encounter, creating a physical barrier to sin. *Tzitzit* are a constant reminder of our relationship with God, visibly hanging from our garments to serve as testimony and protection.<sup>86</sup> The

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which states that women are fit to make *tzitzit*, although the *Rama* thinks it is not preferable. See *Tosafot* to *Gittin* 45b (s.v. "all") and *Mishna Berura* (and the *Be'ur Halakha*) 14:3-4.

<sup>82</sup> *Yitzchak Abohav*, light 3, sec. 3, part 4, 1:3.

<sup>83</sup> See *Sifre*, Numbers 15; *Zohar*, *Shelach* 174; Maharal of Prague (*Chidushei Agadot*), *Sota* 17a; Nachman of Bratslav (*Likutei Moharan*) 7:4.

<sup>84</sup> *Menachot* 43b.

<sup>85</sup> *Tanchuma*, *Shelach*.

<sup>86</sup> See *Sefer haChinukh* 386; Eliyahu Vidash, *Reisheet Chokhma*, section on Holiness, ch. 6; *Chofetz Chaim on the Torah*, *Shelach*.

spiritual significance is alluded to (in the use of the blue thread) by symbolizing heaven itself,<sup>87</sup> bringing us closer to the love and fear of our Creator. *Bachye*<sup>88</sup> says that one who wears fringes should be especially cautious not to sin, because the word *tzitzit* is derived from the Hebrew word *metzitz*, which means "looking," implying that God is watching us, as well.

Halakha both reflects history and creates history. Although the study of Torah texts is timeless, the halakhic codes that emerge from those texts are rooted in specific places and times. That is the paradox of rabbinic interpretation: it concretizes the massive body of oral law that has been transmitted since Sinai by actualizing traditional solutions to contemporary situations. Synthesizing all prior Jewish wisdom into its current application, the ancient and the modern merge to form halakhic practice. Historically, women have often observed precepts from which they were officially exempt, with little record of their "unofficial" practices.<sup>89</sup>

The fact that Torah study for women is burgeoning today, whereas relatively few observant women have opted to wear *tzitzit*, may have more to do with the centuries-old image that *tzitzit* are masculine than a literal reflection of the written word. Like hearing the shofar, blessing the *lulav* and counting the *omer*, which were not biblically mandated for females but are now routinely done, perhaps the wearing of fringes is yet to be claimed by women "who desire in their souls to observe the law although they were not commanded."<sup>90</sup> If passion for the commandments is not motivation enough, we are told<sup>91</sup> that "anyone who is careful in the observance of *tzitzit* will merit being served by 2800 servants, as it says in Zecharia (8:23): 'So says God, the Lord of hosts, in the end of days ten people from each of the world's nations will grab onto the corner [of clothing] of every Jew, saying, we will follow you

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<sup>87</sup> *Menachot* 43b.

<sup>88</sup> *Bachye ben Asher, Kad haKemach, Tzitzit.*

<sup>89</sup> See Shlomo Ashkenazi, *Ha'Isha be'Aspaklarit haYahadut*, vol. 1 (1979) where he lists Jewish women throughout the ages who practiced various laws.

<sup>90</sup> R. Feinstein cited earlier.

<sup>91</sup> *Shabbat* 32b.

because we have heard that God is with you.”<sup>92</sup> If the Gentiles of the world will cling to *tzitzit* in order to embrace the Creator, who knows what *tzitzit* might do for Jewish women today?

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<sup>92</sup> Rav Nissim Gaon explains that since there are 70 nations of the world and ten people will hang onto each of the four corners of a Jew's *tallit*, that is 700 multiplied by four which equals 2800.