

Introduction

This is surely one of the most well known healings that Jesus performs in the Gospels. A very sick woman, who has suffered at the hands of many doctors and is desperate to be healed of her chronic ailment, encounters Jesus. Though this story is well known, there is so much that is hidden between the lines or taken for granted by the author, that a little research yields great rewards.

In Matthew 9:20-22, we find this sick woman receiving healing simply by touching Jesus' clothes:

"Just then a woman, who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the hem of His garment; for she said to herself, 'If I only touch His cloak, I will be healed.' Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' He said, 'your faith has healed you.' And the woman was healed from that moment."

In the Mark account of the same story, it continues:

"At once Yeshua realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched My clothes?' 'You see the people crowding against You,' His disciples answered, 'and yet You can ask, Who touched Me?'" (Mk. 5:30-31).

What is so significant about the hem of Jesus' garment?

At first reading, it seems an odd practice. However, once we understand the significance of the hem of one's garment, these passages will have much more meaning.

The Prayer Shawl

The Prayer Shawl, (aka. tallis, tallit,) is a religious symbol, a garment, shroud, canopy, cloak which envelops the Jewish man both physically and spiritually, in prayer and celebration, in joy and sorrow.

Anyone attending an orthodox synagogue today will see that the men are all wearing prayer shawls. It is a very important part of Jewish life. Learning about this sacred garment will teach many exciting lessons from Bible stories. It is used at all major Jewish occasions: circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, weddings and burials. It protects the scrolls of the Torah when they are moved. It inspired the Jewish flag of Israel which is an unfurled the prayer shawl with the Star of David added.

Before wrapping themselves in the Tallit, Jews recite the age-old blessing, *Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and who has commanded us to wrap ourselves in a Tallit.*

The Tallit has been the companion of the Jewish people throughout their history. Jews have wrapped themselves in their Tallitot, where they have sought refuge within its fringe, and have shed tears under its canopy. The dead are covered by it when they are buried.

The wearing of the "Tallit" or "prayer shawl," was commanded by God in Deuteronomy 22 :12 and;

¹²*"You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself.*

Num.15:37-40

³⁸*"Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. ³⁹"It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, ⁴⁰so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God. ⁴¹"I am the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the LORD your God."*

In biblical times the Jewish men wore the prayer shawl all the time -- not just at prayer. If it should be thought that this practice was obscure and short-lived, it will be enlightening to look at other Scriptures that clearly have a bearing on this subject.

A Prayer Room

TALLIT contains two Hebrew words; TAL meaning tent and IT meaning little. Thus, you have *LITTLE TENT*. Each man had his own little tent. Six million Jews could not fit into the tent of meeting that was set up in the Old Testament. Therefore, what was given to them was their own private sanctuary where they could meet with God. Each man had one! His Prayer Shawl or Tallit. They would pull it up over their head, forming a tent, where they would begin to chant and sing Hebrew psalms, and call upon God. It was intimate, private, and set apart from anyone else -- enabling them to totally focus upon God. This was their prayer room!

Ruth And Boaz

Jewish weddings are sometimes performed under a prayer shawl held up during the ceremony by four poles called a chupa. In Mid East culture they draw a garment over a person being claimed for marriage. In Numbers 15:38 the word translated border or corner is a Hebrew word (קַנָּפִי kanaph) ► 11 which can also be translated wings as it is some seventy-six times in the biblical text. For this reason, the corners of the prayer shawl are often called wings.

In Ezekiel 16:8, the Lord speaks to Jerusalem and likewise says, *"and I spread my wing (קַנָּפִי kanaph) over you, and covered your nakedness,"* and in Psalm 91 we are able to *"abide under the shadow of the Almighty "* and *"under His wings."* (קַנָּפִי kanaph)

In Ruth 3:9, She went to Boaz and lay at his feet, and as he awakened, he was moved by her vulnerability.

"I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering (קַנָּפִי kanaph) over your maid, for you are a close relative."

Ruth was saying, Take me under your WINGS. Cover me, is a term of intimacy. Boaz was an honorable man and did the honorable thing. They were married, and she became his bride. Here she was, a Moabite woman from a foreign country, grafted into the nation of Israel. She had the right to be covered by her Jewish husband's Tallit. This is a symbolic expression of marriage.

It is interesting to note that a similar custom still prevails at an orthodox Jewish wedding, when the bridegroom covers his bride with his tallit, his prayer shawl, with its tassels at each corner, signifying that he is taking her into his care.

A Status Symbol

The hem of a Jewish man's garment was not, as in modern clothes, a simple fold of the cloth, sewn down to prevent the edge from fraying. It was a decorative feature that made a statement about the status and importance of the wearer. To cut off the hem of a wife's garment was regarded as divorcing her.

In New Testament times, most ordinary people only wore a tallit on special occasions. It was *the Pharisees* who seem to have worn it regularly and, apparently in some cases, often for show. Jesus expresses no disapproval of the custom itself but he does condemn the extra long

fringes that they affected to display their piety [Matthew 23:5]. Thus the hem or fringe of a garment indicated the rank or personality of the wearer.

When David spared Saul's life, he took away evidence that he had him in his power: *Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly.* 1 Samuel 24:4.

Why did David do this, and why did his conscience trouble him for having done it? Was there some special significance in what he had done? In fact the act of cutting off the skirt (fringe) of Saul's robe was of very great significance, which Saul was not slow to recognize. When the shouting began next day Saul said: *"Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand."* (1 Sam. 24:20).

David had robbed Saul of his status symbol, the fringe of his robe that identified him as king. The authority had been taken from him.

The Prophet Elijah passed his mantle on to Elisha in II Kings 2.

Many believe that this mantle was actually his Tallit and was symbolic of the power of prayer that Elijah had saturated that mantle with. This mantle that Elijah left behind as he was taken up by a whirlwind into heaven, was what Elisha struck and parted the waters with. Elijah's mantle was a spiritual status symbol not by the artificial lengthening of the tassels but by saturation by prayer.

It will be remembered that Jesus castigated the Pharisees for enlarging their fringes (Matt. 23:5), the inference being that they were thereby trying to magnify their importance. Despite this, he must have worn one himself as the story of the woman who touched the hem of his garment suggests [Luke 8:43, 44 Mark 6:56; Matt 14:36.]. What was the significance of the hem of His garment and how did she know touching it would heal her? Other people, too, were healed by touching the borders or tassels of his clothes.

Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured. Mark 6:56.

The Hem of His Garment

"But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings;"

Malachi 4:2

The Woman who found healing in the Messiah's Wings

This woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the hem of his garment, Matthew 9:20 The woman was, in fact, reaching for the tassels on Jesus' prayer shawl. In Hebrew, these tassels, which are attached to the corners of the prayer shawl, are called tzitzit. Why should she stoop to touch the fringe? Why not his arm, or his feet?

As the tallit was drawn over the head, it formed his own tent. WINGS of the garment were formed when the arms were held out. For this reason, the corners of the prayer shawl are often called "wings." During the first century there were several traditions associated with the tzitzit concerning Messiah. One was that these knotted fringes possessed healing powers. Certainly the woman with the hemorrhage knew of these traditions, which would explain why she sought to touch the hem (the wings) of Jesus' prayer garment. The same word used in Numbers 15:38 for corner is used in Malachi 4:2 for wings. The woman knew that if Jesus were the promised Messiah, there would be healing in His wings (fringes). That this was the opinion of many other people is revealed by the crowd who sought his healing powers, "that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole," Matthew 14:36.

When Jesus stopped and asked who had touched Him she would have been afraid because she had made Him ritually unclean by touching him. Jesus would have to go through the mikvah before He was able to visit the Temple again.

Yet notice Jesus' response to her act of faith.

Your faith (in the Messiah's wings) has saved you. (Luke 8:48)