

SEASONS OF THE MOON

THE MONTHS OF ELUL 5760 / TISHREI 5761

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SEEING BLUE

Lift up your eyes and look into the distance. What do you see? What do you see when you gaze at the furthest point that the eye can see — when you look at distance itself?

The color blue.

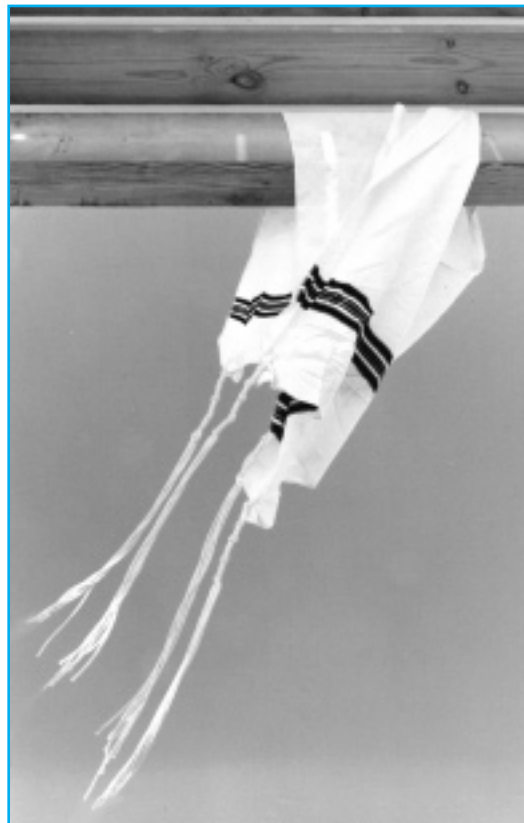
Miles and miles of endless blue.

In Hebrew, there is a specific name for that color. It is called *techelet*. *Techelet* is the color that we see when we look at the world without any outside interruption, without any object interposed between our eyes and infinite distance. *Techelet* is the color of the end of sight itself.

There's a very revealing connection between the word *techelet* and another word in Hebrew which is spelled almost identically. That word is *tachlit* which means "end" or "purpose." *Techelet* is the end of sight, of all perception. *Techelet* is seeing all. And it is also its purpose — its *tachlit*.

A Thread Of Blue

One of the more unusual sartorial aspects of being Jewish is wearing a four-cornered garment with four threads attached to its extremities. These threads are called *tzitzit*. The word *tzitzit* is connected to the word in Hebrew meaning "to peek" (*lehatzitz*). *Tzitzit* allow us a peek at the world's end and its purpose.



Three of the threads of the *tzitzit* are white, the fourth is supposed to be the

color of *techelet*.¹ The *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* is a *mitzvah* of sight. The Torah tells us that we should see the *tzitzit*. What are we supposed to see when we look at these threads of wool? When we look at the blue of the *tzitzit*, we see a reflection of the blue of the sea, and the blue of the sea is a reflection of the blue of the sky, and

the blue of the sky is a reflection of the blue of the heavens. *Tzitzit* allow us a peek at the blue heavens.

In Hebrew, the word for "heavens" is *shamayim*. *Shamayim* comes from the root meaning "there" — *sham*. The heavens represent all the "theres" that are possible. All the *sham-im* that can be. When we look to "there," into the endless distance, we see *techelet* — the end and target of all — *Shamayim*, *Sham-im*, the blue heavens.

The Blue and the White

Only one of the strands of the *tzitzit*, however, is blue, the other three are white. What is the significance of the color white, and what is

the significance of the blue and the white together?

If the end of all sight is the color blue, the beginning of all sight is white. Take the three primary colors, red green and blue, and paint them on a wheel. Spin the wheel and what will you see? White.

Continued over

SEEING BLUE *continued*

White is the root of all color, the background to all color, the color from which all color emerges. White is the place where color begins — where seeing begins. When we write something, we write “black on white.” White is the simplest of all colors.

Days Where You Can See For Miles

On the holy days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, there is a widespread custom to dress in white. Among other reasons, this is a remembrance of the garments of the *kohen gadol* who ministered in white on Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the day when all the “contracts” of our liabilities are erased. It is the day when we are given a clean sheet — a pure white page on which to write in the coming year all our thoughts and actions. Everything goes back to white. The Creator tells us that when we return to Him: “If your sins will be as scarlet, as snow I will whiten them.”

White is the beginning of sight. *Techelet* is the end, the purpose of sight. When we have an unobstructed view of the world, when we see from white to *techelet*, we see the world and its purpose from beginning to end.

THE BLUE BEYOND

Somewhere

An endless summer afternoon

Wind caresses wheat.

Row upon row

Whisper to each other

The confiding hush of high summer

Sometimes

I can lift my eyes to pierce

An inscrutable sky

And see beyond the blue.

To the blue beyond

To See To The End

The Torah speaks of the commandment to wear *tzitzit* in the following manner: “And you will see them and you will remember all the *mitzvot* (commandments) of Hashem.” The *tzitzit* contain three white strands and a thread of blue. White represents where we are now. The beginning. The background of all our actions and our point of departure. On this white is written all our responsibilities and obligations. The blue, the *techelet*, represents our aim, the object and endpoint of our existence.

The *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* is to see them. To see from the very root to the very end — to see the entire scope of our lives and the extent of their potential.

In The Beginning

When we dress in white on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we are expressing our desire to go back to the beginning. To start over with a clean sheet. To take the dross of our lives and cast it aside. When we look at the *tzitzit*, we remind ourselves from where we came — the white background on which our lives are written — to where we are going — to the blue yonder of *Shamayim*, the place of all the “theres” — and in front of Whom we will ultimately have to account, to the Supreme King of Kings, blessed is His Name.

1. Today, we have lost the undisputed identity of the fish from which the *techelet* dye was made, and so most people only wear white. However, the original form of the commandment was that one of the four threads should be *techelet*.

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Sources:

Ramban - Bamidbar 15:38, Vilna Gaon and others

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