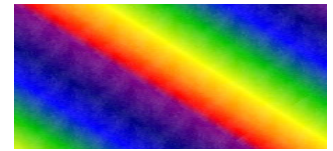


A Tallit of LIGHT!



By Rabbi Levi bar Ido-B'nai Avraham

"Bless Yahweh, O my being! O Yahweh my Elohim, You have been very great: You have put on excellency and splendor, Covering Yourself with LIGHT as with a garment." Tehillim 104:1-2

"And He who sat there was like jasper and a ruby stone in appearance. And there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance." Revelation 4:3

Rabbi Zalman Schachter designed the beautiful B'NAI OR TALLIT (Children of Light) back in the 1960's. He was known as the *B'nai Or* Rebbe. There is a Midrash that says, "How did Elohim create the world? He wrapped Himself in a robe of LIGHT and it began to shine." Rebbe Schachter obtained the design from the RAINBOW colors (the seven colors). The design also has black lines of various widths separating the different colors. It is based upon the Primal Light of Creation. If you look at white light through a spectrum there are rainbow (*keshet*) colors and black lines. The rabbi saw the black lines as *keli* or "a vessel of creation" to contain the colors.

As this *tallit* is placed over the head by the man *davening*, the *atarah* (the embroidered strip) on the *tallit* becomes a crown (*keter*) of white. This is symbolic of the pure white light of Wisdom (*Chokmah*) and Understanding (*Binah*) flowing into the Head from the heavens. This is the *ein sof* of YHWH.

The next color is the purple. This is symbolic of the ultra-violet light coming out of the darkness of *Bereshith*. The lavender represents the first light that becomes visible to the human eye. This is Day One of creation.

The *tekelet* blue is next color on the *tallit*. This is symbolic of the Second Day of creation when the waters above were separated from the waters below. This is also a symbol of the *halakah* of Torah as a container. It does not need black stripes to contain it as it is a vessel by itself.

Green is symbolic the vegetation created on the Third Day of creation. Elohim uttered the word *-TOV* (good) twice on that day so it has two stripes of green. It also has a white light of creation coming down the middle of it, separating the two stripes of green.

On the Fourth Day the sun, moon, and stars were created, so they are represented on the *tallit* by the yellow stripe. Likewise on the Fifth Day the egg laying fish, reptiles, birds, and insects were created so the rabbi designed an orange stripe for the yolk of an egg. The yellow and orange are placed close together with a white stripe separating them. These can also be symbols for Aharon and Moshe. Aharon does the form of the ritual and then channels the blessings to the people of Yisrael. Moshe gives the Torah, but received the revelation. This indicates an active and passive principle at work- a perfect balance.

The red strip follows and represents the EGO. This needs a strong thick black line to contain it and keep it in check. Mammals, or animals with placentas, were created on the Sixth Day of creation. The red can also represent the blood of life since the life is in the blood according to the Torah.

The last color is the brown. It represents the earth. All things must die and return to the dust of the earth. Adam was created from the earth and was the last of Elohim's creation. His name *-Adam*, comes from *Adamah*, or earth. Thus, Rabbi Zalman created the B'NAI OR TALLIT.

The *navi* (prophet) Yechezqel said:

- "As the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness around it. This is the appearance of the likeness of the esteem of YHWH." *Yechezqel 1:28*.

When we wear the *Bnai Or tallit*, we are clothing ourselves in the esteem of YHWH. We recite in the Torah service; "May Your priests (*cohenim*) be clothed in Your righteousness."

There is also a traditional esoteric teaching that the rainbow took off her garment and gave it to Moshe on Mt.Sinai. It is representative of the *Shoeshine*, or the feminine aspects of Elohim.

It is also called "Yosef's Coat of many colors". What I find interesting is that if white light is put through a prism it comes out TEN different colors. Is it possible that the "Coat" that Yosef was given had all ten colors on it? Could it have represented a prophetic message about the Two Houses? Since it was "Yosef's Coat" and the Stick of Yosef is in the hand of Ephraim, could it have represented the Ten Northern Tribes of which Yosef would later be a representative?

Another interesting study is the root of the name YOSEF is *TOSEF* or "will do again". This explains the TRUTH of the Two Houses that Yosef (Ephraim) will AGAIN RETURN TO YHWH AND HIS TORAH IN THE LAST DAYS AS SYMBOLIZED BY THE YOSEF'S COAT!

- *"And I saw another strong messenger coming down from the heaven, robed in a cloud, and a rainbow on his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet (legs) like columns of fire." Revelation 10:1*

Story of Reb Zalman's B'nai Or Tallit

Interview with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

by Rabbi Yonassan Gershom

Over the years, I have met many Jews who bought a B'nai Or tallis simply because it is beautiful, without realizing that there is a 'legend in the making' behind this robe of rainbow light. The story begins many years ago, when Reb Zalman was meditating on the Midrash: 'How did Elohim create the world? He wrapped Himself in a robe of light, and it began to shine.' Suddenly Reb Zalman had a beautiful inspiration, almost a vision, of a prayer shawl woven in vibrant rainbow colors. It was radical - and it was beautiful!

Reb Zalman's very first colored tallis was made in the 1950's from an Anderson clan tartan. It was very nice, but he still preferred stripes, not only because this is traditional, but also because he somehow sensed that it should have bands of color, like a spectrum. (Reb Zalman later presented this plaid tallis to a Scottish convert named Anderson.) Other experiments included embroidering colors on a regular tallis, or appliquéd stripes, and with each new design the rainbow vision became clearer.

Around 1961 or so, the present design was ready for the weavers. But in those days, tallis makers were all very orthodox people who were not about to participate in this "crazy idea." Reb Zalman trekked from one Brooklyn manufacturer to another, but was flatly refused. 'What is this you want? A Purim tallis?' one pious old Hasid asked at the Munkatcher tallis factory. 'Is this some kind of new sect or something?'

But design Reb Zalman envisioned was far from being a 'clown tallis.' Each of the colors, as well as the width and arrangement of the stripes themselves, was based on the seven lower sephirot of the kabbalistic Tree diagram. In 1983 Reb Zalman explained it to me this way:

Gershom: So, you had in mind that the 'robe of light' mentioned in the Midrash, that Elohim wraps Himself in to create the world, is the spectrum, that it is literally the Primal Light?

Zalman: Right. And the "spectrum itself has black lines, too, like you see on a spectroscope. Once I started to see it. I asked myself the question, which ones should have black lines? I saw the black lines as a keli, a 'vessel of creation.' So which of the sephirot need to be contained? Certainly not Gevurah and Malchut, because they themselves ARE vessels. On the other hand, Tiferet and Yesod need strong ego-boundaries. Then there was the question of which stripes should be wider, and how they should be spaced. So it comes out like this: The atarah (embroidered-strip) of the tallis is Keter, the Crown, the Source of the White Light, which is into Chochmah-Binah (still white), and then enters Chesed (Lovingkindness or Grace), which is the wide purple stripe.

Gershom: There are two shades of purple. Why is that?

Zalman: Because it represents Beresheet, 'in the Beginning,' the First Day of Creation. So the deep purple represents ultra-violet, just coming out of darkness. If you have seen 'black light lamps, they have that deep purple color. The lighter lavender [on either side of the deep purple] already has some light mixed in, the first light becoming visible to the human eye And the whole stripe is very wide, because the nature of Chesed is broad and sweeping. Which is also why it needs the black lines to contain it.

Now the next stripe is techelet-blue, representing Gevurah (strength or rigor.) This stripe represents the Second Day of Creation, when the 'water above' was separated from the 'water below' And since Gevurah is by nature a container [because it also represents halachah, or law], it doesn't need the black stripes bordering it.

Following the Creation story, the next stripe is the Third Day. Vegetation was created then, represented by green. Elohim also said 'It is good,' twice on that day, so there are two green stripes, with the white light of Keter coming through the middle. Tiferet (as the heart chakra) needs a vessel, so there are also the black lines.

Next comes Netzach, the Fourth Day, when the sun, moon, and stars were created, so they are represented by yellow. The Fifth Day was when egg-laying animals were made: all the fish, reptiles, birds, and insects. So I represented the sephirah of Hod with orange, like egg yolks. Notice also that Hod and Yesod are very close together, almost like one stripe, and that they are mirror images of each other. You can't really separate them. In fact, people confuse which is which, and there's a lot of disagreement, some systems interpreting them exactly opposite of other systems...

Gershon: I see you've designed them very close together, almost like one stripe, but there is still some white light coming through between them. Like Aaron and Moses. Aaron does the FORM of the ritual and also CHANNELS the blessings. Moses gives LAWS but also RECEIVES revelation. Each has both active and passive elements, like the left and right brain, but more balanced, more integrated. That's why you can't really separate them, right?

Zalman: Right. Now, the red stripe is Yesod (Foundation), which can also represent Ego, so naturally it needs a very strong vessel to contain it. And because the placental mammals were created on the Sixth Day, this one is red, for the blood of life. (Editor's note: Tiferet and Yesod also represent the Higher Self and the lower self, which is why the pattern of the red stripes exactly reflects the green stripes 'above,' only smaller.)

And last of all, we come to Malchut, the Kingdom, which is Earth, represented by brown, because all things turn brown and return to the earth when they die. King David is also associated with Malchut, not only because he was a king, but also because he receives everything and has nothing of his own - not even his life. There's the Midrash that the first Adam gave 70 years of his life to David, so that David's very life came from Adamah, the earth. Thus the brown color.

So, the pattern kept coming through clearer and clearer, and the quest for a weaver continued outside the Orthodox community. The very first tallis in the B'nai Or pattern was made from reindeer wool by a woman in New Haven, Connecticut. This was lovely, but Reb Zalman still was not completely satisfied, because the cloth came out more like a blanket than a prayer shawl, and it hung rather stiffly. The search went on...

Then while visiting Montreal, Reb Zalman looked in the phone book and found the listing of Karen Bulow, Vetements Religieux - a Christian vestment company? Would they be willing to do it? After a brief conversation over the phone, Reb Zalman ran ecstatically into the street and hailed the first taxicab! Yes, they could make it, but he would have to buy five of them, because it wasn't worth setting up the loom for only one. 'Of course, yes, I'll gladly take five!' he said with delight.

At last the original tallaysim were woven: Reb Zalman got one, Abraham Joshua Heschel got one, Everett Gendler got one, Arthur Green got one... And the fifth tallis? I don't know. Perhaps it belongs to all of us, because these five tallaysim opened the door for Jews everywhere to begin personalizing their prayer shawls and expressing their own visions of Jewish spiritual renewal.

A few months later, Reb Zalman was hired as 'religious environmentalist' at a Ramah summer camp. So here was this Lubovitcher Hasid, combing the Manhattan garment district for colorful remnants, especially scraps with stripes and bright colors, so that he could teach Jewish kids how to make their own tallaysim! With a rented sewing machine and a trunk full of cloth under his bunk, he set up his "tallisarium," the very first grassroots do-it-yourself prayer-shawkmaking venture.

Years passed, and those Jews taught other Jews, who taught still others. Reb Zalman never copyrighted his design, so that eventually it was picked up and produced by a tallis factory in Israel, marketed as the "Joseph's coat' tallis, although some manufacturers toned down the original psychedelic "neon' colors to more muted tones. Today, multi-colored tallaysim are commonplace -so much so, that a young man once walked up to the now gray-haired Reb Zalman and asked, 'Where did you get your rainbow tallis? I also have one. Yours is exactly like mine!'"

Reb Zalman smiled lovingly. 'Yes, baruch Hashem, I also have a rainbow tallis...' he paused, a faraway look in his eyes, '... we're both wrapped in the Creator's Robe of Light.'" The vision had come full circle.

