

The Color Blue

(Commemorating Israel's 38th Independence Day, May 14)

By Rabbi Bernard S. Raskas

When visiting an Arab village in Israel, one quickly notices that the doors are painted blue. Arab men saunter the streets fingering strings of blue beads (the so-called worry beads). The women decorate their faces with blue tattooed dots on their foreheads, around their lips and on their chins. The Bedouins, both men and women, paint a blue frame around their eyes with Khol (Eye shadow).

If one inquires from these people about the uses of the blue color, the answer invariably is that it is a protection against the evil eye. The evil eye is feared by people all over the world, but particularly in the Middle East.

By the same token, if one walks the streets of Jerusalem in the Jewish Quarter of the old city, or outside it in the other quarters inhabited by Jews who have lived in Arab lands, one notices that the doors and windows of many houses are surrounded by a light blue frame. One Yemenite rabbi in Jerusalem explained the practice this way. "We paint our houses blue against the evil eye because the Holy one, blessed be He, also painted his dwelling place, heaven, with the sky blue color. If we want to protect ourselves from the evil eye, we do as God did and paint our houses blue."

Blue color and blue dye played an important role in biblical and talmudic times. Two primary colors in decorating the first tabernacle are blue and white. The ark, which contained the Ten Commandments, was covered with "a cloth of blue." The garments of the priests were predominately blue.

One of the most important commandments, the wearing of the *Tzitzit* (fringes) required that a cord of blue be appended to the four corners of every garment worn by a man. The functions of these fringes was to remind their wearer of "all the commandments of the Lord (Number 15:39). According to Maimonides, "Our rabbis explained that the blue is like the sea, all the sea is like the heavens, and the heaven is like God's Throne of Glory."

Blue, in the early Jewish tradition, was known as *tehelet*. This color of blue used to dye the fringes was taken from a shellfish known as *chilazon*. Today it is clearly identified as a murex, a marine creature. Since the exact process for making the dye has been lost, the fringes are no longer dyed blue. However, Talmudic law still holds that one cannot recite the morning *shema* prayer until it is light enough to distinguish between *tehelet* and white. (Brachot 9b).

Blue has an important function in many

cultures. Blue was the symbol of serenity and the abode of the gods. Egyptian gods were painted blue and so were mummies. Zeus and Jupiter in Green and Roman Pantheons were represented by blue. The Assyrian mood god, Sin, was always portrayed with a blue beard. Today it is the Buddhist color of religious devotion sacred to the moon and the dispeller of evil thoughts.

Turquoise was the national color of Persia, and source of some of the oldest and first turquoise gemstones, which were called *perusah* meaning joy. Ancient Persians trusted this lively blue to ward off the evil eye, protecting their animals as well as themselves with turquoise charms. Perhaps, this is the reason that in so many Persian synagogues the ark covers and the Torah mantles were colored blue.

It is of interest to note that for 200 years Wedgewood blue was the best seller in china and decorative pieces in England. Josiah Wedgewood performed more than 16,000 recorded experiments to find the right mixture of blue and white to achieve this color combination. To commemorate the 200th anniversary of Josiah Wedgewood's success, the Jewish community produced a special Wedgewood Mezuzah made in white on pale blue jasper.

Coming to modern times beginning with the fifties, and escalating madly in the succeeding decades, the jeans revolution began. Jeans are made of cloth woven with a blue warp and a white weft. As it wears, the white shows through. The original name for jeans was Levis. This was invented by Levi Strauss who was Jewish. The family today is still extremely active in the United Jewish Appeal.

Of course one could go on and on about the color blue. The uniform for the Union Army in the Civil War, as well as the police today, is blue. There are Blue-chip stocks, the term for jazz is singing "the blues" and in surgery it is the blue beam that guides the healing ray of the laser. But there are two specific uses of blue that are most meaningful to contemporary Jews.

One is the flag of Israel. Blue and white is first mentioned as the colors of the Jewish flag in the latter third of the 19th century. In his poem *Zivul Eretz Yehudah* the poet Ludwig August Frankl writes:

"All that is sacred will appear in these colors:
White - as the radiance of great faith
Blue - like the appearance of the heavens."

The Zionist flag in its present form -- two blue stripes on white with a star of David (Magen David) in the center was, interestingly enough, displayed in Boston by the B'nai Zion Society in 1891. However, this was not known to the delegates of the First Zionist Congress, and it was David Wolfson who created the flag of Zion on the model of the *Tallit* (prayer shawl), which, as he pointed out, was the traditional flag of the Jewish people, adding the Star of David.

In 1933, the 18th Zionist Congress decided that "by long tradition, the blue and white flag is the flag of the Zionist Organization and the Jewish people." This was also the flag which by special order issued by Winston Churchill, became the official flag of the Jewish Brigade in World War II. In 1948 it formally became the flag of the State of Israel.

In the past decade a Hebrew song has arisen. It has become very popular in Israel and it is the theme song of the Jews in Russia, like Anatoly Shcharansky, who are determined to be Jewish and to be free. The refrain of the song is:

"*kachol velavan, kachol velavan*
Zeh tzeveh shell - Kol Yamai Polam"
Blue and white, these are my colors.
These shall be my colors all the days of my life -- forever.

Manned Space Flight Must Continue, Dr. Marvin Resnik Tells Bnai Zion Foundation Reception In New York

NEW YORK, N.Y. - Dr. Marvin Resnik, father of the late Challenger astronaut Dr. Judith Resnik, says that, "NASA took every precaution it could (in the latest Challenger flight) and that the manned space program should continue. If they stop it, the Challenger Crew will have given their lives in vain."

Dr. Resnik made these remarks during the reception in New York for the Judith Resnik Challenger Drew Memorial to be established at the Beit Halochem Rehabilitative Center for the disabled Israeli war veterans in Jerusalem.

Dr. Resnik described his daughter as "a private person who was proud of her Jewish heritage and wanted to be known as a professional engineer dedicated to her works in NASA," he said, Judith Resnik and her Challenger Crew colleagues, "were aware of their risk involved in the work but also prepared to take the necessary chances."

Ernest Zelig, President of Bnai Zion, which sponsors the Beit Halochem Center, reported that the memorial will consist of a rehabilitative gymnasium with physiotherapeutic facilities. He stated, "The memorial will be a constant and permanent source of inspiration for Israel's disabled veterans, who like the astronauts, possess indomitable spirit."

An Ad Hoc Committee chaired by Dr. Erika Freeman-Padan and Co-chaired by Marvin Hamlich and Theodore Bikel is working with the Bnai Zion Foundation to raise support for the memorial. The Committee members include Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio), Leonard Bernstein, Herman Badillo and Mrs. Irma Badillo, R. Peter Strauss, Bella Abzug, Hal Linden and Betty Freiden. One of the Ad Hoc Committee members, New York City Cultural Affairs Commissioner, Bess Myerson told the guests at the reception, "The fact that this living memorial is going to exist in Jerusalem is just extraordinary."

Spiritual Thought For The Week

The world endures by virtue of three things -- justice, truth and peace.

Israelite

For Rates CALL

376-1255

WHEN IT COMES TO GIFTS... SAY IT WITH TREES



FOR ALL OCCASIONS

PLANT TREES IN ISRAEL

JEWISH NATIONAL FUND
5039 N. 19th Ave., Ste. 5
Phoenix, AZ 85015

Let us know what organization/chapter/lodge you want us to credit for your tax deductible free gift.

Trees are \$5.00 each.

Camelot

Senior Citizen Discounts

CARPET & DRAPES
NEWLY REMODELED
GREAT LOCATION

1 BEDROOM FROM...

\$295

ADULTS + NO PETS

TROPICANA

MARYLAND

RENO

798-0004

DRUGS • SOUVENIRS • GIFTS
U. S. POST OFFICE • NOTARY

SECURITY

PHONE 731-0041

LANDMARK PHARMACY

252 CONVENTION CENTER DR.
LAS VEGAS, NEV. 89109

KEN DANIELS, R. Ph. PHONE
-OWNER- (702) 731-0041

Wm. G. Stone, M.D.

BOARD CERTIFIED PSYCHIATRY
1701 - W. Charleston Blvd. Suite 600
Las Vegas, Nevada 89102

384-8050

THE DEPOT

ANTIQUES • FURNITURE
VINTAGE CLOTHING
& JEWELRY

Movie Star & Nostalgia Posters
Antique Sale Every Monday
12 PM to 9 PM
-100'S TO CHOOSE FROM-

1221 SO. MAIN
366-1334
Hours Monday-Saturday
9:30 AM to 6 PM