



The Tallit Gadol

Wearing the Jewish Prayer Shawl

וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וַעֲשִׂיתֶם
אֹתָם וְלֹא־תִתְּרוּ אַחֲרָי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־אֲתֶם זָנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם:

And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, and not to “spy after” your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. Num. 15:39

The Hebrew word *tallit* (טלית, “little covering”) refers to a rectangular “prayer shawl” that is traditionally worn during morning prayers on weekdays and Shabbat, and also during other Jewish holidays. All tallit have four knotted “fringes,” called *tzitzit* (צִיצִית), that are attached at each corner. Most tallitot are beautifully woven from wool and have a neckband, called an *atarah*, that has a blessing or design embroidered on it. Although it has other ritual uses, the Torah states that the display of *tzitzit* is to remind oneself to observe all of the commandments of the Lord, and to guard against the sin of unbelief that marked the spies: “It shall be a tassel for you to look at ... not to “spy” after your own heart and your own eyes” (Num. 15:39). Note that the verb translated “spy” (תָּהַר) is the same word used to “spy” the land of Canaan. Shrouding one’s head in a tallit is a way to keep the eyes from straying and to create a sense of focus and *kavanah*.



The word “tallit” itself does not occur in the Torah (though the verb טָלַל appears and means “to cover over” (Neh. 3:15; Gen. 19:8)). Ruth asked Boaz to “cover” her with his garment because he was a near kinsman (Ruth 3:9). The base word *tal* (טל) means “dew” and the word tallit was perhaps chosen because it alludes to the morning dew in the wilderness that was accompanied by manna (Exod. 16:13-14; Num. 11:9). The unity of brothers is also likened to the dew (Psalm 133:3) as well as the favor of God (Prov. 19:12). The tallit was devised because of clothing changes over the centuries. At one time, garments included the use of “corners” from which fringes could be displayed; later, however, such garments were not worn, and the tallit was introduced to accommodate the Torah’s commandments (Deut. 22:12).

The tallit actually inspired the design of the Israeli flag:





When is a Tallit worn?

Only bar mitzvah men wear a tallit during morning services (it is not worn for afternoon and evening prayers because of the commandment that one should see the tzitzit, which has been interpreted as meaning to be seen by the light of the day). Therefore, the shawl is traditionally worn during:

1. *Shacharit* (morning) prayers (Num. 15:38-39)
2. Torah Reading services (Shabbat, Monday, and Thursday)
3. The Kol Nidre portion of Yom Kippur (and other holiday services)
4. Special occasions such as circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, Shabbats, weddings (used to sometimes make a canopy over the couple).
5. Burial. An orthodox Jewish man is wrapped in it when he is buried.

Before Putting on the Tallit:

1. Take the tallit out of the tallit bag (or remove it from the synagogue rack).
2. Carefully unfold it.
3. Hold it up and inspect the *tzitzit*.
4. Recite the following blessing:

בָּרוּךְ	אַתָּה	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	מֶלֶךְ	הָעוֹלָם,	אֲשֶׁר	קִדְּשָׁנוּ
ba-rukh	at-tah	Adonai	e-lo-hei-nu	me-lekh	ha-'o-lam	'a-sheh	kid-de-sha-nu
Blessed	You	LORD	our God	King of the universe		who	sanctifies us



בְּמִצְוֹתָיו	וְצִוָּנוּ	עַל	מִצְוַת	צִיצִית.
be-mits-votav	ve-tsi-va-nu	al	mits-vat	tst-tsit
with his mitzvot	and	regarding	the commandment of the	tzitzit
commanded	us			

Blessed are You, LORD our God, Master of the Universe, who sanctifies us with His commandments and commanded us regarding the commandment of the tzitzit.

Transliteration:

Barukh attah Adonai, eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kiddeshanu bemitzvotav, al mitzvat tzitzit.



Next, put the tallit on and recite (or read the blessing as written on the atarah):



The blessing embroidered upon the atarah

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו
להתעטף בציצית

בְּרוּךְ	אַתָּה	יְיָ	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	מֶלֶךְ	הָעוֹלָם,	אֲשֶׁר	קִדְּשָׁנוּ	
kid-de	'sha-nu	'a-sher	ha-'o-lam	me-lekh	e-lo-hei-nu	Adonai	at-tah	ba-ruk
h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h	h
sanctifies us	who	King of the universe	our God	LORD	You	Blessed		



בְּמִצְוֹתָיו	וְצִוָּנוּ	לְהִתְעַטֵּף	בְּצִיצִית.
be-mits-vo-tav	vet-siva-nu	le-hit-at-tef	bats-tsit
with his mitzvot	and	to wrap ourselves	in tzitzit
commanded	us		

Blessed are You, LORD our God, Master of the Universe, who sanctifies us with His commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves in tzitzit.

Barukh attah Adonai, eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kiddeshanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu lehitatef batzitzit.



After reciting the blessing:

1. Kiss the end of *atarah* where the last word of the blessing is embroidered, and then again at beginning where the first word is.
2. Wrap the tallit around your shoulders, holding it over your head for a moment of private meditation.
3. Adjust the tallit on your shoulders comfortably.
4. You may also wish to add the following blessing, after having put on the *tallit*:

בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי גְדַלְתָּ מְאֹד
 me·od gadal·ta e·lo·hai Adonai Adonai 'et naf·shi bare·khi
 very you are great my God Adonai Adonai () O my soul Bless



הוֹד וְהַדָּר לְבַשְׂתָּ עֹתֵה-אֹר כַּסְלִמָּה
 ka·sal·mah or 'oteh la·vash·ta ve·ha·dar hod
 as a garment light dressed you wore and majesty glory

נוֹטֵה שָׁמַיִם כַּיְרִיעָה.
 kai·ri·ah sha·mai·yim no·teh
 as a curtain heavens stretching

*Bless the LORD, O my soul; O LORD, my God, You are very great;
 You are clothed in glory and majesty, wrapped in a robe of light;
 You spread the heavens like a tent cloth. (Psalm 104:1-2)*

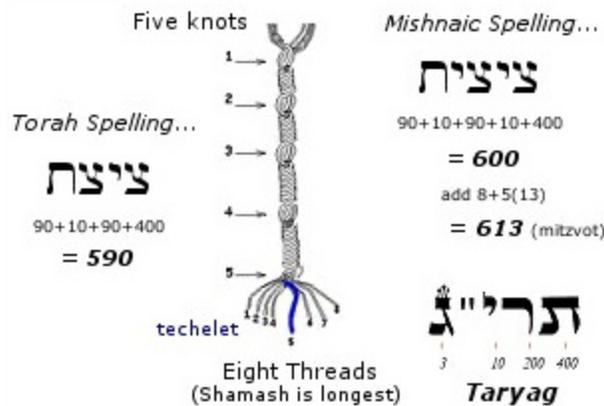
*Barekhi nafshi et Adonai, Adonai elohai gadalta meod
 hod vehadar lavashta. Oteh or kasalmah,
 noteh shamayim kairi'ah.*

Tallit Customs

1. A cord of *techelet* (תְּכֵלֶת), thought to be a royal blue/purple color, is supposed to be added to the fringe at each corner, however since this dye was derived from a now-extinct snail found near Tyre, the color requirement has been waived. As a reminder of the techelet, however, either blue (or sometimes black) stripes are added to the tallit itself. These tallit stripes became part of the emblem of the Israeli flag (most Orthodox wear black for mourning the destruction of the Temple).



2. Only Bar Mitzvah men wear a tallit during *morning* services (it is not worn for afternoon and evening prayers because of the commandment that one should see the tzitzit, which has been interpreted as meaning to be seen by the light of the day). Therefore, the tallit may be worn during: 1) Shacharit (morning) prayers (Num. 15:38-39), 2) during Torah Reading morning services (Sat., Mon., and Thurs.), and 3) during Yom Kippur (and some other holiday services), and on other special occasions. The Tallit Katan, however, may be worn at all times.
3. There are many customs about the proper method of tying the tzitzit (tying Tzitzit is a Jewish art, a form of macrame).



4. Do not wear a tallit into the bathroom (there are generally hooks for you to use outside the door).
5. Many synagogues let you borrow a tallit for the morning service; say the normal blessing when putting on this tallit.
6. Kissing the Tzitzit: Tzitzit are kissed during the recitation of the third paragraph of the Shema (Numbers 15:37-41) which mentions the tzitzit three times. They are also kissed during the hakafot service of Simchat Torah.
7. When called to perform a Torah Reading, a corner of the tallit is first placed on the word where the reading begins and then removed and kissed.
8. It is bad taste to cover your head with the tallit when praying the traditional synagogue prayers (though many cover their head for personal supplications)..

Jesus and the Tallit

Yeshua *perhaps* wore a tallit with tzitzit. Matthew 9:20-22 states “A woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years approached Him from behind and touched the tzitzit on his robe. For she said to herself, “If I can only touch his robe, I will be healed.” On the other hand, the tallit was sometimes used to indicate the “social status” of the wearer. For example, the Pharisees sometimes wore “extra long fringes” to affect a display of piety - a practice that Yeshua condemned (Matt. 23:5).



The Tallit and Torah

As mentioned above, the word “tallit” does not occur in the Torah (though the verb טָלַל appears and means “to cover over” (Neh. 3:15; Gen. 19:8)). The base word *tal* (טל) means “dew” and the word tallit was perhaps chosen because it alludes to the morning dew in the wilderness that was accompanied by manna (Exod. 16:13-14; Num. 11:9). The unity of brethren is also likened to the dew (Psalm 133:3) as well as the favor of God (Prov. 19:12). The modern use of the tallit allows “fringes” or tzitzit to be displayed from the “four corners” of a garment. This seems to be the essence of the requirement given in Numbers 15, Deut. 22:12.

The various customs and “laws” surrounding the tallit are mostly Rabbinical-Talmudic, not based on the Torah. Here are the Torah restrictions for use:

1. The fringes must be on the border of your garment (Numbers 15:38)
2. The fringes must be put on the four corners (*arba kanfot*) of the garment (Deuteronomy 22:12)
3. The fringes must have one ribbon of *tekhelet*. Since the manner of obtaining this dye was lost, two schools of thought arose: a) use black - to indicate mourning for the destruction of the temple, and b) use all white because we do not have access to the tekhelet (Deuteronomy 22:12, Numbers 15:38).
4. The garment and fringes are not of “divers kinds” (Deuteronomy 22:11)
5. That when you look upon them you are to remember God commandments “to do them” to guard against the *sin of unbelief* that marked the spies (Num. 15:39-41)

