



The Tallit Gadol

Wearing the Jewish Prayer Shawl

וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִת וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-נִצְוֹת יְהוָה וַעֲשִׂיתֶם
אֹתָם וְלֹא-תִתְּרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם:

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

A **tallit** (tal-LEET, lit. “little covering”) is a rectangular prayer shawl with four fringes - *tzitzit* - one attached at each corner. Most tallits have a neckband, called an *atarah*, that often has a blessing one recites when donning the tallit, written across it. The tallit is worn to remind oneself to observe all of the commandments of the Lord (see Num. 15:38-9).



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 (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 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 (Num. 15, 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 (Sat., Mon., and Thurs.)
3. The Kol Nidre portion of Yom Kippur (and some other holiday services)
4. Special occasions such as circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, 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:

בְּרוּךְ	אַתָּה	יְיָ	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	מֶלֶךְ	הָעוֹלָם,	אֲשֶׁר	קִדְּשָׁנוּ
barukh	atah	Adonai	eloheinu	melekh	ha'olam	asher	kiddeshanu
Blessed	You	LORD	our God	King of the universe	who	sanctifies us	

בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,	וְצִוָּנוּ	עַל	מִצְוַת	צִיצִית.
bemitsvotav,	vetzivanu	al	mitsvat	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	יְי	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	מֶלֶךְ	הָעוֹלָם,	אֲשֶׁר	קִדְּשָׁנוּ
barukh	attah	Adonai	eloheinu	melekh	ha'olam	asher	kiddeshanu
Blessed	You	LORD	our God	King of the universe		who	sanctifies us

בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,	וְצִוָּנוּ	לְהִתְעַטֵּף	בְּצִיצִית.
be-mitsvotav	vetzivanu	lehit-atef	batsitsit
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*:

בְּרַכֵּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת יְהוָה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי גְדַלְתָּ מְאֹד
 me·od ga·dal·ta e·lo·hai Adonai Adonai 'et naf·shi ba·re·khi
 very you are great my God Adonai Adonai () O my soul Bless



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

נוֹטָה 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)*

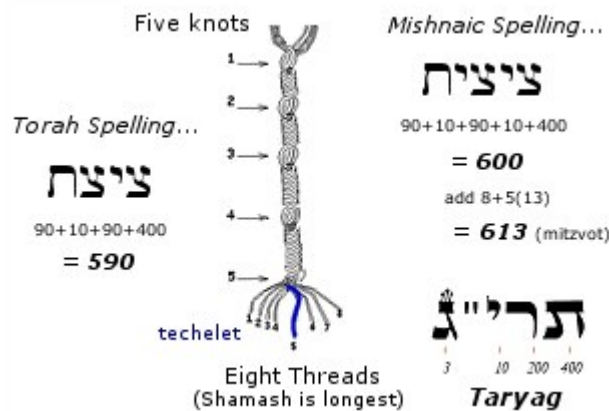
*Barekhi nafshi et Adonai, Adonai elohai gadalta meod
 hod vehadar lavashta. Oteh or kasalmah,
 noteh shamayim kairi'ah.*

Tallit Customs

1. A cord of *techelet* (royal blue/purple) is supposed to be added to the fringe at each corner, however this dye was derived from a now-extinct snail found near Tyre and was later waived as a requirement for the tzitzit. 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 Jews 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 generally bad taste to cover your head with the Tallit when praying the traditional synagogue prayers.

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." The Tallit was sometimes used to indicate the social status of the wearer. 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 לל ט appears and means "to cover over" (Neh. 3:15; Gen. 19:8)). The base word (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" (Numbers 15:39-41)

