

Teletiel A governing angel of the Zodiac.

<http://www.angelfire.com/journal/cathbodua/Angels/Tangels.html>

Tallit

A **tallit** [ta'lit] (Hebrew: טלית) (**talit**^[1] in Modern Hebrew, Sephardic Hebrew and Ladino) (**tallis**,^[2] in Ashkenazic Hebrew and Yiddish) pl. **tallitot** [tali'tot] (**talleisim**,^[3] **tallism**,^[4] in Ashkenazic Hebrew and Yiddish) is a Jewish prayer shawl. The tallit is worn over the outer clothes during the morning prayers (*Shacharit*) and worn during all prayers on *Yom Kippur*.^[5] The tallit has special twined and knotted fringes known as *tzitzit* attached to its four corners. Most traditional tallitot are made of wool. Tallitot are often first worn by children on their *Bar Mitzvahs*. In orthodox, Ashkenazi circles, a Tallit is customarily presented to a groom before marriage as part of the dowry.

1 Biblical commandment

The Bible does not command wearing of a unique prayer shawl or tallit. Instead, it presumes that people wore a garment of some type to cover themselves and instructs them to add fringes (*tzitzit*) to the 4 corners of these (*Numbers* 15:38, *Deuteronomy* 22:12). These passages do not specify tying particular types or numbers of knots in the fringes. Nor do they specify a gender division between men and women, or between native Israelite/Hebrew people and those assimilated by them. The exact customs regarding the tying of the *tzitzit* and the format of the tallit are of post-biblical, rabbinic origin and can vary between various Jewish communities.

Encyclopaedia Judaica describes the prayer shawl as “a rectangular mantle that looked like a blanket and was worn by men in ancient times”. Also, it “is usually white and made either of wool, cotton, or silk”.^[6]

The tallit can be made of any materials except a mixture of wool and linen. Usually, the mixture of wool and linen—a combination known as *shatnez*—is specifically forbidden by the Torah. In the case of tallit however, this is a Rabbinic prohibition, because biblically, the mixture might be allowed for a Tallit during the daytime (however at nighttime there would be a transgression on behalf of the wearer).^[7] Most traditional tallitot are made of wool.

According to the biblical commandment, a blue (Hebrew תכלת, *tekhelet*, tək-ā·leth) thread (Hebrew פתיל “*pəthiyl*”) known as “*tekhelet*” itself, is included in the *tzitzit*.^{[8][9]}

2 Pronunciation

In Modern Hebrew the word is pronounced [ta'lit], with the stress on the final syllable. In Yiddish it is ['taləs], with the stress on the first syllable. The plural of *tallit* in Hebrew is *tallitot*, pronounced [tali'tot]. The Yiddish plural is *talleisim*, pronounced [ta'lejsim].

3 Etymology and origin

Tallit is an Aramaic word from the root טלל *tl* meaning cover.^[10] Tallit literally means cloak or sheet but in Talmudic times already referred to the Jewish prayer shawl. The tallit is similar to the Roman *pallium* worn today by senior Roman Catholic priests, the Roman *toga* and the Arab *keffiyeh*. The tallit or other similar garment is suitable for the climate in West Asia: typically the days are hot and the tallit can be draped around the body and head to provide cover from the sun or just bunched up on the shoulders for later evening use; the evenings can be dramatically cool and the tallit could be draped around the neck and shoulders like a scarf to provide warmth.

4 Idiom

In modern Hebrew idiom, the sarcastic expression, “a completely blue tallit” (טלית שכולה תכלת) is widely used to refer to something that is ostensibly, but not really, absolutely pure, immaculate and virtuous. (An English parallel might be calling someone “Mr. Perfect.”) The expression stems from rabbinic lore about the biblical figure *Korah* who led a revolt against the leadership of *Moses* and *Aaron*. *Korah* was said to have asked Moses a number of vexatious, mocking questions, one of which was, “Does a tallit made entirely of blue yarn require *tzitzit*?” To Moses’ affirmative answer, *Korah* objected that an ordinary (undyed) tallit is rendered 'kosher' (meaning, in this context, ritually fit to be worn) by attaching to its corners the *tzitzit* tassels, whose key feature was the single thread of blue (פתיל תכלת) contained in each tassel.^[11] If so, what addition of holiness^[12] could the *tzitzit* contribute to a tallit which was made entirely of the same sky-blue yarn?

The notion implicit in questions like this attributed by the rabbis to *Korah* is the same as that expressed in *Korah*'s challenge to *Moses* and *Aaron* (*Numbers* 16:3), “The en-

tire congregation is holy, and God is in their midst, so why do you exalt yourselves above God's congregation?" Korah ostensibly subscribed to the laws that were the subject of his questions to Moses, but was really using them to mock and discredit Moses. Therefore Korah's question about a tallit made entirely of blue yarn, which is ostensibly "more kosher than tzitzit" but is really not, since it still requires tzitzit, became, in Hebrew idiom, an epithet used sarcastically against hypocritical displays of false piety.

The phrase "more kosher than tzitzit" is a Yiddish metaphoric expression (בשר'ער ווי ציצית) with similar connotations but is not necessarily used in a sarcastic sense. It can refer, in the superlative, to something that is really so perfect and flawless as to be beyond all reproach or criticism.

5 Customs

In some Jewish communities a tallit is given as a gift by a father to a son, a father-in-law to a son-in-law, or a teacher to a student. It might be purchased to mark a special occasion, such as a wedding or a bar/bat mitzvah. Many parents purchase a tallit for their children at the age of 13, together with tefillin. In the egalitarian, Reform and Conservative movements, it is common for both men and women to wear a tallit. While many worshipers bring their own tallit to synagogue, there is usually a rack of shawls for the use of visitors and guests.

At Jewish wedding ceremonies, a tallit is often used as a *chuppah* or wedding canopy. Similarly, a tallit is traditionally spread out as a canopy over the children during the Torah-reading ceremony during the holiday of Simchat Torah.

The tallit is traditionally draped over the shoulders, but during prayer, some cover their head with it, notably during specific parts of the service such as the *Amidah* and when called to the Torah for an *aliyah*.

In the Talmudic and post-Talmudic periods the tefillin were worn by rabbis and scholars all day, and a special tallit was worn at prayer; hence they put on the tefillin before the tallit, as appears in the order given in "Seder Rabbi Amram Gaon" (p. 2a) and in the *Zohar*. In modern practice, the opposite order is considered more "correct". Based on the Talmudic principle of *tadir v'she'ayno tadir, tadir kodem* (תדיר ושאינו תדיר, תדיר קודם): lit., frequent and infrequent, frequent first), when one performs more than one mitzva at a time, those that are performed more frequently should be performed first. While the tallit is worn daily, tefillin are not worn on *Shabbat* and holidays.

On the fast day of Tisha B'Av, different customs prevail. Some Ashkenazim do not wear a tallit during the morning (Shacharit) service and those who do omit the blessing regarding donning a fringed garment (Tzitzit); at the afternoon service (Mincha), those who wear a tallit gadol make the blessing on fringes then.^[13] Some Sephardim

(according to Kabbalah and the local custom (Minhag) for Jerusalem) wear the tallit at Shacharit as usual.^[14]

The Kabbalists considered the tallit as a special garment for the service of God, intended, in connection with the tefillin, to inspire awe and reverence for God at prayer.^[15] The tallit is worn by worshipers at the morning prayer on weekdays, *Shabbat*, and holy days; by the *hazzan* (cantor) at every prayer while before the ark; and by the reader of Torah, as well as by all other functionaries during the Torah service.

5.1 History

The use of the tallit begins in the Biblical period. The ancient Jewish tallit design was different from that known today. Originally it was a large white rectangular garment with tzitziyot in each corner and was used as a garment, bed sheet, and burial shroud.

In the book *The Ancient Jewish Shroud At Turin* by John N. Lupia (Regina Caeli Press, 2010; ISBN 978-0-9826739-0-4) Lupia shows the historical development of the tallit when its design began to change during the second half of the first century CE and began to take on the forms known today beginning around 1000 CE. The long tradition of a single orthodox form of the tallit became modified in a more culturally diverse atmosphere and continued to change throughout time until it became permuted and shortened in length as the kittel, tallit katan, tallit gadol, and the more common tallit prayer shawl form know today.

5.2 Weddings

In many Sephardic communities, the groom traditionally wears a tallit under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy). This is also the custom in German Jewish communities. In non-German Ashkenazi communities, a more widespread custom is that the groom wears a kittel. In Hasidic and some non-Hasidic communities, an overcoat is worn over the kittel.

5.3 Burials

In the Diaspora, Jews are buried in a plain, wooden casket. The corpse is collected from the place of death (home, hospital, etc.) by the *chevra kadisha* (burial committee). After a ritual washing of the body, the body of men is dressed in a kittel and then a tallit. One of the tzitzit is then cut off. In the Land of Israel, burial is without a casket, and the kittel and tallit are the only coverings for the corpse. Women are buried in white shrouds only.

5.4 Additional occasions

In addition to the morning prayers of weekdays, Shabbat and holidays, a tallit is also worn for *Selichos* in Ashkenazic communities by the prayer leader, even though it is still night.^[16] A tallit is also worn at night on *Yom Kippur*, from *Kol Nidre*, which begins during the daylight hours until after the evening (*Ma'ariv*) service.^[17]

6 Types of tallitot

6.1 Tallit katan



An Orthodox Jewish man wearing a Wool Tallit Katan under his vest.

The **tallit katan** (Yiddish/Ashkenazic Hebrew *tallis koton*; “small tallit”) is a fringed garment traditionally worn either under or over one’s clothing by Jewish males. It is a poncho-like garment with a hole for the head and special twined and knotted fringes known as *tzitzit* attached to its four corners. The requirements regarding the fabric and fringes of a *tallit katan* are the same as that of a *tallit gadol*. Generally a *tallit katan* is made of wool or cotton.

Although Sephardi halakha generally maintains a distinct preference for a woolen garment as per the ruling

of the Shulchan Aruch, among Ashkenazim customs are split, with the Rema ruling that all garment types are acceptable.^[18] Whilst the Mishnah Berurah and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein recommend wearing a woolen garment in accordance with the Shulchan Aruch’s ruling, the Chazon Ish was known to wear cotton, in accordance with the ruling of the Vilna Gaon.^[19] This was also the practice of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, and that of German Jewry historically.^[20]

While all four cornered garments are required to have *tzitzit*, the custom of specially wearing a *tallit katan* is based on a verse in *Numbers 15:38-39* which exhorts Jews to “remember[ance of] all the commandments of the Lord.”^[21] Wearing a *tallit katan* is not mandated in Biblical law, but in Rabbinic law the practice is strongly encouraged for men, and often considered obligatory or a binding custom.^{[18][22][23]}

The tallit katan is also known as *arba kanfot* (Yiddish/Ashkenazic Hebrew: *arba kanfos*), literally “four corners”, and may be referred to synecdochally as *tzitzit*.

6.2 Tallit gadol



A typical tallit bag. The Hebrew embroidery says tallit. Frequently the owner will add additional embroidery with their name.

The *tallit gadol* (Yiddish/Ashkenazic Hebrew *tallis godoil*; traditionally known as *tallét gedolah* among Sephardim), or “large” *tallit*, is worn over one’s clothing resting on the shoulders. This is the *prayer shawl* that is worn during the morning services in synagogue by all male participants, and in many communities by the leader of the afternoon and evening prayers as well. The *tallit gadol* is usually woven of wool — especially among Ashkenazim. Some Spanish and Portuguese Jews use silk *tallitot*. The Portuguese Jewish community in The Netherlands has the tradition of decorating the corners of the Tallit. Today some tallitot are made of polyester and cotton. *Tallitot* may be of any colour but are usually white with black, blue or white stripes along the edge. Sizes of

tallitot vary, and are a matter of custom and preference. Some are large enough to cover the whole body while others hang around the shoulders, the former being more common among Orthodox Jews, the latter among Conservative, Reform and other denominations. The neckband of the tallit, sometimes woven of silver or gold thread, is called the *atarah*. The *tallit gadol* is often kept in a dedicated pouch or cloth bag, which can be quite simple or ornately decorated.

The tallit gadol is typically either all white, white with black stripes, white with blue stripes, or white with twelve-colored stripes. The all-white and black-and-white varieties have traditionally been the commonest, with the blue-and-white variety becoming increasingly prevalent in recent years among non-Orthodox Jews on account of the association of blue and white with the State of Israel.^{[24][25]} The all-white variety is customary among Sephardic communities, whereas among Ashkenazic communities the tendency is toward white tallitot with black stripes.^[26] One explanation for the significance of the black stripes is that their black color symbolizes the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews from the land of Israel.^{[27][28]}

In many Jewish communities, the tallit is worn in the synagogue by all men and boys over bar mitzvah age (and in some communities even younger). Aside from German Jews and Oberlander Jews, men in most Ashkenazi communities (which comprise the majority of Jews today) start wearing the tallit after their wedding.

7 Women

According to the Talmud, and subsequently modern non-egalitarian denominations (Orthodox), Women are not obligated to wear a *tallit*, since they are not bound to perform positive *mitzvot* which are time-specific,^[29] and the obligation to wear a *tallit* only applies by day. Many early authorities did permit women to wear a *tallit*, such as Isaac ibn Ghiyyat (b. 1038), Rashi (1040–1105), Rabbeinu Tam (c. 1100–1171), Zerachya ben Yitzhak Halevi of Lunel (c. 1125–1186), Rambam (1135–1204), Rabbi Eliezer ben Yoel Halevi (c. 1140 – c. 1225), Rashba (1235–1310), Aharon Halevi of Barcelona (b. c. 1235?), Rabbi Yisrael Yaaqob Alghazi (1680–1761), Rabbi Yomtob ben Yisrael Alghazi (1726–1802). There was, however, a gradual movement towards prohibition, mainly initiated by the Medieval Ashkenazi Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (the *Maharam*). The *Rema* states that while women are technically allowed to don a *tallit* it would appear to be an act of arrogance (*yuhara*) for women to perform this commandment.^[30] The *Maharil*^[31] and the Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel^[32] both view a talit as a “male garment” and thus find that a woman wearing a talit to be in violation of the precept prohibiting a woman from wearing a man’s garment.

In contemporary Orthodox Judaism, there is a debate on the appropriateness of women wearing *tzitzit* which has hinged on whether women are allowed to perform commandments from which they are exempt. According to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik the issue depends on the intention with which such an act is undertaken, e.g. whether it is intended to fulfill the actual commandment, to bring a person closer to the Almighty, or for political or protest purposes. Other commentators hold that women are prohibited generally, without making an individual inquiry. The view that women donning a *tallit* would be guilty of arrogance is cited as applying to attempts of making a political statement as to the ritual status of the genders, particularly in the Modern Orthodox community, are generally more inclined to regard contemporary women’s intentions as religiously appropriate.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein wrote that permission is granted to every woman who wishes to fulfil even those *mitzvot* which the Torah did not obligate; and they indeed fulfil a *mitzvah* and receive the reward for the fulfilment of it including saying the appropriate associated blessing (as with *shofar*, *lulav* etc.). And also *tzitzit* are applicable for a woman who desires to wear a four cornered garment—it should be different from a man’s garment—and by attaching *tzitzit*, she fulfils this *mitzvah*.^[33]

Rabbi Yisrael Yaaqob Alghazi and Rabbi Yomtob ben Yisrael Alghazi held that the observance of this *mitzvah* by women was not only permitted but actually commendable, since such diligence among the non-obligated would inspire these women’s male relatives to be even more diligent in their own observance .

Women in egalitarian movements (Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist and others) are not prohibited from wearing a tallit, and usually encouraged to do so, especially when called to the Torah or leading services from the bimah. Some will receive a tallit as a Bat Mitzvah gift.

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9 External links

- Tallit Blessing, tying, and customs

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