

A TALLIS WITHOUT TZITZIS

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

A woman once approached a well-known rav, requesting to wear a tallis for tefillah. To the woman's great joy, the rav replied that he permitted her to do so, but said that she had to start gradually, and for the first week she should wear a tallis without tzitzis, and then report back to him. A week later, the woman returned to the rav and reported that her tefillos had reached a new level of elevation while wearing the tallis.

To this woman's great surprise, the rav responded that if she felt so inspired wearing this tallis, it was forbidden for her to continue. Wearing a tallis without tzitzis is not a mitzvah; on the contrary, for a man it is considered a transgression. Her enthusiasm came from the superficial trapping of the act and not the mitzvah itself; consequently, it was improper for her to wear a tallis.

The woman in the above anecdote and some other women, misled by feminist philosophies, think that they need the extra boost to elevate their prayers. Actually, women are more emotionally attuned than men, and do not need the assistance of the outer trappings of a tallis. Their obligation is to dress modestly and respectably for tefillah.

Men, on the other hand, have been assigned special clothing for tefillah. Each one of these garments can play a special role in elevating their prayers, and are part of the man's required uniform when granted an audience with the King. Let us try to understand why women should not wear a tallis for tefillah, while grasping the deeper meaning of man's donning a tallis for prayer.

Women and Tzitzis

The Shulchan Aruch writes, "Women are exempt from the mitzvah of tzitzis since it is a time-bound commandment" (Shulchan Aruch 17,2). The Rema adds, "If a woman wants to wear tzitzis she may fulfill this mitzvah. However, this appears to be an act of haughtiness; therefore she should not wear tzitzis" (Rema, *ibid.*).

There are a number of reasons for the halachah that women do not wear a tallis. Rav Yonasan ben Uziel cites that tallis and tefillin are garments specifically designated for men. If a woman wears them, she violates the negative commandment of *begeid ish*, not dressing in the manner of men (Devarim 22,5).

The Torah states that tzitzis are meant to remind a man of the 613 mandatory mitzvos. Some authorities explain that since women are not obligated to perform time-bound commandments, they

do not have 613 mitzvos. For this reason, they are exempt from wearing tzitzis (Maharil, Responsa Chadashos 7).

In modern society, there is yet another reason why women should not wear tzitzis of a tallis. Today, a woman in tzitzis has become symbolic of the Reform movement. Wearing a tallis shows an affiliation with them, and every Torah-observant woman should do all she can do to distance herself from their false ideologies (Halachah Berurah 8,2).

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