

TALLIS KATAN: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

QUESTION: Is one required to wear a garment with tzitzis fringes attached to it?

DISCUSSION: Although Biblical law does not require one to put tzitzis on a garment unless the garment that he is wearing has four square corners, which most garments nowadays do not have, it is fitting and proper for every male to wear a tallis katan (a small four-cornered garment) all day. By doing so, he fulfills an important mitzvah, one that serves as a constant reminder of all of the other mitzvos of the Torah.(1)Accordingly, it has become customary for all G-d-fearing people to wear a tallis katan all day.(2)Since this has become the prevalent custom, one may not deviate from the accepted practice. Nowadays, therefore, one is obligated to wear a tallis katan all day long.(3)Indeed, those who are meticulous in their mitzvah observance do not walk four cubits (approximately eight feet) without tzitzis.(4)

QUESTION: Does a Tallis Katan require a blessing?

DISCUSSION: Married men and those who wear a large tallis during davening need not recite a separate blessing over their tallis katan. Rather, when they recite the proper blessing over the tallis gadol, they should have the tallis katan in mind.(5)Unmarried men who do not wear a tallis gadol recite the blessing of Al mitzvas tzitzis on a tallis katan. If the tallis katan is of questionable size(6)or material,(7)a blessing should not be said.

Although all married(8)men should wear a tallis gadol during davening, they should not forgo davening with a minyan if a tallis is unavailable in shul.(9)[In regard to tefillin, however, it is better to daven without a minyan than to daven without tefillin.(10)]

Before the blessing on a tallis gadol or katan may be recited, the tzitzis fringes should be separated from one another.(11)Some poskim(12) imply that if the fringes are intertwined, then one has not fulfilled the mitzvah of tzitzis at all, while other poskim hold that b'dieved one has fulfilled the mitzvah.(13) [If taking time to separate the tzitzis will cause one to miss tefillah b'tzibur, he may rely on the lenient view(14)] All poskim agree that if the fringes are tied [or glued] together, then the mitzvah has not been fulfilled and the blessing said over them is said in vain.(15)

Often, the chulyos (the top segment of the fringes which is wound and knotted) become unraveled or loosened. If this happens, the fringes should be rewound and knotted. On Shabbos, however, this is strictly forbidden. Tightening or knotting tzitzis fringes on Shabbos may even be Biblically prohibited.(16)

QUESTION: L'chatchilah, can one wear a tallis katan made out of cotton?

DISCUSSION: There is a dispute among the Rishonim as to whether it is a Biblical requirement to attach tzitzis to a four-cornered garment made of cotton. Some Rishonim⁽¹⁷⁾ hold that only woolen and linen garments are Biblically obligated in tzitzis, while others⁽¹⁸⁾ include cotton as well. Both views are quoted in the Shulchan Aruch,⁽¹⁹⁾ and the Rama rules like the view that maintains that cotton garments are Biblically required. Nevertheless, many poskim advise a G-d-fearing person to wear only a tallis katan made from wool and thereby fulfill the mitzvah according to all views.⁽²⁰⁾ Other poskim, however, do not insist on wool,⁽²¹⁾ and there were eminent Torah scholars⁽²²⁾ who wore cotton garments to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzis.

QUESTION: May a woman attach tzitzis strings to a garment (tallis katan or tallis gadol)?

DISCUSSION: The Talmud⁽²³⁾ excludes women from the writing of tefillin since they are not commanded to wear tefillin. Following this line of reasoning, R' Tam ruled that since women are not commanded to wear tzitzis, they are also not permitted to attach the tzitzis to the garment. The majority of Rishonim, however, do not agree with this ruling. They allow women to be involved in all phases of tzitzis production. The Shulchan Aruch⁽²⁴⁾ rules with the majority. Nevertheless, in deference to the minority opinion [and for other reasons as well], the Rama advises that l'chatchilah, women should not be allowed to put tzitzis on a garment ⁽²⁵⁾. One should follow the Rama's directive⁽²⁶⁾. The Rama's restriction, however, applies specifically to inserting the strings through the hole and knotting the first set of chulyos and the double knot immediately following⁽²⁷⁾. All poskim agree that after the fact, if these procedures were done by women, the tzitzis are kosher and need not be restrung⁽²⁸⁾.

QUESTION: May a minor attach tzitzis fringes to a garment?

DISCUSSION: Based on the previously mentioned Rama, some poskim rule that a minor below the age of bar mitzvah should not attach tzitzis to a garment. Other poskim feel that minors are not excluded and may attach tzitzis to a garment. The Mishnah Berurah⁽²⁹⁾ rules that l'chatchilah, it is not proper to allow a minor to do so.

A minor, however, may prepare tzitzis for himself or for another minor. Even when he becomes bar mitzvah, he does not have to unknot the tzitzis and restring them⁽³⁰⁾.

There is, however, another issue concerning minors attaching tzitzis to a garment. When tzitzis are placed on a garment, they must be attached with the intention of "l'shem mitzvas tzitzis," for the sake of the mitzvah of tzitzis. Since a minor may not be mature enough to concentrate properly, he may not attach tzitzis to a garment unless he is under the supervision of an adult. If a minor was not properly supervised, then the tzitzis must be removed and reattached properly⁽³¹⁾.

QUESTION: Is it permitted to attach tzitzis fringes to a garment at night?

DISCUSSION: There are some poskim⁽³²⁾ who recommend that one should not do so. Their reasoning is based on the halachic principle of ta'aseh (you should make) v'lo min ha-asui (it should not be automatically done): Since one is not obligated to wear tzitzis at night⁽³³⁾, it follows that one cannot produce kosher tzitzis at night, either. The vast majority of poskim⁽³⁴⁾ however, reject this argument. The Mishnah Berurah does not discuss this issue, but the Chafetz Chayim is quoted⁽³⁵⁾ as permitting tzitzis to be attached at night. The Chazon Ish is reported⁽³⁶⁾ as having asked that tzitzis be prepared for him at night.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Bamidbar 15:39 [quoted in O.C. 24:1]: "That you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them." In addition, the Talmud (Menachos 41a) says that wearing a tallis katan protects a person from Hashem's anger.

2 Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:2; Tzitz Eliezer 8:4; Yechaveh Da'as 4:2.

3 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:4. See also Igros Moshe O.C. 5:20-25.

4 Mishnah Berurah 8:1. See also Tzitz Eliezer 14:49, who says that the tallis katan should be left on even if one is suffering from the heat.

5 Mishnah Berurah 8:24, 30; Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:16. This is especially recommended since often the tallis katan may not be the right size according to all views. In order to avoid reciting a blessing on the tallis katan that may be l'vatalah, it is best to recite the blessing over the tallis gadol. Some poskim rule that if there will be a "long break" until the tallis gadol is worn, a blessing should be said on the tallis katan - Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky in Orchos Rabbeinu 1:48; oral ruling heard from Harav M. Feinstein. See Siach Halachah 8:47-5 for elaboration.

6 See Shulchan Aruch O.C. 16 for the laws of the proper size.

7 Rama O.C. 8:6. The following segment discusses which materials require tzitzis.

8 The Sephardic and German custom is that unmarried men wear a tallis gadol, too.

9 Imrei Yosher 2:201-2; Be'er Moshe 5:5.

10 Mishnah Berurah 66:40.

11 O.C. 8:7.

12 Artzos ha-Chayim O.C. 8; Beiur Halachah 8:7 according to the view of the Gr"a and Olas Tamid.

13 Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:13; Chazon Ish O.C. 3:9.

14 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 9:7; Mishnah Berurah 8:18; Aruch ha-Shulchan, 8:13. The Artzos ha-Chayim [quoted above] holds that one must separate his tzitzis even at the expense of tefillah b'tzibur.

15 Chazon Ish O.C. 3:9.

16 Ketzos ha-Shulchan (Badei ha-Shulchan 317:4); Az Nidberu 3:22; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 15:50.

17 Rif, Rambam.

18 Rashi, Tosafos, Rosh.

19 O.C. 9:1.

20 Chayei Adam 11:5; Shulchan Aruch Harav 9:4; Mishnah Berurah 9:5; Igros Moshe O.C. 1:2; 2:1; 3:1; 3:52. In Igros Moshe O.C. 5:20-25, Harav Feinstein adds that one who suffers from the heat is not required to wear woolen garments, although he himself was particular to do so.

21 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and Aruch ha-Shulchan do not mention this stringency.

22 Chazon Ish (quoted in Shoneh Halachos 9:1) and Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky (quoted in Orchos Rabbeinu 3:188) based on the ruling of the Gr"a (Ma'asei Rav 17). There are several reasons given why the Gr"a ruled so - See Tzitzis-Halachah Pesukah pg. 77.

23 Gittin 45b.

24 O.C. 14:1.

25 Many poskim rule that other mitzvos [such as putting sechach on a sukkah] are included in this prohibition. See, however, Igros Moshe O.C. 5:40-3.

26 See Beirur Halachah 14:1. Aruch ha-Shulchan 14:7 refers to this stringency as a chumra b'alma.

27 Mishnah Berurah 14:2.

28 Mishnah Berurah 14:5.

29 In 14:4 he quotes both views without a decision. In Beirur Halachah he rules that it is appropriate to be stringent.

30 Beirur Halachah 14:1, since we view that situation as a b'dieved, and b'dieved the tzitzis are valid according to all views.

31 Mishnah Berurah 14:4.

32 Tosefos Chayim on Chayei Adam 11:1; Salmas Chayim 3:28.

33 The Talmud (Menachos 43a) derives from the verse "and you should see them" that there is no mitzvah of tzitzis at night.

34 Tehillah l'David 18:4; Aruch ha-Shulchan 14:7; Kaf ha-Chayim 18:2; Harav A.Y. Bloch (quoted by Harav C. Stein in Imrei Shalom 1:1).

35 Rivevos Efrayim O.C. 3:27.

36 Dinim v'Hanhagos Chazon Ish 2:11; Orchos Rabbeinu 3:188.

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