

# SHE'AILOS U'TESHUVOS

*by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt*

**QUESTION:** How long should the tzitzis strings [on a tallis gadol or katan] be? Is a tallis kosher if one or more strings tears either partially or completely?

**DISCUSSION:** Once the tzitzis strings are looped through the hole on the corner of the garment and knotted, the length of the strings - from the top of the first knot to the end of the string<sup>(1)</sup> - should be no less than 11.4 inches.<sup>(2)</sup> The first third, approximately, is the gedil, the top segment which is composed of wound and knotted strings, and the lower two thirds, where the strings hang loose, is the anaf.<sup>(3)</sup>

But the strings need to be no less than 11.4 inches in length only when they are attached initially to the garment. Attaching strings that are shorter than the prescribed length onto the garment renders the tallis pasul. If, however, the strings were the proper length when attached to the garment, but only later were cut or shrunk, the tallis is still kosher as long as the anaf is at least 1.9 inches<sup>(4)</sup> long.

The following rules apply to tzitzis strings that fall short of the original requirement:

- \* If one - but not more - of the eight strings snaps off completely and loses its anaf entirely, the tallis remains kosher l'chatchilah and the proper berachah is recited when it is donned.<sup>(5)</sup>
- \* If more than one of the eight strings snaps off completely, or even if more than one string is less than 1.9 inches long, the tallis should no longer be worn.<sup>(6)</sup>
- \* If one or two of the eight strings shrank but is still at least 1.9 inches long, the tallis remains kosher l'chatchilah and the proper berachah is recited over it.
- \* If three or more [or even all eight] strings shrank but are still at least 1.9 inches long, the tallis remains kosher, but it should be replaced or repaired. If, however, this is the only tallis available, it may be worn and a berachah recited over it.<sup>(7)</sup>

Note: Our discussion pertains to strings that were cut, got torn or shrank in the anaf portion of the string. If, however, even one string was severed at the point where the tzitzis are attached to the garment [until after the first knot], the tallis is pasul.<sup>(8)</sup>

**QUESTION:** What are the correct dimensions for a tallis katan?

**DISCUSSION:** There is a wide range of views in the poskim regarding the proper length and width of a tallis katan: Some hold that there is no minimum at all and a tallis katan of any length or width is

acceptable,(9) while others require an extremely long tallis katan, one that will reach below the knees.(10)

The view of most poskim, however, falls somewhere in between these two extremes. The general consensus(11) is that it is appropriate for a G-d fearing individual to wear a tallis katan which is two amos long and one amah wide. Using the middle-of-the-road view as to the exact length of an amah, it follows that the preferred tallis katan is at least 42.5 inches long [front to back ,(12)] and 21.3 inches wide.(13)

While this is the preferred size, Mishnah Berurah(14) rules that one may wear a tallis katan which is only an amah-and-half long by three-quarters of an amah wide - 32 inches long by 16 inches wide.(15)

Note: Chazon Ish(16) rules that each side (shoulder) of the tallis katan by itself must be wider than the opening for the neck. If, for instance, the opening is 15 inches wide, then each side of the tallis must be at least 15 inches wide for a total of 30 inches. Most other poskim do not mention this requirement.

**QUESTION:** Should men recite the blessing of al mitzvas tzitzis when they put on their tallis katan in the morning or not?

**DISCUSSION:** In order to understand the different rulings on this issue, the following background information will be helpful:

In past generations, the widely accepted practice was not to recite a berachah on a tallis katan at all; instead, the berachah that was said on the tallis gadol - which was put on later - was intended to retroactively cover the tallis katan as well. While the concept of a berachah retroactively "covering" a mitzvah is quite unusual, the custom developed (17) because many poskim were hesitant about reciting a berachah over a tallis katan. In order to avoid the risk of a berachah levatalah, they advised that the berachah over the tallis gadol include the tallis katan as well. The reasons for their reluctance to recite a berachah over a tallis katan were:

- \* Often, the tallis katan was of questionable size or material.(18)
- \* The tallis gadol was usually donned at home (before going to shul), right after the tallis katan was put on.(19) The poskim felt that reciting two berachos [over the same mitzvah] one right after the other is akin to reciting a berachah she'inah tzrichah, an unnecessary blessing.(20)
- \* Many people go to sleep in their tallis katan.(21) When that happens, it is questionable whether or not a berachah may be recited over the tallis katan the next morning upon arising.(22)
- \* Sometimes the tallis katan is put on either before daybreak, before using the bathroom or before washing the morning netilas yadayim. If so, the berachah is not recited at that time.(23)
- \* Because of these and other reasons,(24) the blessing of Al mitzvas tzitzis over the tallis katan was

hardly ever recited.(25) Nowadays, however, conditions have changed and several of the reasons mentioned above no longer apply. Contemporary poskim debate whether we should continue a custom which was established long ago, or if the present circumstances warrant changing the custom and reciting a berachah over the tallis katan under the right conditions.(26)

Harav S.Z. Auerbach(27) opined that the custom should not be changed, and those who wear a tallis gadol should have in mind the tallis katan when they recite the berachah over the tallis gadol. Obviously, all those who do not wear a tallis gadol should recite the berachah over the tallis katan at the first possible moment.

The Steipler Gaon, Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky,(28) however, made a distinction between those who go to shul to daven Shacharis as soon as they are dressed and ready, and those who rise early to learn [or recite selichos, etc.] before davening. The first group should not recite a berachah over their tallis katan, since they are going to be reciting the other berachah in short order. The second group, however, who are not going to recite the berachah on the tallis gadol for quite some time, should recite the berachah over the tallis katan.

It seems that the opinion of Harav M. Feinstein was even more inclined toward reciting the berachah over a tallis katan. When asked whether or not to recite a berachah over a tallis katan if there will be a break of twenty minutes between donning the tallis katan and donning the tallis gadol, he answered in the affirmative.(29)

But whichever opinion one follows, a berachah over the tallis katan cannot be recited before misheyakir, which is approximately 45 minutes(30) before sunrise.(31) Nor can the berachah be recited if one has not used the bathroom and washed his hands for the morning netilas yadayim.(32)

In the event that the tallis katan is put on before misheyakir or before using the bathroom and washing the hands, the berachah is deferred(33) until the appropriate time. At that time, there is no need to remove and put on the garment again; simply looking at the strings(34) and touching them(35) is sufficient.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1 The section of string between the hole and the first knot does not count towards the minimum length of the tzitzis strings.

2 O.C. 11:4, based on the measurements of the Chazon Ish. According to the calculations of Harav A.C. Naeh, the length may be no less than 9.5 inches.

3 O.C. 11:14. See Shiurin shel Torah, 6, that the third to two thirds ratio need not be exact.

4 According to the measurements of the Chazon Ish. According to Harav A.C. Naeh, it is about 1.6 inches.

5 O.C. 12:1. It is a Middas chassidus, however, to repair such strings immediately; Eishel Avraham O.C.

12 and Kaf ha-Chayim 12:12. See also Mishnah Berurah 15:3.

6 Depending on the exact method used for attaching the tzitzis to the garment, it is possible that a tallis will remain kosher even if more than one [or even four] string snapped off completely. We refer here to the case where the method is unknown, e.g., a tallis that was bought with the tzitzis already attached to the garment.

7 Mishnah Berurah 12:11;13 and Beur Halachah s.v. v'halchah.

8 Mishnah Berurah 12:13; Chazon Ish O.C. 3:6, 13.

9 Aruch ha-Shulchan 16:5; Hisorerus Teshuvah 3:38. See Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:52-2 for an elaboration.

10 The view of the Gaon of Vilna, as quoted by his disciples; see Keser Rosh 4, and Da'as Torah 16:1. See also Kaf ha-Chayim 16:2 quoting the Arizal.

11 See Mishnah Berurah 16:3; Chazon Ish O.C. 2:9; 3:31.

12 Whether or not the neck opening is included in the minimum size is disputed by the poskim. Mishnah Berurah (8:17; 16:4) holds that it does not count, while Chazon Ish (O.C. 3:30) rules that it does, and that there is no need for stringency on this issue.

13 We have calculated the amah according to the measurements of Igros Moshe O.C. 1:136. According to Chazon Ish, the preferred size is 48 by 24 inches, while according to Harav A.C. Naeh, 38 by 19 inches will suffice.

14 8:17; 16:4.

15 According to Harav A.C. Naeh, the minimum size would be 30 by 15 inches.

16 O.C. 2:9; 3:31. See also Igros Chazon Ish 1:10.

17 Dating back (at least) to the days of the Rama; see Darkei Moshe 8:3. It went on to become universally practiced, both by Ashkenazim and Sefaradim.

18 Mishnah Berurah 8:24.

19 Rama O.C. 25:2 and Mishnah Berurah 11.

20 Mishnah Berurah 8:24; 8:30.

21 As recommended by the Arizal, quoted by Mishnah Berurah 21:15.

22 Mishnah Berurah 8:42.

23 Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:16.

24 See Mishnah Berurah 8:7 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:16.

25 See Tzitzis-Halachah Pesukah 8, note 122, that the Chazon Ish did not recite a berachah over the tallis katan even on Friday afternoon when he put on a fresh tallis katan in honor of Shabbos.

26 See Siyach Halachah 8:47,5-6 for an elaboration of this debate.

27 Halichos Shelomo, Tefillah, 3:10. This is also the opinion of Yechaveh Da'as 5:2, based (in part) on the view of the Eishel Avraham (Tanyana 16) and other poskim who hold that nowadays no berachah is recited over a tallis katan no matter what its size, since adults are embarrassed to be seen in the street wearing such a garment; see Rama 16:1 and Peri Megadim, Mishbetzos, 1.

28 Quoted in Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, 48.

29 Oral ruling heard by Rabbi B. Hirschfeld.

30 There are several views among contemporary poskim as to when, exactly, misheyakir occurs, ranging from 60 to 35 minutes before sunrise.

31 Mishnah Berurah 18:10.

32 Mishnah Berurah 4:60.

33 Alternatively, those who put on a tallis gadol can wait until that time to include the tallis katan.

34 O.C. 24:3.

35 O.C. 8:10. See Igros Moshe O.C. 4:7.

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