

HOW LONG MUST THE TZITZIS STRINGS BE?

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[1] — should be no less than 11.4 inches[2]. 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[3]. 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 shrank, the tallis is still kosher as long as the anaf is at least 1.9 inches[4] long. See tomorrow's Discussion for the details. 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[5].
- 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[6].
- 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 may be recited over it[7].

Note: Our discussion pertains to strings that were cut, got torn or shrank in the anaf portion of the string. However, if 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[8].

Question: What are the correct dimensions for a tallis katan?

Discussion: There is a wide range of views among 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 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 God-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 edge to back edge^[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 one and half amos 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.

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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, who writes 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 commendable, 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) strings 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 and Beiur Halachah, s.v. v'halachah.
 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 in 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.

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