

Customs and Traditions - The Tallit (lit: little tent)



Also referred to as the "prayer shawl." Millions of Jews could not fit into the tabernacle (lit: tent of meeting). This garment would be a way to make a personal sanctuary tent and have privacy with God. One tradition claims that this prayer covering garment goes back to the commandment of God to the children of Israel to wear "tzitzit" (tassels or fringes). One tradition of making these garments is to have 613 knots tied in the fringes to remember the 613 commandments of God. Another traditional way of making these garments is to look more closely at these tassels and their numeric value of the Hebrew letters. The letters spelling "tzitzit" along with their guidelines for arrangement on the garment is interesting.

צ צ' + י' + צ צ' + י' + צ צ'

400	300	200	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	ל	מ	ב	י	ט	ח	ו	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א

Tallit are created following specific guidelines:

- The four fringes must be made of wool (reminding the wearer of the lamb and the four legs of the lamb).
- On these four corners there must be 8 strands tied into 5 knots. Some traditions say that 5 could be symbolic for the 5 books of the law or the first 5 words of the "shema" ([Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#)).
- Notice the numbers: 600 (tzitzit) + 8 (strands) + 5 (knots) = 613! Again, the number of commandments of God found in the Torah.

The Hebrew word for command is *mitsvah* meaning a command, law, ordinance, or precept. When a man would pray, he would lift the prayer shawl from his shoulders and cover his head to make a tent as God said.

When putting on the Tallit the following prayer (which is located on the Atarah - neckband) is said:

Hebrew: **ברוך אתה ה' אלהים מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להתעטף בציצת**

Transliteration: Barukh atah adonai ehlohaynu melekh haolam, asher kied'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzievanu lhiyet'atayf batzitzit

Translation: "Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to wrap ourselves in tzitzit (fringes)."

There are some relevant Bible passages that give insight to this garment. [Psalm 91:1](#) refers to the secret place and the shadow of the Almighty. [Numbers 15:37-41](#) is where God told Moses to have the Israelites put the fringes on their garments. The Hebrew word for fringe (tzitzit or *tsiytsith*) refers to a floral or wing-like projection, a fore-lock of hair, a tassel. These fringes represented the commands and Word of God which the Israelites believed promised healing.

"...If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee." ([Exodus 15:26](#))

"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings;..." ([Malachi 4:2](#))

Many Jewish authorities understand this verse to refer to the coming Messiah wearing a healing tallit.

Does this have any significance to the New Testament?

Yes! Jesus was a Jew (and more specifically a Jewish rabbi). He probably wore this garment. You may recall, the woman with the issue of blood in [Luke 8:43-48](#) who spent all of her life's savings on doctors and still had this blood disease. If you read this story, you will find that she reached and touched the border of Jesus' garment. Jesus said that "virtue is gone out of me." The tallit was a garment, with tassels, worn all of the time, raised over the head for prayer. It represented the commandments and healing of God. It had the appearance of wings when worn on the shoulders and down the arms. Jesus, the "Sun of righteousness ([Malachi 4:2](#))" with "healing in his wings" said "who touched me." See Matthew for this woman's belief:

"For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole" ([Matthew 9:21](#))

One other reference I might mention is the reference to the prayer closet (see [Matthew 6:6](#)). How does one enter into the "prayer closet?" Is it simply, physically, going into another room? Or is there perhaps something more? It could be the raising of the tallit over one's head to make a tent and get ALONE with God! This may be what Jesus had in mind. The point of getting alone with God to pray in secret is a significant idea of what Jesus was communicating during His "Sermon on the Mount." This is an important part of the text as the Word tells us when we pray in secret God rewards us OPENLY ([Matthew 6:4, 6, 18](#) - three times it says "openly" in the text - in the Authorized Version, not most modern translations).

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. ([Matthew 6:6](#))