



Experience the Holy Land

The TALLIT ("little tent")

and

The TZITZIT ("fringe")



The **TALLIT** טלית is a four-cornered rectangular-shaped garment with a **TZITZIT** (Hebrew: ציצית) in each corner. That is the very purpose of this piece of clothing, to hold the **TZITZIYOT** (plural – "fringes" or "tassels"). This garment is also referred to as the "prayer shawl."

Millions of Jews could not fit into the **TABERNACLE** (literally: "tent of meeting") at one time, and this garment would be a way for a person to make a personal sanctuary or "little tent" to have privacy with G-d. The **TALLIT** טלית is normally worn during morning prayers and other special occasions.

One tradition claims that this *prayer-covering* garment goes all the way back to the commandment of G-d through Moses to the children of Israel to wear the **TZITZIT** ציצית (again, "fringe" or "tassel") on their garment borders. The following list of Bible verses makes for an excellent study concerning these fringes on the borders or corners of a garment:

- **HEBREW BIBLE:** Psalm 91:1,4; Numbers 15:37-41; Deuteronomy 22:12; Exodus 15:26; Ruth 3:9; 1 Samuel 15:27; 1 Samuel 24:4-5,11; Malachi 4:2 (in particular, note the usage of the words: "tzitzit" "kanaph" "tekheleth" "mitzvaot" "gedil" "rapha" and "marpe"). These verses (with the Hebrew words noted) are also available for download as a print-ready document. This study really is insightful.
- **NEW TESTAMENT:** Matthew 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:43-48; Mark 5:27; Matthew 9:21; Matthew 6:6; John 11:44; John 20:7; Acts 18:3



In **Numbers 15:37-41** and **Deuteronomy 22:12** G-d (YHVH) commanded Moses for the Children of Israel to put "fringes" on the four corners of their garments. The Hebrew word is **TZITZIT** ציצית which has a numerical value of 600. The tassels have 5 knots and 8 cords which equals 13. If counted, one would find that there are 613 **MITZVOT** מצוות ("commandments") found in the **LAW** or **TORAH** תורה (the first 5 books of the **TANAK** תנ"ך - the Hebrew Bible). It is clear that the **TZITZIT** ציצית is designed to be seen, and when seen, it reminds us to do all the commandments of G-d.

THE 613 LAWS

Though the 10 Commandments are more recognized by most people, they are not the only commandments found in the Bible which G-d gave and expected to be remembered and done. One traditional way of making the tassels on the garments is to have 613 actual knots tied in the fringes to remember the 613 commandments of G-d. Another traditional way of making these garments is to look more closely at these tassels and their numeric value of the Hebrew letters (the assigning of a numerical value to the Hebrew alphabet letters is called *gematria*). The letters spelling **TZITZIT** ציצית along with their guidelines for arrangement on the garment is most interesting. Hebrew reads from right to left and if one were to take all of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and assign numbers to them starting with the first letter to the last according to the following system, some fascinating things can be discovered concerning the **TZITZIT** ציצית and other words (*Answers found at the end of this lesson*).

ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א

As mentioned, the Hebrew word for fringe is: **TZITZIT** ציצית. Do the research. Look up the letters and find their numerical value, then add them up below.

TZITZIT ___ ת + ___ י + ___ צ + ___ י + ___ צ = ___

TALLIT טלית TRADITIONS

The **TALLIT** טלית is normally created following very specific traditional guidelines. It was not to be made of mixed materials (Deuteronomy 22:11; Leviticus 19:19). This could be a representation of "G-d is one" meaning that wearing the **TALLIT** טלית, in itself, is a reminder of the one true G-d. As the wearer raises the **TALLIT** טלית over their head, closing out the world, they can focus their communication with the one G-d in prayer. There are *different* traditions on how, exactly, the **TALLIT** טלית was to be created. Here are some points to consider on the tassels to give you an idea:



- The four fringes would be made of wool (reminding the wearer of the lamb and the four legs of the lamb).
- On these four corners there would 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** שמע (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).
- Notice the numbers: **600** (TZITZIT צִיצִית) + **8** (strands) + **5** (knots) = **613!** Again, the number of commandments of G-d found in the **TORAH** תורה.
- Because the **5** knots are actually **5** pairs of knots, some say that the **10** knots represent the **10** commandments.

The loops between the knots also have customary significant meaning. There is one string that is longer than the rest, called the **SHAMASH** שמש (literally: “helper” “servant” “caretaker”) used to bind or wrap all of the other threads together. The number of **SHAMASH** שמש spirals between the knots is also interesting. One system (**Sephardic** - from Spain/Portugal tradition/ancestry) takes the **SHAMASH** שמש and places **10** loops of knots between the first double knots, then **5** loops of knots, then **6** loops of knots, then **5** loops of knots. **10+5+6+5=26** and corresponds to the numerical value for the sacred personal name of G-d **YHVH** יהוה (LORD - Yod י, He ה, Vav ו, He ה). Another system (**Ashkenazi** - from German tradition/lineage) uses a **7, 8, 11, 13** pattern of loops only between the double knots (as pictured above left and right). In this system the first 2 series of loop numbers are **7+8=15** (the numerical equivalent of the first 2 letters of **YHVH**, Yod י + He ה). Next is loop series **11** (the numerical equivalent of the last two letters of **YHVH**, Vav ו + He ה). This, again, totals the numerical value for the sacred personal name for G-d, **26, YAWEH** יהוה (also called the **Tetragrammaton** “word of four letters”). The last group of **13** loops represents the Hebrew word **ECHAD** אחד or “one” (**1+8+4=13**). So, essentially the loops in this tradition represent the phrase “G-d is one” as found in the **SHEMA** שמע (“hear”).



Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: (Deuteronomy 6:4)

Another system (**Chassidic** – from Eastern Europe tradition) follows the **7, 8, 11, 13** pattern for the loops but further breaks down the **7** loops into *grouped loops of knots, 3+3+1*, the **8** loops into **2+3+3**, the **11** loops into **3+3+3+2**, and the **13** loops into **1+3+3+3+3**. Yet another tradition (**Karaite** – “Readers of Scripture, TANAK”) braids the strands into unique patterns of twists or “chains.” These are some of the common systems for tying the tassels, though not all of the traditions, there are others. In my research, observations, and garments purchased, I have found the **Ashkenazi** arrangement to be the most popular method for creating the fringes. When tying the knots the following is said:

Transliteration: “L’Shem Mitzvat Tzitzit” **Translation:** “for the sake of the commandment of tzitzit”

One other interesting thing I found in my research is the total number of strings being 32 (a set of 4 **TZITZIYOT**) is also the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for “heart” (lev לב **30+2**). Some say that all of the loose strings represent G-d’s “heart” strings. There is a lot of symbolism and numerical representation in the various traditions of the “fringe.” Do the research:

YHVH ____ ה + ____ ו + ____ ה + ____ י = ____

ECHAD ____ ו + ____ ה + ____ א = ____

LEV ____ ב + ____ ל = ____

THE BLUE RIBBON

The **TZITZIT** צִיצִית according to the Bible was to have a **blue** (*tekhelet* תכלת) strand or cord. Over time, Israel’s enemies have repeatedly attacked and attempted to destroy them and their Jewish traditions. It is said that the *chilazone* (certain type of creature from which the dye is made) only appears every 70 years. Some say it is a cuttlefish, others say a certain squid, and yet others say it is a certain snail. Over the years, tradition discontinued the blue cord as the way to make the color from the dye was lost and no Jew was able to fulfill it. Recently, research has rediscovered different possible sources for the dye and the tradition is being revitalized to use the blue cord. The white **TZITZIT** צִיצִית is still the most traditional in Israel and blue coloring is added to the **TALLIT** טלית itself to remember the command (see pictures on the first page).

OTHER TALLIT טלית TRADITIONS

There is a **TALLIT GADOL** גדל טלית (“*big tallit*” – see pictures on first page) worn on shoulders and raised over the head for prayer. There is also a **TALLIT KATAN** קטן טלית (“*small tallit*” – see picture right) worn beneath the clothes but not directly on the skin. There is a **CHUPPAH** (covering held up at the four corners as a canopy during a Jewish wedding).

Esteem is also associated with the garment. The more a **TALLIT** טלית is used, the more respect it has. Sometimes a **TALLIT** טלית is passed on in the family or given as a gift. It is used in special occasions, such as a *circumcision*, a *bar mitzvah* (son of the law), *bat mitzvah* (daughter of the law), *wedding*, or *trip to Israel*, etc. It is also traditional to be buried with one's **TALLIT** טלית. This idea is most interesting (see [John 11:44](#) & [20:7](#): the “napkin”). Attending a synagogue (assembly) would also be an occasion to wear the **TALLIT** טלית.



TALLIT טלית PRAYER (entering the “prayer closet”)

The Hebrew word for **COMMAND** is **MITVAH** מצוה (“*command*” “*law*” “*ordinance*” “*precept*”). When a man would pray, he would lift the “*prayer shawl*” from his shoulders and cover his head to make a tent as G-d had said concerning the **TABERNACLE** (“tent of meeting”).

When putting on the **TALLIT** טלית the following prayer (which is located on the Atarah – “neckband”) is said:

Hebrew: ברוך אתה הי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להתעטף בציצית
Transliteration: *Barukh atah Adonai ehlohaynu melekh haolam, asher kied'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzievanu lhiet'atayf batzitzit*
Translation: “Blessed are You, Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to wrap ourselves in tzitzit.”

TALLIT טלית AND THE BIBLE

There are some other relevant Bible passages that give insight to this garment. [Psalm 91:1, 4](#) refers to the “*secret place*” and the “*shadow of the Almighty*”, “*under his wings*.” [Numbers 15:37-41](#) is where G-d told Moses to have the Israelites put “*fringes*” on the “*borders*” of their “*garments*.” The Hebrew word for *fringe* (ציצית *tzitzit* or *tsiytsith*) refers to a floral or wing-like projection, a fore-lock of hair (as in [Ezekiel 8:3](#)), or a *tassel*. These *fringes* represented the commands found in the Word of G-d which the Israelites believed, if they kept them, would protect from disease for the healthy and promise healing for the ill.

“...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](#))

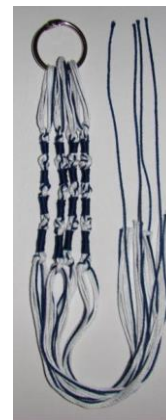
Many Jewish authorities understand this verse to refer to the coming Messiah wearing a healing **TALLIT** טלית:

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

HEBREW BIBLE CONSIDERATIONS

Learning about the **TALLIT** טלית and related traditions that have developed around this garment gives interesting insight into the Bible, as well as teaching opportunities:

1. G-d spoke of a “*secret place*” the “*shadow of the Almighty*” where he would cover with His “*feathers, and under his wings*” ([Psalms 91:1, 4](#)). “*Wings*” is the same word for where the **TZITZIT** ציצית was located.
2. The “*fringes*” go on the “*borders*” or “*four quarters*” to “*remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them*” ([Numbers 15:37-41](#); [Deuteronomy 22:12](#)).
3. Keeping the “*commandments*” of the LORD protected the children of Israel from “*diseases*” and brought “*healing*” ([Exodus 15:26](#)). The **TZITZIT** ציצית represents the commandments of the LORD.
4. Ruth was covered by Boaz’s “*skirt*” ([Ruth 3:9](#)) which is the same word as “*wings*” and “*quarters*.” She was covered by the part of Boaz’s garment that had the **TZITZIT** ציצית on it.
5. Saul tore Samuel’s “*skirt*” ([1 Samuel 15:27](#)) which is the same word as “*wings*” and “*quarters*.” He tore the part with the **TZITZIT** ציצית on it!
6. David cut off a piece of Saul’s “*skirt*” ([1 Samuel 24:4-5, 11](#)) which is the same word as “*wings*” and “*quarters*” where the **TZITZIT** ציצית was located. David didn’t just cut a piece of material; he cut the part that had one of the **TZITZIT** ציצית on it.



- The “Sun of Righteousness” will rise with “healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). “Healing” is a word based on the same Hebrew word used in Exodus 15:26 for “healing” concerning those who keep His commandments and “wings” is the same word where the TZITZIT צִיצִית was located. When resting on one's shoulders the TALLIT טלית looks like wings, interesting comments to be made about the Messiah, eh? The Messiah is going to rise with a garment that has TZITZIT on it which represents the commandments of the LORD which became associated with healing.

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. He certainly would have followed the LAW and the commandment to wear the fringes. 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 טלית was a garment, with tassels, worn all of the time, raised over the head for prayer. It represented the commandments and healing of G-d. 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 get alone with G-d and enter into the “prayer closet” exactly? Is it simply, physically, going into another room? Or is there perhaps something more? It could be the raising of the TALLIT טלית over one's head to make a “little tent” and get ALONE with the one true G-d! This may be what Jesus had in mind. The point of getting alone with G-d to pray in “secret” is a significant idea of what Jesus was communicating during His “Sermon on the Mount.” This SECRETLY/OPENLY idea is an important part of the text as the Word of G-d tells us when we pray in “secret” G-d rewards us “openly” (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18 - three times it says “openly” in the text - at least it does in the Authorized Version, but not most modern translations, look it up and see for yourself).

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)



NEW TESTAMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- Jesus was a servant (like the blue SHAMASH cord).
- Jesus had people who wanted to touch the “hem of his garment” and people were made “whole” (Matthew 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:43-48; Mark 5:27; Matthew 9:21).
- Jesus talked about entering into a prayer “closet” praying in “secret” and being rewarded “openly” (Matthew 6:6).
- Lazarus was buried with a “napkin” (John 11:44). What was this “napkin?”
- Jesus was wrapped in a special burial garment with his grave clothes. He took the time to wrap the “napkin” separately from His grave clothes upon His resurrection (John 20:7). Again, what was this item? Was the “napkin” an esteemed garment of personal use that was buried with the Messiah?
- Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). What kind of tents did he make? Big tents, tabernacles for feasts, or TALLIT טלית “little tents” ???
- Paul performed miracles with “handkerchiefs” (same word as “napkin”) or “aprons.” What was this garment?

These references all use words (Hebrew Bible) or possibly imply (New Testament) references to garments or the place on garments that the TZITZIT צִיצִית went. Knowing this gives those passages of scripture a new picture. What covered Ruth? What did Saul tear? What was David holding up? What did Jesus fold after His resurrection? This garment was left as a testimony to Peter and John. Was it just a piece of any material? It was something that he wore. Jesus was a Jew. He kept the law! There are rich rewards to be obtained by Christians who study their Jewish heritage, the Jewish Messiah.

ANSWERS

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

$$TZITZIT \ 400 \text{ ת} + 10 \text{ י} + 90 \text{ צ} + 10 \text{ י} + 90 \text{ צ} = 600$$

$$YHWH \ 5 \text{ ה} + 6 \text{ ו} + 5 \text{ ה} + 10 \text{ י} = 26$$

$$ECHAD \ 4 \text{ ד} + 8 \text{ ח} + 1 \text{ א} = 13$$

$$LEV \ 2 \text{ ל} + 30 \text{ ל} = 32$$

Article last updated 11/08/08 - by Chuck Louviere, M.Div.
 For this document, holy land related products, information on future trips, resources, and much more, go to: <http://www.holywordcafe.com/tours>