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Name

Tallit

THE MASTER PROPHET
PRAYER SHAWL

ARCHBISHOP E. BERNARD JORDAN

Tallit - The Master Prophet Prayer Shawl

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Chapter 1

UNDERSTANDING THE TALLIT

The Blessing Heads are covered by the Tallit, or prayer shawl; hands are extended out with the fingers splayed to form the shape of the letter Shin, the first letter in the word Shaddai, a name for the Almighty. The chant, in Hebrew, is loud and ecstatic: "May the Lord Bless and keep you."

- Leonard Nimoy

POWER TRUTH

You shall make tassels on the four corners of the cloak with which you cover yourself.

Deuteronomy 22:12

THE ORIGIN

The tallit is one of the religious items that Jews use when they pray and worship God. The origin of this item roots back to the Mosaic period. It is basically, a covering made from wool, cotton or silk. It is a rectangular mantle that is similar to a blanket and the usual color used is white. On its borderline, you will see fringes that are beautifully knotted and twined, known as "tzitzit." Rabbinic sects have different opinions about the material and layout of the tallit, but wool gained a popular use.

The tallit is one of the religious items that Jews use when they pray and worship God.

Tallit Principle No. 1

As a sacred item, wearing the tallit requires guidance from traditions and protocol must be observed. For instance, boys can wear the tallit at the age of thirteen because, in Jewish tradition, thirteen is an age of accountability. In fact, during the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, "the tallit is spread over the children as a canopy"¹ during the ceremony of Torah-reading.

It is a beautiful picture of spiritual legacy to the next generation. In the home, the father can also give a tallit to his son. In other Jewish communities, the tallit can be used as part of the wedding gift or dowry. It signifies the sanctity of marriage. But in rabbinic law, women are not required to wear a tallit when they pray, although for the non-Orthodox Jews, they are encouraged to do so.

In the Old Testament, in Numbers 15:39-40 and Deuteronomy 22:12, we have a clear statement about the origin of the tallit, together with its purpose. Moses said,

"It shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye go not about after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go astray; that ye may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy unto your God." (Numbers 15:39-40 English Standard Version)

¹ Leo Giosuè, "What Is a Tallit?," The Jerusalem Post | JPost.Com, last modified June 18, 2020, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/special-content/what-is-a-tallit-631948>.

THEOLOGICAL VISUAL AID

The tallit serves as a "portable spiritual home"² for a worshipper of Yahweh, whenever and wherever he desires to seek God in prayer. This item should not be compared to an amulet, as if it is a source of spiritual or magical power that protects the user from evil. Instead, the tallit is just an emblem or a visual reminder of God's everlasting commandments.

It is a creative way of inspiring constant faithfulness to Yahweh Adonai. Psychologically, it helps the practitioner pray with focus and solemnly reflect on God's Word with concentration. Interestingly, there are those who use this item for healing. Somehow these practitioners feel that they can use the tallit like an amulet. They believe that in the midst of this evil world, the tallit can be an emblem of God's power and protection that will keep them holy or protected from the evils of the world.

They believe that in the midst of this evil world, the tallit can be an emblem of God's power and protection that will keep them holy or protected from the evils of the world.

Tallit Principle No. 2

As a visual aid, the knots on the tallit carry a deep spiritual truth. Jewish tradition teaches that the knots "symbolize the 613 guidelines for conscious living

²Rabbi Goldie Milgram, "What Is a Tallit? What Do the Fringes Mean? And a Ritual for Tying the Knots," Reclaiming Judaism, accessed October 9, 2020, <http://reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/what-tallit-what-do-fringes-mean-and-ritual-tying-knots>.

through the Mitzvot"³ – the commandments of God. The observance of these commandments should be in thought, word and deed. In fact, the observance of the Mitzvot is connected to the greatest commandment of loving God with all our being, as it also reflects our love for our neighbor.

Moreover, the Jews also formulated a mathematical computation in the tallit that will lead you to the concept of God's oneness and holiness.⁴ This religious code is inspired by the Shema – the declaration that Adonai alone is the true God and the sole object of our worship and trust. Thus, in this sense, the tallit is a theological visual aid that reminds and inspires commitment to a religious Judaic worldview.

SIGN OF DEVOTION

The tallit or described as "tassels on the corners of your garment" is one of the many creative ways of how God communicates spiritual truth to His people (Num. 15:37). It is "a sign of Israel's devotion to God."⁵ It teaches them to separate themselves from paganism or worldliness (Num. 15:38).

**Yahweh still exists and His words still
have the power of command upon
their lives.**

Tallit Principle No. 3

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle*. (Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1996).

To this day, Orthodox Jews still wear and display the fringes as a sign of their devotion to God, that even though we are now in a modern world, God will still fulfill their promises to their fathers. This is very interesting to note, because today, the sect of Islam and the philosophy of atheism have influenced many Jews. Many of them think that the God of their patriarchs has been long gone. Consequently, they also view the Old Testament, particularly the Torah, as no longer applicable to their faith as a nation. Thus, in this psycho-social situation of the Jews, wearing the tallit is a sign of faith and commitment to Adonai as an ever-living God.

Yahweh still exists, and His words still have the power of command upon their lives. Alongside this, Christian theology answers the reason why Adonai is not yet executing His covenant to the nation of Israel in fullness. The reason is twofold: first, when God sent Jesus Christ to them, they rejected Him as their promised Messiah despite the evidence that Jesus showed to them (Jn. 1:10).

Secondly, God is now building a body of people where Jews and Gentiles are united in Christ – this is the Church (Eph. 2:11-15). But after God's dealing with the Church, He will come for the nation of Israel once again and will completely fulfill His promises made to them since the time of Abraham.

DIVINE HEALING

It reminds them of God's promise to
heal if they obey His word.

Tallit Principle No. 4

In the Jewish mindset, there is a connection between the tallit and healing. It's a common practice among the Jews to use the tallit to cover a part of their body that feels pain or has a disease.⁶ This is inspired by one of the promises of Yahweh Adonai in the Mosaic Law, which is to heal them from their diseases (Exod. 15:26). If obeying God's commandment brings blessings – which is the symbolic essence of the tallit – therefore, one of the inherent blessings signified in the tallit is physical healing. It reminds them of God's promise to heal if they obey His word.

God saw the effort of her faith and she
got her desire for healing.

Tallit Principle No. 5

In the New Testament, this is beautifully illustrated in the scenario where a woman had to touch the hem or fringe of Jesus' garment, believing that by doing so, it would heal her (Matt. 9:20-22). That woman had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years, but with one touch of Jesus' garment, she was completely healed. And according to Jesus, her healing was because "your faith has made you well" (Matt. 9:22).

In other words, there is no magical power in the fringes of Jesus' garment. Like any other garment, it was just a normal piece of cloth. Yet, the woman was specifically reaching for the fringe of Jesus' garment because that fringe symbolizes God's promises of blessings to those who hold on to His word. Again, we must remember that the Jews were commanded by God to make fringes on their garments and it became their long-standing tradition.

**God saw the effort of her faith and she
received her desire of healing.**

Tallit Principle No. 6

⁶Rabbi Goldie Milgram, "What Is a Tallit? What Do the Fringes Mean? And a Ritual for Tying the Knots," *Reclaiming Judaism*, accessed October 9, 2020, <http://reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/what-tallit-what-do-fringes-mean-and-ritual-tying-knots>.

We assume then that Jesus had also worn a garment with tzitzit or fringes on the bottom of it. The woman had to stoop down to the ground so she can touch the tzitzit. It was actually a risky move for her because Jesus was in the middle of the crowd. She could have been accidentally stepped on by people, yet she reached for it, believing in God's power to heal through Jesus. God saw the effort of her faith and she received her desire of healing.

SKY PEOPLE

Based on the biblical instructions, the tallit should become a regular part of a Jewish outfit. It should be worn all day.⁷ It is supposedly part of their casual dress "throughout all generations" (Num. 15:37). But today, many Jews feel impractical to wear a tallit because it is old fashioned and symbolically sacred for them.⁸

Thus, this regular dress of their forefathers has been used only for special occasions or during a religious feast. Moreover, secularism has pervaded the nation of Israel today and has forgotten the spiritual legacy of their biblical forefathers. As a result, many of them view the tallit as a traditional or cultural dress without regard for its spiritual meaning. Of course, it is a different story from the side of the Orthodox Jews, which is traditionalist or conservative when it comes to Judaism. As a modern alternative to the tallit, they developed a "poncho-like garment."⁹

⁷ "Tallit: The Jewish Prayer Shawl," last modified July 6, 2007, accessed October 9, 2020, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/530124/jewish/Tallit-The-Jewish-Prayer-Shawl.htm.

⁸ Ibid

In biblical times, the blue wool in the tallit was called "tekhelet." It is a hallmark of nobility and in line with tallit's purpose of reminding the Jew that he is a member of God's kingdom of priest.

Tallit Principle No. 7

In this garment, they made a beautiful style of fringes or tzitzit on its four corners. They call this garment "arba kanfot" or four corners.¹⁰ Somehow, through this, they can still show their religious belief to the world without sacrificing fashion. One of the colors of the fringes in the arba kanfot is blue. In biblical times, this blue wool in the tallit was called "tekhelet." It is a "hallmark of nobility and in line with tallit's purpose of reminding the Jew that he is a member of God's kingdom of priest."¹¹ Indeed, it is a beautiful signification of their spiritual identity as sky people or heavenly-minded people.

MODIFICATIONS

Jewish persecutions have made the tallit and the tzitzit to undergo some modifications from the biblical command.

Tallit Principle No. 8

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

Jewish persecutions have made the tallit and the tzitzit to undergo some modifications from the biblical command. For instance, during the Middle Ages, when the Jews were scattered throughout the Gentile world, showing the fringes or tzitzit on their personal garments would have meant subjecting themselves to persecution and danger.¹²

As a response, they modified their custom and decided that they would only wear the tallit and tzitzit when they are in the synagogue. But after times of harsh persecution, the Orthodox Jews felt to revive the spirit of the biblical custom by wearing an undergarment that carries the fringes. They call it "tallit katan." They wear this garment during their waking hours.¹³ But before wearing it, they hold it first with both hands as they recite the Hebrew blessing that says:

"Blessed are thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who has sanctified us by his commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves in the fringes."

**Indeed, such a habit will always make
you aware of the presence of God.**

Tallit Principle No. 9

¹² Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle*. (Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1996).

¹³ *Ibid*

Indeed, such a habit will always make you aware of the presence of God. Wearing the symbolism of "*mitzvah*" or divine commandments on your garment is a sanctifying habit. In the Old Testament, there was a prophecy that relates to this dress-code. In Zechariah 8:23, it says,

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: In those days, ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'" (English Standard Version)

This verse shows that God is the One who will restore the tallit custom in its original biblical form. On that day, the Jews will no longer fear persecution or be ashamed of their religious conviction, because God will redeem them and prove to the world that their God is alive and the true, ever-living God. From the Christian point of view, this will happen at the time of Christ's Second Coming.



Chapter 2

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TALLIT

*No duty is more earnestly impressed upon us in Scripture than the duty of
continual communion with Him.*

- David McIntyre

POWER TRUTH

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak,
Matthew 9:20

ALIYAH

When Jews gather for congregational prayer, all men will wear a tallit and begin to recite the phrase: "O bring us in peace from the four corners of the earth." After this, the worshipper gathers the four fringes of the tallit together in his left hand.¹⁴ This prayer is called "Aliyah." It is related to the Jewish diaspora when Jews were scattered abroad into the four corners of the earth due to persecution.

By praying the Aliyah, a Jew is asking Yahweh Adonai to give him peace and provision on his way to the Promised Land, particularly to the city of

Jerusalem, the city of the King. It is a prayer that asks God to visit His people and fulfill the promised shalom or peace to the city of Jerusalem, which will become the center of messianic reign on earth. Moreover, in this congregational prayer, they also recite the "Shema" or the declaration that Yahweh Adonai is the one and only true Lord. Then they also read Numbers 15:37-41 while kissing the tzitzit three times, holding it up to view or pressing it to their eyes.¹⁵

**It is a prayer that asks God to visit His
people and fulfill the promised shalom
or peace to the city of Jerusalem,
which will become the center of
messianic reign on earth.**

Tallit Principle No. 10

¹⁴ Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*. 1st ed. (The Jewish Publication Society, 2004).

¹⁵Ibid

This ritual is an expression of their love and devotion to Adonai. They know that their diaspora was caused by their disobedience to Yahweh's command. But this elaborate ritual will always remind them of their solemn duty to seriously put God's Word into their hearts. The lesson is: the essence of peace is obedience to God. But obedience will happen if God's Word is in the heart and is always the focus of the eyes. God knows this, and so in instituting the tallit dress, He said,

"You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes." (Numbers 15:37-38 English Standard Version)

TALLIT OF GOD

The color of the tallit is theologically inspired. Typically made of wool or cotton, the tallit is usually white, based on the description of the Talmud that says God wraps Himself in a tallit.¹⁶ Also, in Daniel 7:9, the vision of Daniel told us that the garment of the Messiah "was like white snow." But in AD 70, when Jerusalem was sieged and the Temple was destroyed, the Jews intentionally changed the color of the tallit by putting black stripes as a

color of mourning for the loss of the Temple.¹⁷ As an alternative, in the kabbalistic system, some tallits are made of various colors inspired by theological symbolism or aesthetic preference.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the white color is fit for the biblical image of God's holiness and glory. God Himself is wrapped by pure glory, which is called the Shekinah glory. No wonder the rabbis believe that the "essential part of wearing the tallit is being enwrapped in it."¹⁹ This entails that the head is also covered, particularly when a worshipper recites the phrase, "who has commanded us to wrap ourselves in the fringed garment." ²⁰

Covering the head is a symbolic act of devotion to God.

Tallit Principle No. 11

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

Covering the head is a symbolic act of devotion to God. It is a way to "eliminate distractions and increase concentration"²¹ to the word of Yahweh. Thus, most Jews prefer to pray with their heads covered with the tallit, particularly when they recite the Shema, Amidah, and Kedushah. In the Talmud, in relation to God who also wraps Himself in a tallit, "being enfolded by the tallit is regarded as being surrounded by the holiness of the commandments of the Torah."²² It means total obedience to the divine will as your preoccupation, purpose, and source of joy. It is a means to be closer to God's presence.

HOLY CODE

When it comes to religious practice, it should be noted that the modern Jewish identity is a complex group of people that can be divided into various groups. In other words, many contemporary Jews do not practice the tallit commandment of Numbers 15:37-41. In fact, the tallit is socially sensitive, and only those who believe in the modern applicability of the Torah practice the ritual.²³ Also, not only modern fashion trends frustrate the relevance of this commandment, but modern Israel is far different from their biblical origin.

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Paul Joseph De Mola, "Tallit," Ancient History Encyclopedia, last updated June 3, 2013, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.ancient.eu/Tallit/>.

The conservatives formulated a holy code embedded in the tallit and tzitzit so they can preserve the Mosaic legacy and highlight their spiritual identity as a chosen nation.

Tallit Principle No. 12

Sociopolitically speaking, many of them are not religiously conservative in relation to Tanakh – the Old Testament teaching. But to the Conservative group, the tallit is an ever-relevant expression of faith to Yahweh from generation to generation (Num. 15:38). The conservatives formulated a holy code embedded in the tallit and tzitzit so they can preserve the Mosaic legacy and highlight their spiritual identity as a chosen nation. For example, they mathematically fashioned the tzitzit according to the 613 commandments in the Torah. The white linen and blue cloth in the tzitzit are tied exactly according to this number. The Torah is mathematically signified in the fringes, while the special blue color points back to the sacred vesture of the Levitical High Priest.²⁴ Simply put, the code shows the holiness of the Torah and the duty of Israel to uphold it in their affection and attention (Num. 15:37).

²⁴ Ibid

In Christian theology, obedience to God's Word always connects to one's perception of God's holiness. In other words, people will find it hard to obey divine precepts or the mitzvah if they don't know and feel the weight of divine holiness in it. In the beatitudes, it is said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Thus, without sanctifying the Lord in your heart and eyes, you will never appreciate the beauty of His commandments.

THEOCRACY

In its biblical form, the tallit was a simple and regular garment for common people, though rich in spiritual meaning. Before the monarchical period, the government of Israel under Moses and priesthood leadership was theocratic – God was their king. In the book of Leviticus, the color of royalty is blue, which is seen in Levitical garments.²⁵ No wonder that even in the tallit dress, the blue color played a special signification. It refers not only to the holiness of God's Word and to Israel's heavenly focus but to God's theocratic rule itself.²⁶

**In the book of Leviticus, the color
of royalty is blue, which is seen in
Levitical garments.**

Tallit Principle No. 14

²⁵ Rich Robinson, "The Tallit and Tzitzit," Jews For Jesus, last modified January 1994, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/newsletter/newsletter-sep-1993/the-tallit-and-tzitzit>.

²⁶ Ibid

In other words, wearing the tallit shows one's submission to Yahweh as his Adonai King. Hence, part of the ritual observance of the tallit until today is to recite the Shema. Shema is the essence of Israel's devotion. It says,

'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.'
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5 English Standard Version)

This is the rule of law that should bind Israel's heart and mind. It is their philosophy for living; the absolute basis of judging what is right and wrong. Of course, based on biblical history, Israel, as a nation, failed to fulfill the spirit of the tallit. As a result, God judged them many times and in so many ways. In fact, even now, they are still under God's judgment because they rejected the Great High Priest who came to them more than 2,000 years ago – Jesus of Nazareth. In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews explains the issue between the Old and New Testament. But right now, God temporarily postponed His program for the nation of Israel and started to build a new kind of people; that is, "a chosen generation and a royal priesthood," which is the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9).

In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews explains the issue between the Old and New Testament.

Tallit Principle No. 15

NATIONALISM

There is Jewish nationalism signified in the tzitzit.²⁷ If you remember the story in the book of Exodus, Israel became a slave-nation under Egypt. At that time, Egypt was the center of "Gentile globalism"²⁸ and the superpower of the ancient world. Yet Israel at that time didn't have any sociopolitical resources that would help them to free themselves from the political craftiness and shackles of Egypt. But then God called and supernaturally empowered Moses to perform miraculous feats, and in the end, he was able to deliver and lead Israel out of Egypt. Under Moses' leadership, God started to build a nation according to His promise to Abraham. God gave many unique and creative commandments to Israel that set them apart from the Gentile world. One of them was the tallit dress code. It was given in the context of Israel's independence from Egypt and from any other nation.

In fact, "archaeological evidence from the Bar Kokhba Period (CE 132-136) reveals that zealots were wearing tzitzit during their war of liberation from Roman occupation."²⁹ But again, this is not surprising, because the meaning contained in the tallit is highly theocentric. It calls for total submission to the divine lordship that makes Israel distinct from any other nation. As people delivered by God from Egypt, they had been given a new identity and service. To call Israel as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation," was a revolution (Exod. 19:6). They were the only nation in the ancient world that had

²⁷ Paul Joseph De Mola, "Tallit," *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, last updated June 3, 2013, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.ancient.eu/Tallit/>.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

been given this title and identity. And God assured them that if they were faithful to His Word and if they sustained their nationalism as God's people, the Lord would make them a great nation around the world (Deut. 4:6).

The meaning contained in the tallit calls for total submission to the divine lordship that makes Israel distinct from any other nation.

Tallit Principle No. 16

MORAL PHILOSOPHY

It is now clear to us in this study that the tallit and the tzitzit are symbols for God's commandments. It calls for devotion; that is, to love the Lord with all of one's heart, mind, soul and strength. When reading the book of Exodus, it should be noted that the tallit commandment was given with the Ten Commandments in the background, and it is connected to the motivation of the Shema's blessing in Deuteronomy 6. In other words, the tallit also serves as a foundation of moral conviction and philosophy for Israel. In Numbers 15:39, God warned Israel about spiritual compromise due to entertaining and embracing pagan worldviews. However, the tallit will always remind Israel of the only truth that they should believe and embrace – that is that Yahweh alone is the true and only God.³⁰

³⁰ "Tallit: The Jewish Prayer Shawl," last modified July 6, 2007, accessed October 9, 2020, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/530124/jewish/Tallit-The-Jewish-Prayer-Shawl.htm.

It calls for devotion; that is, to love the Lord with all of one's heart, mind, soul and strength.

Tallit Principle No. 17

The tallit commandment is concluded with a theological emphasis on God's redemptive historical move upon the nation of Israel. He said, "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD your God" (Num. 15:41). In other words, Israel's deliverance from Egypt should inspire them to dedicate their lives to the powerful God who gave them freedom. One of the ways by which they could show their dedication to Yahweh was by wearing the dress-code that God Himself designed for them. But take note, although the tallit commandment calls them to dedication, it's also a means by which God can protect them from pagan ideologies. God knew that His chosen people had the tendency to compromise due to sociopolitical ambitions (Num. 15:39). But God, through daily reminders, can discipline them to have a mind and heart that follows the will of God.



Chapter 3

MOSAIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE TALLIT

*Our lives are unique stones in the mosaic of human existence —
priceless and irreplaceable.*

- Henri Nouwen

POWER TRUTH

Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner.

Numbers 15:38

SPIRITUALITY

In the Jewish style of prayer, it has become a popular practice for the worshipper to cover his head using the tallit. There was a "mystical explanation"³¹ inspired by the Zohar teaching for doing this. The Zohar is a group of Jewish commentary books that deals with the mystical aspects of the Torah. Concerning praying using the tallit, it teaches that "when a man stands at prayer, he should keep his feet together and cover his head as one who stands before a king."³² He should

³¹ Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*. 1st ed. (The Jewish Publication Society, 2004).

³² *Ibid*

also cover his eyes so as not to look at the Shekinah glory of God. This Shekinah glory refers to the bright and shining holiness of God that the Israelites saw on the Tabernacle during the time of Moses (Exod. 40:38). Hence, praying while the head is covered with the tallit is a symbolic expression of one's humility before a holy God. It is an acknowledgment of one's sinfulness, weakness, and humanness that apart from the protective covering of the tallit, one will perish at the sight of God's shining glory—the Shekinah.

It is an acknowledgment of one's sinfulness, weakness, and humanness, that apart from the protective covering of the tallit, one will perish at the sight of God's shining glory—the Shekinah.

Tallit Principle No. 18

Moreover, another reason why Jews covered their heads with the tallit during prayer is to remind them of the supreme importance of the mitzvah or the holy commandments. Practically speaking, when we come to the Lord, we are oftentimes immersed in our prayer requests than in the will of God. Praying with the tallit on the head reminds us of our spiritual priority. In Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, when the Temple was built, Solomon reminds the worshipper,

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few. (English Standard Version)

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

Like many religious objects of Old Testament times, the tallit garment was not unique to Israel. Archeological findings tell us that "fringed garments were also found in non-Hebrew cultures such as Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Midianite."³³ They also put fringes on their garments either as "decorations or amulets to keep away evil spirits."³⁴ But "God took the already known and gave it a new significance for Israel."³⁵ Hence, although pagan nations were familiar with fringed garments, the religious meaning placed on it was far different. For Israel, the fringes on their garments remind them of the God of the Abraham, the One who delivered them from the powers of Egypt and gave them the Mosaic Law. But perhaps what made the tallit of Israel different from the fringed garments of other nations was its color.

³³ Rich Robinson, "The Tallit and Tzitzit," Jews For Jesus, last modified January 1994, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/newsletter/newsletter-sep-1993/the-tallit-and-tzitzit>.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

The fringes or tzitzit of Israel's garment was blue. This color is very rich in its theological significance.

Tallit Principle No. 19

The fringes or tzitzit of Israel's garment was blue. This color is very rich in its theological significance. It usually highlights the kingship of God. Blue was the cover of the ark and other tabernacle objects (Num. 4:6). "Blue was also used with the curtains of the tabernacle where God dwelt enthroned between the cherubim."³⁶ With this picture, you will get the theological context of Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance when kings of Assyria gathered together with the main purpose of sieging Jerusalem. In his desperation, King Hezekiah prayed,

"O Lord of host, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdom of the earth; you have made heaven and earth." (Isaiah 37:16 English Standard Version)

Hence, the blue color points to the reality of God's sovereignty. When the Israelites see this color in the tabernacle and on their tallit dress, it reminds them that their God is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

³³ Rich Robinson, "The Tallit and Tzitzit," Jews For Jesus, last modified January 1994, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/newsletter/newsletter-sep-1993/the-tallit-and-tzitzit>.

THE REPORT OF SPIES

Strengthening one's faithfulness to the Word of God is the practical purpose of the tallit dress.

Tallit Principle No. 19

Strengthening one's faithfulness to the Word of God is the practical purpose of the tallit dress. As an ornament, the display of tzitzit is to remind the worshipper "to observe all of the commandments of the Lord and to guard against the sin of unbelief."³⁶ This was the sin that marked the report of the spies in Numbers chapter 13. In a creative sense, it teaches God's people 'how' to be faithful to God. Take note of what God said to Israel,

"And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to where after."
(Num. 15:39)

It was the Lord's order that commissioned them to spy out the land of Canaan, and Moses encouraged them to "be of good courage" whatever they see in the land
(Num. 13:1-32).

Tallit Principle No. 20

In this verse, the phrase "not follow after your own heart" should be translated "not to spy after your own heart." Again, the historical background of this word goes back to the "bad report" that the spies gave to the nation of Israel after their forty days of espionage in the land of Canaan. It was the Lord's order that commissioned them to spy out the land of Canaan, and Moses encouraged them to "be of good courage" whatever they see in the land (Num. 13:1-32).

In fact, the spies saw many good things in the land. The agricultural condition was very fertile that they were right to describe Canaan as the land that "flows with milk and honey." (Num.13:27). However, when they saw the giants and military men in that land, many of them doubted and discouraged the people of Israel. Thus, their unbelief prevailed over their faith. It was only Caleb who believed that they could conquer the land with the help of the Lord. This is the historical context implied in the tallit commandment. It reminds the people of Israel to fix their eyes on the presence and power of the Lord, not on the difficulty of the situations.

³⁷ "The Tallit Gadol." Hebrew for Christians. Accessed October 12, 2020. https://hebrew4christians.com/Blessings/Synagogue_Blessings/Donning_Tallit/Tallit-Blessing.pdf

³⁸ Ibid

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Tallit Principle No. 22

KEY TO POLITICS

The tallit is an expression of the Jewish worldview or the summation of their life's philosophy. In the Old Testament, wisdom is described as the practical application of the Word of God in all areas of life. The source of this wisdom comes from the mitzvah—divine commandments. Its blessings are experienced by obedience. Thus, the tallit serves as a tangible and creative reminder about the foundation of Jewish moral and religious philosophy. God said to them,

"Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deuteronomy 4:6 English Standard Version).

Despite plain and simple cloth, the tallit bears a very significant religious conviction for the Jewish people. It is the core and essence of their wisdom. It is the key that will make their nation "great" in the world. According to Numbers 15:40, the tallit garment should become a regular and strong reminder for the people of

God to "remember and do all my commandments and be holy to your God" (Num. 15:40). Thus, if only they had been faithful to Yahweh, they should have become the center of prosperity and power on earth today. Unlike the game of politics among pagan nations, the basis of Israel's prosperity and power was holiness unto the Lord.

Holiness expressed in obedience to God's Word was the force that would have made them great over the nations.

Tellit Principle No. 23

Holiness expressed in obedience to God's Word was the force that would have made them great over the nations. Yet, they failed to do this not only in biblical history but even now in their recent sociopolitical condition. How ironic that this nation chosen by God has failed to believe and obey their scripture, and the high cost was their national downfall.³⁹

³⁹ "Judaism: Beliefs and Teachings." Finalsite.Net. Accessed October 12, 2020. <https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1553546871/sydenhamlewishamschuk/lkerv1ziw7ogdo7kt6rl/Religious18-pt5.pdf>

THE GOLDEN RULE

"And it shall be a tassel for you to look at... So you shall remember and do all my commandments" (Num. 15:39-40). The Hebrew word for "commandments" here is *mitzvah*. It is difficult to find a word in English that really translates this word because it has more than one meaning.⁴⁰ The Talmud calculates that there are 613 commandments (*mitzvah*) in the Torah that are creatively represented in the number of knots on the tallit. Yet because of these numbers, the Jews oftentimes find it confusing and difficult to obey the *mitzvah*. They are, of course, encouraged to read the Torah but to memorize the so-called 613 commandments so you can obey them all is really unrealistic, if not legalistic.

The Talmud calculates that there are 613 commandments (*mitzvah*) in the Torah that are creatively represented in the number of knots on the tallit.

Tallit Principle No. 24

Today, it is impossible to keep all 613 commandments because many of them are "connected with religious practices in the Temple, which has been destroyed."⁴¹ Thus, there are Jews who rightly believe that some of the commandments are "no longer compatible with twenty-first-century life."⁴² So to simplify the issue, the question is asked: What is the essence or foundation of the 613 commandments?

What is the fundamental principle that will help a person to fulfill them all? This concern is not modern, because in the Gospels, there were also Jews who asked Jesus about the essence of the Mosaic Law. What is the hinge that holds the whole Law? Hillel, who was a great rabbi of the first century, answered this question by saying: "That which is hateful unto you do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole of the Torah; the rest is commentary. Go forth and study."⁴³ It seems that Jesus adapted this and gave his own golden rule: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

It seems that Jesus adapted this and gave his own golden rule: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

Tallit Principle No. 25

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

THE BLESSINGS OF "TAL"

Etymologically speaking, the word "tallit" does not occur in the Torah. Only its root word *tal* is mentioned, which is very rich in meaning. The Jews used the word "tallit" because they wanted to relate the rich meaning of *tal* to the symbolism of their dress code. There are three meanings attached to the word *tal*. The first one is "to cover over."⁴⁴ For instance, Ruth asked Boaz to "cover" her with his garment because he was a near kinsman (Ruth 3:9). The cultural significance of covering here means protection and redemption. This is exactly the symbolism expressed in the tallit commandment. It is related to Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

The Jews used the word "tallit" because they wanted to relate the rich meaning of *tal* to the symbolism of their dress code.

Tallit Principle No. 26

The second meaning is "dew." It actually "alludes to the morning dew in the wilderness that was accompanied by manna."⁴⁵ Numbers 11:9 describes it for us. It says, "When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it." In other words, just like the morning dew, the camp of Israel was covered with manna. God completely provided for their daily needs. This picture of God's provision gave them a "theology of morning" in the Psalms. For instance, the psalmist sings, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns" (Ps. 46:5). When everything seems out of place and the light of hope is not seen, they can still sing like Jeremiah: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23-24).

Thirdly, the word *tal* also carries the idea of unity.⁴⁶ That is to say, if Israel as a nation will knit their hearts together in faithful obedience to God's commandments, the favor of the Lord will be poured out upon them.

⁴⁴ Leo Giosuè, "What Is a Tallit?," The Jerusalem Post | JPost.Com, last modified June 18, 2020, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/special-content/what-is-a-tallit-631948>.

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid



Chapter 4

SPIRITUALITY IN THE TALLIT

Spirituality manifests in countless outer forms ... underneath these outward forms, there is a common longing for the sacred, a universal desire to touch and celebrate the mystery of life. It is in the depths of the soul that one discovers the essential and universal dimensions of spirituality.

– David N. Elkins

POWER TRUTH

And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Mark 6:56

A HEART WITHOUT TALLIT

The first step toward change is awareness. Awareness comes from knowledge of the truth, particularly the Word of God. When God gave to Israel the tallit commandment, one of the practical purposes of that item was to heighten their awareness of His presence and truth. As part of their regular dress, it boosts their obligation to obey the Law as a philosophy of their living.⁴⁷ Yet biblical history shows us that this religious item

⁴⁴ Alan Carr, "The Breakfast of Champions (Num. 14:6–9)." In *The Sermon Notebook: Old Testament*, 552–555. (Alan Carr, 2015).

was not effective to bring them closer to the Lord. Since the time of Moses until the time of the last Old Testament prophet, Israel had always been a covenant-breaker. But does this mean that the tallit commandment was not creative and effective enough to bring them closer to the Lord? Was it a mistake on God's part to give them such a religious item? Of course, God never commits a mistake; His ways are always perfect, wise, and good.

The tallit was undoubtedly a very creative and effective item that would surely help Israel experience communion with God.

Tallit Principle No. 27

The tallit was undoubtedly a very creative and effective item that would surely help Israel experience communion with God. Yet, they lost the spiritual significance of the tallit because their hearts were far away from God.⁴⁸ They were good performers of the ritual but not faithful followers of the Law. Thus, the problem was not in their garment but in their heart. They forgot the basic truth that "the Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). They have forgotten that Yahweh is Spirit, and those who worship Him should worship in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24). They thought that just wearing the tallit and looking at its fringes will earn them favor from God. But no, God has always been looking for our hearts.

⁴⁸ Ibid

THE TALLIT IS DIVISIVE

The Mosaic tallit was a God-centered religious item that regularly instructed the children of Israel to have a high view of God as the sovereign Creator and their Redeemer. As noted in the previous chapters, covering one's head with the tallit is a symbol of absolute submission to Yahweh. It also "emphasizes that God's presence covers that person's life, much like when God's presence covers the Tabernacle." Hence, in the context of ancient Israel, who was surrounded by pagan nations, the tallit will straighten and refocus their view of God. It is for this reason why the tallit commandment is closely linked to the Ten Commandments.

There is only one God, the true and ever-living God, and His name is Yahweh.

Tallit Principle No. 28

If you remember, the first five commandments strongly prohibit Israel from worshiping other gods or from comparing Yahweh to pagan gods. There is only one God, the true and ever-living God, and His name is Yahweh. God Himself emphasized this in the tallit commandment by repeatedly saying, "I am the LORD." In this text, there is a reason why "LORD" is capitalized. Our Bible translators want us to see the original emphasis of the Hebrew passage. When God says, "I am the LORD," it simply means that there is no other god beside Him. Yahweh is the only God, and any religion that is not founded or established by Him is a false religion. Therefore, the tallit commandment and the symbolism of the garment teach of the exclusivity of the biblical God.

⁴⁹ Ibid

The Shema is the declaration that there is only one true religion—the biblical religion.

Tallit Principle No. 29

In this present age of religious pluralism, it is intolerable for people to hear the Shema. The Shema is the declaration that there is only one true religion—the biblical religion. Thus, the tallit is a very divisive commandment and symbolism. But the division that it causes is positive and essential because it gives us clear knowledge of what is a true and false religion.

THREE ETERNAL TRUTHS IN THE TALLIT

As an ancient religious garment, the tallit in its original form is no longer applicable as a regular dress today. Christians are actually under no obligation to follow the tallit commandment. However, although the ritual is no longer applicable for us today, its spiritual value is timelessly relevant. The spiritual truth of the tallit should penetrate our soul and lead us to a life pleasing to God.⁵⁰ There are at least three fundamental truths signified in the tallit.⁵¹

First, the tallit reminds us of God's sovereignty. The act of covering the head and the shoulders with the tallit is a visual representation that God is always above us. Our God is a mighty God; he is the King of

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

the universe, and nothing in this world happens—even in the lives of His children—that He does not know or brought by His permission and approval. There is a solid reason why we can rest assured that all things can work together for our good (Rom. 8:28). It's all because we have a sovereign God whose wisdom and goodness will never fail His children.

Our God is a mighty God; he is the King of the universe, and nothing in this world happens—even in the lives of His children—that He does not know or brought by His permission and approval.

Tallit Principle No. 30

Secondly, covering the head with the tallit is an act of humility.⁵² We acknowledge that God is holy and we are sinful. In other words, we need a Mediator who will cover us by His mercy. No wonder there is a mercy seat in the Tabernacle, because ever since the fall of man, he needs a mediator who stands for and beside him before the Holy God (Exod. 25:17). Third, as a symbol of divine law, the tallit reminds us of God's call to commit our lives to His holy will. It is an invitation to our hearts to believe and cherish the will of God as the source of true joy, peace, and blessings.

⁵² Ibid

HEBREW MINDSET IN THE TALLIT

The possibility that Jesus wore a tallit is highly likely. There are scenarios in the Gospels that prove this. But to appreciate the significance of Jesus wearing a tallit, it is important to understand the difference between what is called Greek and Hebrew mindset.⁵³ Surely, they have their own "way of thinking about life, about God, and about Truth."⁵⁴ For instance, in Hebrew, the concept of God is an easy concept. They see God as their Creator, the God of their historic ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But when you put the concept of God to the Greeks, they are more prone to be atheistic or agnostic. No wonder that when Apostle Paul went to the Gentile world to preach the gospel, more of his theological challenge was to bring the Gentiles into the Judeo-Christian worldview.

**They see God as their Creator, the God
of their historic ancestors—Abraham,
Isaac, and Jacob.**

Tallit Principle No. 31

⁵³"Where does it say Yeshua wore a tallit?" The Refiner's Fire. Accessed October 14, 2020. https://www.therefinersfire.org/yeshua_wore_tallit.htm

⁵⁴ Ibid

Thus, in light of these two different ways of thinking, when a Gentile reader tries to read the Gospels, their Greek mindset will let them interpret the tallit of Jesus as a tattoo or slogan. In other words, it is an abstract idea that is free to whatever interpretation. However, for the Hebrews, they see the tallit in a more realistic way. It is more than a symbol but a concrete reality in space and time. In other words, it points to historical, practical, and eschatological facts. That is why it is not surprising how they viewed the Temple as a concrete place for God's presence. The Greeks will see the Temple as a divine emblem and symbol, but for the Jews, it was an actual place where God's presence truly resides. In the same way, when it comes to tallit, they view it as an embodiment of the Torah, God's covenant, and the eschatological reality that someday the Messiah will come to them as their mighty deliverer.

ONE IMPORTANT THING

At this point, it is profitable to expound more on the significance of the tallit as a visual reminder of our commitment to Yahweh. In 1493, when the Jews were suffering persecution due to racial anti-Semitism, the Jews in Sicily were despoiled of all their possession and expelled from their homes. But before leaving the island, they petitioned the authorities if they could allow them to bring their prayer shawls (tallit) with them. Unfortunately, their petition was refused.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Millgram, Rabbi Abraham. "The Tallit: Spiritual Significance." My Jewish Learning. Accessed October 24, 2020. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-tallit-spiritual-significance/>

God has given them a lot of promises that wait for fulfillment.

Tallit Principle No. 32

For us who are not Jews, who do not have a religious heritage of historic divine revelation like the Torah and divine covenants, it is easy for us to take for granted or neglect such religious items. In the first place, by a cursory reading of the Bible, the nation or people highlighted in it are the Jewish people. In fact, this emphasis was the very reason why various anti-Semitic persecutions arose. There are just those kinds of people who cannot take the fact that Jews are special people by virtue of God's election and promises.

Of course, the New Testament provides a way for the Gentile people to share in the blessings God has promised to Israel. Nevertheless, no one can deny the fact that the Bible is Jewish-centered. God has given them a lot of promises that wait for fulfillment. Christians, of course, claim that many of the promises and prophecies in the Old Testament are fulfilled in and by Christ. That's why Christians don't usually wear a tallit because he possesses the spiritual significance of that item—Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:14). But for the Jews who are still waiting for their Messiah, every sacred ritual in their Torah is important. They can still carry on living and move forward even if the world is against them as long as they have the foundation, the emblem, and symbol of their identity as a chosen nation of God.

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Tallit Principle No. 33

ILLUSTRATION FOR POWERFUL PRAYER

The tallit is a very good illustration of a powerful prayer. According to the Midrash, wrapping oneself with tallit during prayer helps the worshipper "to focus on God with a proper mood of reverence and a prayerful spirit."⁵⁶ The Midrash is the ancient textual interpretation of the Torah by Judaic authorities. They were biblical exegetes. As lovers of the Torah, they were committed to scriptural prayer inspired by the tallit commandment. Since the tallit essentially refers to the Torah, they deduced that the kind of prayer that God loves to hear is the one that claims and exalts His word. Thus, effective prayer comes from scripture. Apart from scripture, there is no power in prayer.

Powerful prayer is praying the Word of God back to Him. It is filling our minds and hearts with His Word so that our mouths declare His will as we lift to Him our requests and desires.

Tallit Principle No. 34

⁵⁶ Ibid

However, many people today wrongly connect the power of prayer to their zeal and passion. They think that sincerity and solemnity are enough to make one's prayer heard and answered by God. There is an element of truth in this. But the power of prayer is not primarily subjective but objective. In other words, the power of prayer comes outside of us; it is given to us and not made by us. Powerful prayer is praying the Word of God back to Him. It is filling our minds and hearts with His Word so that our mouths declare His will as we lift to Him our requests and desires.

God said that Israel should look upon the tallit so that by looking at it, they will remember and obey God's law. There is something in the Word of God that when you desire and meditate on it, you are somehow looking at the face of God. One rabbi comments that the original emphasis and intent of the phrase "a tassel for you to look at" is "to feel as though the glory of the divine Presence were upon them so you can look upon Him, that is, upon the Holy One, blessed be He."⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Ibid



Chapter 5

SOCIOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TALLIT

Particle physics suffers more from being infected by the socio-political mood of the day than from lack of spectacular opportunities for major and profound discoveries.

- Leon M. Lederman

POWER TRUTH

They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

Matthew 23:5

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

There is no explicit record in the Old Testament that prophets wore the tallit; it is only assumed.⁵⁸ Since it was part of the regular dress of a devout Israelite, the prophets should have worn it as well to set an example of commitment to Yahweh. Surely, Moses and Aaron wore a tallit, together with the Levites and all the prophets who came after them. If the Pharisees of Jesus' day wore a tallit, surely the Old Testament

⁵⁸ "Biblical Origins of Tallit and its Spiritual Significance." Jesus Boat. Accessed October 14, 2020. <https://www.jesusboat.com/the-biblical-origins-of-the-tallit-and-its-spiritual-significance/>

prophets did the same thing. The certainty of this thought simply rests on the necessity of the tallit commandment. As previously noted, the tallit dress was originally a regular dress of the Hebrew people. It should always be part of their outfit to protect themselves from pagan ideologies and practices. It is an outward expression of holding on to the basic tenet of Judaism, which is monotheism. The Levite should have certainly worn some kind of tallit covering that will always remind him of his holy duties and consecration. In Leviticus, one of his primary and valuable duties is to teach "the children of Israel, all the laws which the Lord has given them by the hand of Moses" (Lev. 10:11). Surely, the tallit commandment was part of their teaching. And lastly, since priests and prophets were in a leadership position, they were highly expected to set an example for people. As dispensers and expounders of the Law, they had a solemn responsibility to walk their talk. In fact, in biblical history, one of the major reasons why Israel was brought to painful captivity was because their priests forgot the Law of God. "Like people like priest" was the sad motto of their demise (Hos. 4:9).

TALLIT AND YOM KIPPUR

Wearing the tallit in the solemn night of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is a dramatic way of showing one's total humility and repentance.

Tallit Principle No. 35

Wearing the tallit in the solemn night of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is a dramatic way of showing one's total humility and repentance. Compared to other religious holidays in Israel, Yom Kippur brings every devout Jew to an overnight "prayer of repentance."⁵⁹ During this solemn celebration, the entire body of the worshipper is wrapped in the tallit. It is a sign of their heartfelt repentance, even an expectation for their long-awaited Messiah. The white fabric of the tallit worn on this occasion represents "the sincerity of repentance,"⁶⁰ which is inspired by the Old Testament act of repentance. For instance, God said,

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14 English Standard Version)

But in the process of time, rabbinical tradition began to explain Yom Kippur in relation to High Holy Days of the Hebrew calendar. On this occasion, they believe that God inscribes each person's fate for the coming year into a book which is called the Book of Life. If your repentance is sincere and honest, God will forgive you and will not let the evil consequence of your sins to fall upon you.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Bennett, Rabbi Jim. "Tallit on Yom Kippur." Union for Reform Judaism. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.sestl.org/2017/09/tallit/>

⁶⁰ Appell, Rabbi Victor S. "Does one wear a tallit to services the night of Yom Kippur?" Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://reformjudaism.org/learning/answers-jewish-questions/does-one-wear-tallit-services-night-yom-kippur-kol-nidrei>

⁶¹ Bennett, Rabbi Jim. "Tallit on Yom Kippur." Union for Reform Judaism. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.sestl.org/2017/09/tallit/>

If your repentance is sincere and honest, God will forgive you and will not let the evil consequence of your sins to fall upon you.

Tallit Principle No. 36

In Christian theology, the fulfillment and heart of Yom Kippur are in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament explains this theology in great detail, as it goes back to the Mosaic Law and points to Christ as its actual fulfillment. Yom Kippur for Christians is the celebration of the Lenten season. But contrary to Jewish Yom Kippur that still expects their promised Messiah, the Lenten season celebrates the incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the embodiment of Yom Kippur.

TALLIT AND REFORMED JUDAISM

In the Jewish religious denomination, there is a kind of Judaism "that shunned the wearing of the tallit."

Tallit Principle No. 37

In Jewish religious denomination, there is a kind of Judaism "that shunned the wearing of the tallit." The founders of Reformed Judaism in Germany since the 19th century have "rejected the tallit along with other ritual garbs as archaic and foreign." In their "desire to fit in and assimilate more with contemporary culture," they formulated a view that emphasizes that the progressive nature of faith and the ethical element of the Torah is much more superior to the ceremonial ones. Thus, for this denomination, the tallit remained somewhat foreign and unwelcome. Although this view successfully accommodates cultural flexibility and sociopolitical trends, it seems unfaithful to the clear statement of Numbers 15:37-41. God Himself said that the applicability of the tallit commandment is "throughout the generations to come" (Num. 15:38). As a garment, the tallit can actually adapt to modern fashion while faithfully preserving its symbolism.

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

The tallit is no ordinary religious item; it bears the identity and legacy of the Jews, the promises of God to their fathers, and the Word of God.

Tallit Principle No. 38

The tallit is no ordinary religious item; it bears the identity and legacy of the Jews, the promises of God to their fathers, and the Word of God. Fortunately, in recent decades, more and more Jews have chosen to 'explore the spiritual practice and meaning of wrapping oneself in a tallit.' They do this out of the awakened desire to revive their spiritual heritage and to seek comfort from their rich and extraordinary tradition as a chosen people of God.

In relation to Christian theology, when the New Testament declared that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), Judaism has been opened to a new kind of reform. That is to say, the Torah and the Prophets have a spiritual aspect that is fulfilled and extended to the Church of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christians can say that they are spiritual Israel, and their tallit is Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:14).

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Ibid

TALLIT AND REPENTANCE

Forgiveness of sins was given by virtue of sacrifice.

Tallit Principle No. 39

As a sign of heartfelt repentance, the Jew wraps himself with a large tallit during Yom Kippur.⁶⁷ On this special and solemn occasion, the tallit plays a mediating role between God and man. But originally, Yom Kippur is 'based on the ritual of expiation of sins during biblical times.'⁶⁸ There is a significant distinction between Mosaic and modern Yom Kippur. Mosaic Yom Kippur was based on the Levitical sacrificial system. Forgiveness of sins was given by virtue of sacrifice. In Christian theology, the book of Hebrews explains that Jesus Christ is the substance and fulfillment of the Levitical sacrifices. Moreover, when Israel first established the Temple during the time of Solomon, Yom Kippur was a solemn call for national repentance headed by the king himself. But in modern times, Yom Kippur is somehow different from its biblical heritage. It is no longer sacrifice-based but stands solely on the theology of confessions and self-contrition. They believe that God will secure your fate in the Book of Life if you truly repent of your sins. This is a beautiful truth. However, the Old Testament theology of repentance was always sacrifice-based (Num. 29:7-11).

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ "Yom Kippur 101." My Jewish Learning. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/yom-kippur-101/>

God's justice demands punishment for our sins; someone must pay. And this is the heart of the New Testament theology.

Tallit Principle No. 40

The book of Hebrews tells us that 'without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins' (Heb. 9:22). In other words, the repentant sinner must come to God through the merit of the sacrifice. Repentance is not enough; you need someone or something that will stand for you as a substitute. God's justice demands punishment for our sins; someone must pay. And this is the heart of the New Testament theology. Christ died for our sins. He bore on the cross our sins and paid them in full; he purchased us with his own precious blood. But in modern Judaic theology, the necessity of sacrifice is removed, and they come to God on the basis of their human effort.

PURPOSE OF REPENTANCE

Mosaic theology emphasizes the importance of sacrifice as a means to receive God's forgiveness. The repentant sinner should come to God on the basis of substitutionary death, which is animal sacrifices. In Christian theology, the sacrifice of Jesus is the source of forgiveness. In relation to this, looking at the tallit during Yom Kippur is symbolic. It shows the purpose of repentance. As previously noted, the theology of forgiveness in Judaism is based on the sincerity of one's repentance.

Mosaic theology emphasizes the importance of sacrifice as a means to receive God's forgiveness.

Tallit Principle No. 41

Judaism believes that God provided a special day—like Yom Kippur—wherein He opens the gates of heaven to pour out His forgiveness on repentant sinners.⁶⁹ On this occasion, the opened gate of heaven is symbolized by 'Aron Kodesh,'⁷⁰ which is similar to the Ark of the Covenant or the Mercy Seat of the Old Testament Tabernacle. As they look upon the tzitzit, they pledge that their repentance will be characterized by going back to the Law of God. Apart from this desire, there is no true repentance.⁷¹

As they look upon the tzitzit, they pledge that their repentance will be characterized by going back to the Law of God. Apart from this desire, there is no true repentance.

Tallit Principle No. 42

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Lockshin, Prof. RabbiMarty. "What Do Tzitzit Represent?" The Torah. Accessed 20, 2020. <https://www.thetorah.com/article/what-do-tzitzit-represent>

Their pledge to follow the Torah is the condition of God's forgiveness and the assurance that their name will be written in the Book of Life.⁷² Just as the ark of Aron Kodesh is opened to receive their confessions and contrition, their hearts must also be open to receive the Torah. In fact, the Aron Kodesh is also called 'Torah Ark' because it houses the Torah scrolls.⁷³ At the end of Yom Kippur, the worshipper can only claim divine forgiveness with a song if he pledged allegiance to the Torah.⁷⁴

THE TALLIT OF THE PHARISEES

Jesus criticized the highly respected spiritual leaders of Judaism for being so good in showing off their false spirituality.

Tallit Principle No. 43

Since God alone can see true repentance, it is possible to fake it and just show off by going with its ritual. Jesus rebuked this hypocrisy during his time. Jesus criticized the highly respected spiritual leaders of Judaism for being so good in showing off their false spirituality. For instance, there were some Pharisees who wore very long tzitzit in order to appear more pious than they were. Concerning them, Jesus said,

⁷² "Yom Kippur 101." My Jewish Learning. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/yom-kippur-101/>

⁷³ "The Holy Ark Aron Hakodesh." Chabad. Accessed 20, 2020. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/365931/jewish/The-Holy-Aron-Hakodesh.htm

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Thomas, Pamela. "Yeshua Wore a Prayer Shawl." Bridge for Peace. Accessed October 15, 2020. <https://www.bridgesforpeace.com/letter/yeshua-wore-a-prayer-shawl/>

'But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments' (Matthew 23:5 English Standard Version)

The Pharisees were a conservative religious sect of Judaism. They believed in the literal and spiritual reliability of the Old Testament. They upheld the Law of Moses to its minutest detail that they were labeled as legalists. Yet, despite their passionate commitment to God's law, many of them showed a life that betrays the true spirit of the Law. Jesus boldly rebuked them for being hypocrites. Indeed, by wearing a long tzitzit or by enlarging the borders of their garment, they showed their commitment to God's Law.

As spiritual leaders and religious teachers, they knew the Torah from cover to cover. They were intelligent, well-disciplined, and well-mannered. But their love for the Law somehow became a way to publicize their religious credentials. They loved being seen and praised by people, instead of desiring the praise of God alone. Supposedly, the purpose of the tallit and tzitzit was to focus their eyes on God's presence alone. And yet, they used this sacred item to show off their spirituality. The tallit should have made them aware of God's presence, but they became self-centered and proud. Thus, Jesus assured them that they would not go to heaven because they became lovers of self and not lovers of God (Matt. 23:13).



Chapter 6

DRAMATIC SIGNIFICANCE IN THE DONNING PROCEDURE

The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely tenacity. The fears are paper tigers. You can do anything you decide to do. You can act to change and control your life and the procedure. The process is its own reward.

- Amelia Earhart

POWER TRUTH

On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Revelation 19:16

THE SYMBOLIC PROCEDURE

As a religious item, the tallit is guided by customs and procedures to ensure proper use. In Jewish customs today, a tallit is worn at morning services, both on weekdays and the Sabbath.⁷⁶ It is only worn in the morning because the rabbis interpret the phrase ‘look at them’ in the tallit commandment as referring to daylight or during waking and active moments. But as an exemption, it is worn on the night of Yom Kippur as a sign and expression of complete surrender and

⁷⁶ “Donning Tallit and Tefillin.” Judaism 101. Accessed October 21, 2020. <https://www.jewfaq.org/tallitref.htm>

repentance. Jews usually wrap themselves with tallit on such occasions. But in regular days of prayer and worship, the practitioner is expected to put on the tallit before he begins to pray. Actually, in relation to phylactery, the tallit should be put on before wearing the phylactery.⁷⁷ The phylactery is a small leather black box that contains scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah. Usually, the verse is the Shema—the declaration that there is only one God. The significance of this procedure is to simply show that the worshipper can only focus on the Shema—on who God is—if he is covered by the tallit. But to be covered by the tallit, it is interesting to note its symbolic procedure.

Usually, the verse is the Shema—the declaration that there is only one God. The significance of this procedure is to simply show that the worshipper can only focus on the Shema—on who God is—if he is covered by the tallit.

Tallit Principle No. 44

When wearing the tallit in your prayer time, you should first stretch the tallit before you as a sign of readiness. You need to hold it with both hands as a gesture of receptivity and care. Secondly, as you hold it, you will recite the tallit blessing. Then after you recite the tallit blessing, you gently throw the tallit over your shoulders like a cape and bring your hands together in front of your face briefly like covering your head. It is a sign of submission and willingness to learn from the Torah.

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

IN RELATION TO PHYLACTERY

Closely connected to the tallit commandment and its practice, is the phylactery. These two items are inseparable. As previously noted, the phylactery is that small black box that contains a significant passage from the Torah, which is the core belief of Judaism. The scripture passage is called the 'Shema,' which is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-8. It is called 'Shema' because it calls Israel to listen with all attention and affection to the one true God—Yahweh.⁷⁹ This verse is the heart of the tallit commandment in Numbers 15:37-41. There is no way to understand the theology and ritual practice of the tallit commandment apart from the Shema.⁸⁰

The Shema is the spirit of the religious practice itself.

Tallit Principle No. 45

The Shema is the spirit of the religious practice itself. Actually, in Hebrew, the word used for 'phylactery' is *tefillin*. And unlike the etymological meaning of the word 'phylactery,' which is amulet, *tefillin* means 'judgment.'⁸¹ It is judgment in a sense that God's Word, the Torah, is the absolute moral basis of right and wrong. Thus, it should become the moral strength of the worshipper as he lives in the midst of an ungodly society.⁸² No wonder that in the procedure of binding the arm with the phylactery, every practitioner will find

⁷⁹ "Signs and Symbols." Judaism 101. Accessed October 21, 2020. <https://www.jewfaq.org/signs.htm#Tefillin>

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Ibid

it very symbolic. Compared to wearing the tallit, wearing the phylactery is a bit difficult. You should have someone experienced show you how to do it if you have never done it before.⁸³ But basically, you bind the phylactery in your non-dominant arm as you recite the *tefillin* blessing, which is similar to the tallit blessing, only that in the last verse of the blessing, you change the word 'tallit' into 'tefillin.' Interestingly, from the point of view of the acupuncturist, the positioning of the *tefillin* in the arm stimulates clear thinking and inward peace.⁸⁴

FIRST SIGNIFICANT STEP

It is like a medium or mediator between a sinful man and a holy God.

Tallit Principle No. 46

When it comes to donning the tallit gadol or the big tallit, there are four simple steps to follow. These four simple steps are rich in theological significance. But at this point, we will first study the first step and know its significance. The first step is to check the tallit.⁸⁵ It is necessary to check the strings of the tzitzit and tallit before the worshipper uses it in prayer. 'Torn strings invalidate the entire tallit'⁸⁶ and, therefore, in a sense, invalidates the significance of this ritual. As previously noted, the tallit serves as a covering for the worshipper. It is like a medium or mediator between a sinful man and a holy God.

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ "How to Put on a Tallit or Tzitzit: Blessings and Instructions." Chabad. Accessed October 21, 2020. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/530125/jewish/How-to-Put-on-a-Tallit-or-Tzitzit-Blessings-and-Instructions.htm

⁸⁶ Ibid

**It is like a medium or mediator between a
sinful man and a holy God.**

Tallit Principle No. 47

Moreover, using a tallit with a torn tzitzit not only shows negligence on the part of the worshipper but disrespect in the perfection and purity of the Torah. The tzitzit refers to the 613 commandments of the Torah. These 613 commandments are in harmony and unity based on the personality and nature of God Himself as one. Thus, it is always first importance for the worshipper to check if his tallit does not have any torn tzitzit so that its sacred symbolism is honored and God's Word is highly viewed and valued.

'Kosher' is the term that the Jews use to declare that the tallit is in proper condition. The word literally means 'fit' or acceptable. It is also used for food that complies with the dietary standard of the Mosaic Law. In the book of Deuteronomy, it signifies reverence and adherence to the Law of God. Thus, when it is applied to declaring the tallit as kosher, the worshipper acknowledges the perfection of God's Word and that it is the only source of good things.

**'Kosher' is the term that the Jews use
to declare that the tallit is in proper
condition.**

Tallit Principle No. 48

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid

SECOND SIGNIFICANT STEP

The second step in donning the tallit is to 'unfold the tallit and open it wide, kiss its upper edge and swing it around from the position in which it is held in front of you until it is hanging behind you.'⁸⁹ Then, after doing this, you recite the tallit blessing. Among the four steps, this one is perhaps the most significant. First, the unfolding of the tallit and opening it wide means readiness and openness to learning from the Torah. It is a beautiful expression of God's revelation in the scriptures as His holy presence is summoned by the worshipper to come in prayer.⁹⁰ This is exactly what the psalmist means when he said, 'He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty' (Ps. 91:1).

Take note that the worshipper kisses the upper edge of the tallit in order to show that his priority in life is the Law of God.

Tallit Principle No. 49

The tallit is compared to God's holy wings as represented by the cherubim that cover the Ark of the Covenant, where God's Law was placed. Secondly, the kissing of the upper edge of the tallit is to literally kiss the tzitzit. Obviously, the significance of this gesture is to show one's devotion or love for God's Word.⁹¹ In biblical history, the composition of the famous Psalm 119 was inspired by this kind of affection for God's Word. Take note that the worshipper kisses the upper edge of the tallit in order to

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid

show that his priority in life is the Law of God. It is a way of saying you love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And thirdly, to place or hang the tallit behind you like a cape is to recognize the covering presence of God over you. To a Jewish worshipper, it is as if God is saying, 'you are mine.' Only after these gestures can you begin to recite the blessing.

Take note that the worshipper kisses the upper edge of the tallit in order to show that his priority in life is the Law of God.

It is a way of saying you love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Tallit Principle No. 50

THIRD SIGNIFICANT STEP

The third step to donning the tallit is to 'gather the two right corners of the tallit; raise them up and place them over the left shoulder.' In relation to the Shema, the symbolism of placing the tallit on the shoulder simply means 'strength.'⁹³ It is a way of saying love the Lord your God with all your strength. It goes back to the history of God's deliverance from Egypt when He drowned all the military forces of Pharaoh in the Red Sea. That time, the Israelites danced with a song,

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

'The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God and I will exalt him.' (Exodus 15:2 English Standard Version)

Inspired by this biblical history, a tallit on the shoulder represents the strength that comes from the covenant relationship established by redemption.

Tallit Principle No. 51

Inspired by this biblical history, a tallit on the shoulder represents the strength that comes from the covenant relationship established by redemption. In other words, God's people are strong not because of themselves but because of their Redeemer, the God who delivers them from their enemies. Simply put, a relationship with God is the source of strength. Moreover, there is an interesting connection between the tallit on the shoulder and the gesture of raising up its corners or the tzitzit. The tallit commandment says,

'It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to where after.' (Numbers 15:39 English Standard Version)

The point is, just as all strong and lasting relationships are built on trust and faithfulness, so also is our relationship with God. Mosaic theology shows God as a jealous God (Exod. 20:5). He does not want a rival in our love; He commands and desires whole-hearted affection. Covenant relationship with God grows when it is nourished by obedience to His Word.

FOURTH SIGNIFICANT STEP

In the final step then, all the tzitzit is practically located in the heart. It is a simple but significant expression of the conviction.

Tallit Principle No. 52

Simultaneous with the third step, the fourth step of donning the tallit is 'to gather the two left corners and bring them up to the left side of the chest.'⁹⁴ Thus, at this point, 'all four tzitzit are on the left side, two in front and two behind.'⁹⁵ This is very rich in meaning and practically a powerful reminder of the Shema. If you will see this action personally, it is very dramatic. In the final step then, all the tzitzit is practically located in the heart. It is a simple but significant expression of the conviction,

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid

‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.’
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5 English Standard Version)

Thus, the procedure of donning the tallit essentially teaches love for God. It is a kind of love that is committed to the Word of God no matter what the cost. Take note, placing all the tzitzit on the left side of the chest means total devotion to the whole scripture. You love God and everything that He has said. You don’t follow the mistake of the Scribes and Pharisee, who only expound on their favorite verses and leave the rest that they don’t find comfortable (Matt. 5:19).

You love God and everything that He has said.

Tallit Principle No. 53

Finally, this fourth gesture tells us that in the final analysis, ‘love is the fulfillment of the Law’ (Rom. 13:10). All the so-called 613 commandments are fulfilled in one way—the way of love. Love is the only way that will satisfy the spirit of the Law. It is usual understanding that the Mosaic Law is legalistic. From our vantage point today, we see the Mosaic Law as ritualistic. Yet, if you will reexamine it apart from rabbinic traditions, you’ll see its Shema or spirit that fulfills everything—love (Deut. 6:4-5).



Chapter 7

THE THEOLOGY OF PRAYER IN THE TALLIT

*You will find all true theology summed up in these two short sentences:
Salvation is all of the grace of God. Damnation is all of the will of man.
- Charles Spurgeon*

POWER TRUTH

She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes,
and immediately her hemorrhage stopped.

Luke 8:44

AS A SPIRITUAL HOME

It is important to note that the tallit commandment is more than a religious dress code for Israel; it is also a means of effective prayer. To limit its use as a garment is to miss the spiritual purpose that God Himself placed on it, that is, to be close to His presence. Inspired by Jewish diaspora, the tallit is viewed as a 'spiritual portable home.'⁹⁶ Historically, it sheltered the faith of the Jews from their long period of dispersion. Although their Temple was destroyed and that they were forced to leave their country, their faith remained in them. The tallit

⁹⁶ Rabbi Goldie Milgram, "What Is a Tallit? What Do the Fringes Mean? And a Ritual for Tying the Knots," *Reclaiming Judaism*, accessed October 9, 2020, <http://reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/what-tallit-what-do-fringes-mean-and-ritual-tying-knots>.

preserved them from completely losing their faith. As a portable spiritual home, the tallit reminds them of three fundamental truths of Judaism every time they pray. First, it reminds them of God's Law. Scattered in different parts of the world, the Jews were separated from their culture and national identity. They had lived in a pagan world and been opened to constant ridicule and persecution. During those harsh times, it would be comfortable to compromise or turn away from their faith so they can survive. But the tallit preserved their hope.

God will never betray His words and promises, and that's the comfort that encouraged them to continue in their faith and in their prayers. Secondly, since they were separated from the Temple, they did not have a local place where they could freely gather together and express their religious conviction and devotion. But through the tallit, the emblem of the Temple was somehow reborn and their longing for God's presence was satisfied. Third, as they lived in foreign cultures with different views about God, the tallit reminded them of one important and defining reality—God is one. For the Jews, this is the basis of effective prayer.

God will never betray His words and promises, and that's the comfort that encouraged them to continue in their faith and in their prayers.

Tallit Principle No. 54

FOCUS OF PRAYERT

Focus signifies control. In the words of Jesus, 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matt. 6:21). Prayer is, in a sense, a control signifier. It tells one's priority and sense of power for living. It is not surprising then that in the Bible, the worshipper is always admonished to pray with focus. That is to say that we need to pray with all our heart. The tallit commandment is one of the creative ways that God has given His people to encourage them to pray with focus. It is a creative means that both help their memory and affection. From the very beginning, the tallit has been 'a sign of Israel's devotion to God.'⁹⁷

As previously noted, it points their focus to three fundamental truths of Judaism: Torah, national identity, and monotheism. But basically, the principle to learn from the tallit is that when we pray, we need to be godly or God-centered. That is to say, the priority of prayer is God. It teaches us to shun from materialistic and selfish prayers. Of course, it does not mean that petitions and supplications are not important to God. Rather, as we bring Him our prayer requests, our focus is not our will but His will.

When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, he modelled the same priority when he placed the worship of God as the top priority (Matt. 6:9).

Tallit Principle No. 5.5

⁹⁷ Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle*. (Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1996).

When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, he modelled the same priority when he placed the worship of God as the top priority (Matt. 6:9). Even in the tallit commandment, God solidifies the prayers of His people by inviting them to set Him holy in their hearts. He said, "Be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Num. 15:40-41). Thus, prayers should be holy to God, not materialistic or self-centered.

Focus signifies control.

Tallit Principle No. 56

TRANSCENDENT FOCUS OF PRAYER

One of the basic theological truths that is often misunderstood or neglected in prayer is divine sovereignty. This is not to say that we don't know or that we intend to forget it; rather, we have a wrong impression or application of what it is. For instance, since we are used to valuing our socio-political democracy, we unknowingly apply it also to our view and prayers to God. But the Judeo-Christian God is not a democratic God in terms of His rule in the universe and over our lives. His rule and dealing are always theocratic.

This is the truth that He embedded on every Mosaic ritual that He gave to His people in the Old Testament. As previously noted, the special blue fringe in the tallit is a symbol of God's transcendent rule as the Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth.⁹⁸ There is a

⁹⁸ Rich Robinson, "The Tallit and Tzitzit," Jews For Jesus, last modified January 1994, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/newsletter/newsletter-sep-1993/the-tallit-and-tzitzit>.

theological reason why God is called the "Most High" (Gen. 14:22). No one in the world and in the whole universe can place himself above God. Yahweh alone is the transcendent One. Therefore, when Old Testament believers prayed, they had this principle:

"Be not rash with your mouth, or let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few." (Ecclesiastes 5:2 English Standard Version)

In other words, when you pray, find your joy and comfort in the fact that God's will is the best for your life. Stop rebelling against the will of God but start reveling on His holy will. As our Creator, it is logical to say that He has planned and stored the best things for us. If we trust that He is holy, we can be certain that when we follow His words, it will always result in good things beyond our expectations. God never disappoints those who trust in His will.

**Stop rebelling against the will of God
but start reveling in His holy will.**

Talbot Principle No. 57

THE BEST OF LIFE

Scripture and prayer are inseparable elements of effective and clear communication with God.

Tallit Principle No. 58

Scripture and prayer are inseparable elements of effective and clear communication with God. Through prayer, we talk to God, while through scripture, God talks to us. This principle is true even in the prayer rituals of Judaism. In the tallit commandment, when a Jew covers his head while praying, he reminds himself of the supreme importance of the Law of God over his life.⁹⁹ That is to say, in all his prayers, his motto should be the will of God. The focus of his heart is to do what pleases God. This is the spirit of prayer that is already true in the Old Testament saints. For example, the psalmist tells us,

"Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act." (Psalm 37:4-5 English Standard Version)

⁹⁹ Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*. 1st ed. (The Jewish Publication Society, 2004).

The lesson is: the priority of prayer is the Word of God.

Tallit Principle No. 59

This principle is of course inspired by devotion to the Torah, which is also seen in the tallit. The lesson is: the priority of prayer is the Word of God. But it should be noted that the reason why we prioritize God's will in our prayer is not that He is a killjoy God and that He is not concerned with our desires.

It is basic theology in the Old Testament that God's will is always for our best. The Torah and all the rituals of the Mosaic Law are for the betterment of the saints. God gave them the Law so that He could protect His people from foolish ideologies and practices of an ungodly society (Num. 15:39). Thus, our God is not a legalist God. When His people pray to Him with tallit-covered heads, it is an expression not only of humility but of trust that His Fatherly will is the best.

**Thus, our God is not a legalist God.
When His people pray to Him with
tallit-covered heads, it is an expression
not only of humility but of trust that
His Fatherly will is the best.**

Tallit Principle No. 60

AGAINST POWERFUL DISTRACTION

It is customary to bow the head when we pray simply because we recognize that there is a supreme being who is far beyond our comprehension. We pray because there is God. In the prayer rituals of Israel, the blue color of the fringes in the tallit is historically and spiritually significant. It is a sign of God's sovereignty as the Holy One of Israel and the Lord Most High.¹⁰⁰

In fact, the blue color of the star in the national flag of Israel was inspired by the tallit commandment regarding the fringes. Israel believes in the one true God, who is a personal being who transcends everything in the universe. In Genesis, God is introduced as the Creator of heavens and earth. By His imperative word, everything was created out of nothing. Thus, with this biblical God, nothing is impossible. This is the theological awareness of the Old Testament saints, which is really a far cry from the religious perspectives of the pagan nations. The sovereign oneness of the biblical God is the core tenet of Judaism. It is the solid rock that holds the saint in every difficulty that he faces in life.

¹⁰⁰ Rich Robinson, "The Tallit and Tzitzit," Jews For Jesus, last modified January 1994, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/newsletter/newsletter-sep-1993/the-tallit-and-tzitzit>.

The powerful distraction is unbelief—the state of our mind. And so, in the case of the Jews, to help them focus on God’s power, the tallit commandment was made for them so they can concentrate and never forget the majesty of their God.

Tallit Principle No. 61

The book of Psalms contains the historic and dramatic records of Israel’s faith in God in all dark and stormy situations of life. God’s sovereignty sustains them throughout all generations. It is the hope of their prayer. Thus, when it comes to our communion with God, our greatest distraction is not outward disturbances or physical infirmity. The powerful distraction is unbelief—the state of our mind. And so, in the case of the Jews, to help them focus on God’s power, the tallit commandment was made for them so they can concentrate and never forget the majesty of their God.

THANKSGIVING FOCUS

The aspect of thanksgiving is an important element of effective prayer. Surely, this is a prayer principle that is perhaps so basic to many of us. And yet, basic as it is, if we are honest, many of us have not mastered the element of thanksgiving in our prayers. Like the first generation of Israelites in the Old Testament, although they had seen the powerful manifestation of God’s power and presence, their hearts remained doubtful toward God. Thus, basic theology does not assure mastery on our part.

Ponder this: there is no focus in prayer if you do not thank the Lord.

Tallit Principle No. 62

Theological information and even personal encounter with God's power does not guarantee that we will become faithful worshippers. There's a reason why God Himself called Israel a stiff-necked people (Exod. 32:9). It is because despite His tremendous display of power and showers of blessings upon them, they didn't have a spiritual concentration to stay faithful and committed to His words. God knew this; that is why He made the tallit commandment for them.¹⁰¹ That garment was not special; it was just an ordinary cloth embedded with a symbol of commitment to God. Yet it served as a powerful daily reminder for them that their God is the Almighty Creator of all things.

¹⁰¹ Leo Giosuè, "What Is a Tallit?," The Jerusalem Post | JPost.Com, last modified June 18, 2020, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/special-content/what-is-a-tallit-631948>.

It is a way of putting their minds on the past historic feats of God's power and that the act of God will continue to their generation and daily experience.

Tallit Principle No. 63

It is a way of putting their minds on the past historic feats of God's power and that the act of God will continue to their generation and daily experience. But that is only if they will set their mind on believing God. This is the prayer principle that should be revived today. God's people should be a more thankful people. Thanksgiving shows that we have experienced the good hand of the Lord. But if your prayer does not abound in thanksgiving, perhaps it is high time for you to revisit the character of your faith and check the commitment of your heart. Ponder this: there is no focus in prayer if you do not thank the Lord.



Chapter 8

THE THEOLOGY OF BLESSINGS IN THE TALLIT

An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others.

- W. Tozer

POWER TRUTH

and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak;
and all who touched it were healed.

Matthew 14:36

CREED OF BLESSINGS

The tallit blessing is like a creed. It is a theological confession of one's faith in God and how it impacts the practice of life. It is the spirit of the ritual; the kind of spirituality that the worshipper wants to experience in the details of life. The history of the tallit blessing is ancient and profound. Perhaps it underwent modifications, but the biblical theology remains the same. The modern version of the tallit blessing reads like this:

Blessed are you, Adonai our God,
Sovereign of all, who hallows us with
mitzvot, commanding us to wrap
ourselves in the fringes.¹⁰²

**This prayer is very interesting because
it is a theological blessing that not only
exalts the personal being of God but
teaches the worshipper how he can
summon the blessing of God.**

Tallit Principle No. 64

This prayer is very interesting because it is a theological blessing that not only exalts the personal being of God but teaches the worshipper how he can summon the blessing of God. In other words, when you bless God, you are also blessed. Again, this blessing is like a creed because it carefully condensed in one basic statement the fundamentals of biblical spirituality.

Although the rabbis formulated the statement, its idea is rooted in Mosaic theology. For instance, the blessings and cursing in Deuteronomy 28 certainly influenced the formulators of this blessing. The emphasis of Deuteronomy 28 is simply obedience to God's Word. If you obey, you will receive the blessing; if you disobey, you will reap a curse. Moreover, one of the earliest benedictions in the Old Testament is in Numbers 6:22-27.

¹⁰² "Daily Blessings: Donning the Tallit." Reclaiming Judaism, accessed October 29, 2020, <https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/prayers-blessings/daily-blessings-donning-tallit>

It was a benediction pronounced by the priests to bless the people of Israel. Thus, creedal type of benediction already existed before or during the Mosaic dispensation. But again, the purpose of such benediction is not only to bless the receiver but particularly to call his attention to the Giver of blessings. The point is: the blessing of blessings is to bless the holy name of God.

The point is: the blessing of blessings is to bless the holy name of God.

Tallit Principle No. 65

AS A PROTECTIVE BARRIER

Theology is the root, while practice or spirituality is the fruit.

Tallit Principle No. 66

Theology is very important in the practice of faith. Theology is the root, while practice or spirituality is the fruit. Unfortunately, the person of God has been culturally compromised due to doctrinal descent in many religious circles today. It means that God is interpreted according to social consciousness instead, out of the biblical context.

And since the pervading principle today is pluralism, biblical language is brought under the hermeneutics of comparative religion.

In other words, you interpret the Bible no longer according to its own language but according to world religion. This theological issue should not be underestimated because if we entertain the idea that the biblical God is like or related to the gods or deities of world religion, then we have lost the God of the Bible. And this is the philosophy of religious interpretation that God Himself warned Israel against in the tallit commandment. God said,

"And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after." (Numbers 15:39 English Standard Version)

Its greatest intention is to protect our minds from religious ideologies that might sound socio-politically interesting, but spiritually detrimental to our relationship with God.

Tallit Principle No. 67

The point is this: as a creedal type of blessing, the tallit benediction not only desires to summon the blessings of the true God upon our lives.¹⁰³ Its greatest intention is to protect our minds from religious ideologies that might sound socio-politically interesting, but spiritually detrimental to our relationship with God. The tallit blessing then serves as a protective barrier for our biblical faith. By careful meditation, it is not actually friendly to world religion but rejects them by declaring that there is only one sovereign God in the universe.¹⁰⁴ And this doctrinal conviction should bind the hearts of God's people from generation to generation. There is only one God and His name is Yahweh. That's the absolute claim of the tallit blessing.

**There is only one God and His name is
Yahweh. That's the absolute claim of the
tallit blessing.**

Tallit Principle No. 68

TRANSCENDENCE IN THE TALLIT

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ "Tefillin." Judaism 101. Accessed October 21, 2020. <https://www.jewfaq.org/signs.htm#Tefillin>

The tallit benediction gives us a very high view of God. It gives us philosophical and moral absolute for thinking and practice. The sovereign existence of God is its grand theme that defines perspectives and values for living. The blessing says, "Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all."¹⁰⁵ It must be noted that in the Old Testament, the name "Adonai" is a very sacred name to the point that the scribes need to take a bath first before they can write the name.

In the English Bible, it is usually translated with a capitalization "LORD." It is also called by theologians as the sacred tetragrammaton or the four-letter word. Simply put, the theological richness of this name declares the absolute reality of Yahweh as the only true and ever-living God. And compare to the localized gods and goddesses of the ancient world, the biblical God is "the Sovereign of all." ¹⁰⁶

The tallit benediction gives us a very high view of God. It gives us philosophical and moral absolute for thinking and practice.

Tallit Principle No. 69

¹⁰⁵ "Daily Blessings: Donning the Tallit." Reclaiming Judaism, accessed October 29, 2020, <https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/prayers-blessings/daily-blessings-donning-tallit>

¹⁰⁶ "Ibid

In other words, He is the Transcendent One in the universe. He is the Creator of reality, the definer of everything, and the basis of all truths. Thus, whether people believe Him or not, we are living in a theistic universe. Consequently, there should be no room for atheism and skepticism in this world, because God has given us a basis and means to understand the existence and purpose of everything—God Himself.

Yet today, this biblical truth is strongly opposed by the modern scientific society that views the existence of the universe from a naturalistic point of view. That is to say, these people define reality according to their scientific methods but reject the premise that God exists. But in the tallit blessing, the worshipper is reminded that the absolute answer to man's ultimate moral and philosophical questions is God alone. Hence, transcendence gives us a beautiful purpose for living.

IMMANENCE IN THE TALLIT

The existence of the sovereign of God is the first essential theological element of the tallit blessing. It is the transcendent foundation of everything in the universe. But closely tied to transcendence, is immanence. In biblical theology, divine immanence is the reason why we have supernatural history and experience. If in transcendence we say that "God is there," in immanence, we declare that "God is not silent."

In other words, the God of the Bible is not the faraway God of the deist. Deism believes that God exists and yet this mighty Creator has forsaken His creation by just letting it exist according to the laws of nature that He put within it. The god of deism doesn't really care for our existence. He is not bothered at all by our suffering and pain. But contrary to this view, the biblical God is a social and personal God. He creates, and He relates. He is the Creator, but He is also the Father of creation.

If in transcendence we say that "God is there," in immanence, we declare that "God is not silent."

Tallit Principle No. 70

In the tallit commandment, this truth is expressed in the phrase, "who hallows us with mitzvoth."¹⁰⁷ Meaning to say, the Creator, God, revealed Himself to us in a historic and dramatic way that we can understand. The tallit blessing then rejects all kinds of superstitious and fanciful speculations about God.

Rather, He revealed Himself in a supernatural, rational, historical and personal way. And one solid evidence of His supernatural revelation is the scripture itself—the mitzvoth. God condescends to us by giving us His historical and logical words. By "logical words," it refers not only to principles of correct thinking but implies moral meaning, purpose, and destination. The tallit opens our eyes to a morally intelligent universe created by a wise and good God. Hence, there is God, and He speaks through His scripture.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

FOUNDATION OF ETHICS

God sanctifies us by His words.

Tallit Principle No. 71

Since there is a sovereign God whose mighty voice is manifested in creation, particularly in His scripture, we are living in a moral universe. The tallit blessing says, "Who hallows us with mitzvoth."¹⁰⁸ God sanctifies us by His words. However, in today's society, the concept of divine revelation is complex and controversial. One of the dominant views that are opposed to divine revelation is materialism. By materialism, we are not only referring to lifestyle but to a philosophy—a worldview. Materialism was the by-product of naturalism that based reality according to the laws of nature or evolution. It recognizes the law or harmony of creation but rejects the lawgiver or designer. But such a conclusion is illogical and nonsense. No wonder that ever since Old Testament times, it has already been concluded that atheistic perspective is foolishness.

It is labeled foolishness because of the deduction that if you deny the existence of God, you also deny the inherent moral characteristic of the universe.

Tallit Principle No. 72

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

The psalmist said, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1). It is labeled foolishness because of the deduction that if you deny the existence of God, you also deny the inherent moral characteristic of the universe. That's why in the context of Psalm 14, when people deny the existence of God and ridicule the historical reality of divine revelation, the psalmist says, "They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good" (Ps. 14:1b).

Simply put, when it comes to refuting naturalism and materialism, the psalmist didn't need to provide philosophical arguments but just showed the practical effects of denying God in real-life situations. So, those who deny God will not have moral absolutes as the basis of right and wrong. It is impossible to understand the meaning of morality without a law-giver. Thus, the atheist and materialist will live their lives subjectively according to their whims and impulses because they do not have an objective moral basis outside themselves—the Word of God.

COMMANDER OF THE UNIVERSE

The existence of the sovereign God
answers our deepest questions,
and His scriptural revelation fills the
longings of our heart.

Tallit Principle No. 73

In philosophy, worldview is defined by three important big questions: What is knowledge? How should we conduct ourselves? How should we govern ourselves? All these questions are sufficiently answered in the tallit blessing. The existence of the sovereign God answers our deepest questions, and His scriptural revelation fills the longings of our heart.

Sadly, in modernistic philosophy, man defines his value by placing himself above all things. That is to say, man stands as the definer and judge of everything, the captain of his fate and the master of his soul. Consequently, biblical religion has become obnoxious to modern trends and tastes. They cannot tolerate the absolute commands of the scripture because they feel that God is imprisoning them or depriving them of rights and freedom.

But the tallit blessing reminds us of our place as creatures in the hands of God. It says, "commanding us to wrap ourselves in the fringes."¹⁰⁹ The key word here is "command." You see, one of the important realizations in life is to remind ourselves that we are not God.

**He is the true Commander who
commands our absolute obedience.**

Tallit Principle No. 74

The humanistic declaration that we are the captain and master of our soul is a deception birthed by atheism and naturalism. The scripture and even theistic philosophers of the past generations admit the fact that "In Him, we move and have our being." (Acts 17:28). Our being, motion, situation, and destination are all governed by God. There is no such thing as "chance" in life because there is a God who governs everything. He is the God who by the word of His power commands everything according to the pleasure of His will. He is the true Commander who commands our absolute obedience. Of course, people have the freedom to rebel against Him; it's their choice, but they can't erase the fact that they are absolutely accountable to God.

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