סימן טז

## שיעור טלית

**א.** לכתחילה אין לברך על טלית קטן אלא אם כן יש בו כשיעור שתי אמות אורך (תשעים וששה סנטימטר) על אמה רוחב (ארבעים ושמונה סנטימטר). [תמונה צ"ד]. אבל בפחות משיעור זה, אף על פי שיכול ללבוש לקיים מצות ציצית, מכל מקום לא יברך עליה, שספק ברכות להקל. אלא יברך על טלית גדול, ויכוין בברכתו לפטור טלית קטן. והמנהג שאין מברכים כלל על טלית קטן. [הליכו"ע ח"א עמ' י, וע"ע יחו"ד ח"ה סי' ב]. וראה לעיל בסימן ח' הלכה כ"ד.

Siman 16

## The Size of a Tallit

Day 75

**Proper size for reciting a blessing**

**1)** It is best, if someone wishes to recite a blessing over his *tallit katan*, to make sure that it is at least two cubits (96 centimeters) long and one cubit (48 centimeters) wide. (Illustration №94) It is permissible to wear a *tallit katan* that is smaller than this, but one should not recite the blessing on it because of the principle of *safek berakhot lehakel*. Instead, one should recite a blessing on one's *tallit gadol* and have in mind for the blessing to cover the *tallit katan* as well. The common custom is never to recite a blessing on a *tallit katan*.[219] See above in *Siman* 8:24.

**219. Source from the Talmud**

The Talmud teaches (*Menahot* 40b): If a tallit is large enough for a child to cover his head and most of his body with it, and an adult would wear such a garment occasionally, it is obligated to have tzitzit attached. Rashi explained that this means that an adult would not be ashamed to be seen in public wearing a garment of this size. Rambam (*Hilkhot Tzitzit* 3:1) stated: "The type of garment that is obligated by the Torah to have tzitzit attached is one that has four corners and that is large enough to cover a child's head and most of his body. This refers to a child old enough to walk through the streets on his own without an adult accompanying him to protect him." Rabbenu Avraham ben David commented: "This is well put, for the measurement is not a garment fitting just any child, but only one who can go through the streets on his own. This is supported by the Talmud's statement: 'an adult would wear such a garment occasionally,' suggesting that the first measurement refers to a child of a specific age and not just any child."

The *Arba'a Turim* defined it more specifically – it refers to a nine-year-old child. Maran in the *Bet Yosef* commented that the *Arba'a Turim* disagreed with Rambam, because a child much younger than nine can go through the streets by himself. Maran then suggested an alternate interpretation – the *Arba'a Turim* understood that Rambam was referring to a child who could go around the streets by himself and would not lose his tallit, and that means a child at least nine years old.

The *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* asserted that the Talmud is referring to a child who has reached the age of *hinukh*, and the *Bayit Hadash* explained that this means six or seven years old. Harav David ben Zimra (responsa Vol. V, #2,106) stated that according to Rambam and Rabbenu

Avraham ben David, the Talmud is referring to a five-year-old, since at that age the child is capable of going through the streets by himself without a caretaker. Furthermore, he explained that the Talmud's term "his head and most of his body" does not mean that it must cover most of the child's body besides covering his head. What it does mean is that we view the child's head and body as one entity, and the tallit must be large enough to cover a majority of that entity. This is considerably less than the area of his head plus the majority of his body. He concluded that this is the basis of the widespread practice of wearing a small *tallit katan*, since it is large enough to cover most of a five-year-old's body.

In the *Shulhan Arukh*, Maran wrote that the minimum size of a tallit is one long and wide enough to cover the head and most of the body of a child who can go through the streets without someone to protect him. In responsa *Yehave Da'at* (Vol. V, #2), Maran the Rishon Letziyon interpreted this to mean a nine-year-old child, concurring with the *Arba'a Turim*. This is because this interpretation matches that of Maran in the *Bet Yosef* explaining Rambam's ruling, while in the *Shulhan Arukh* he simply cited Rambam's language without elaborating.

**The Arizal and Rav Yosef Hayim**

The *Sefer Mikabtze'el* cites the Arizal and Harav Shalom Mizrahi Sharabi explaining that the Talmud's rule that the minimum size of a tallit is "large enough to cover a child's head and most of his body" means a tallit large enough to cover an adult's head, back and chest. He then added that it really depends on the individual's size – the larger or taller a person is, the more area of his body needs to be covered by his *tallit katan*. Even though the Arizal did not say this specifically, this is his intent. Nevertheless, if someone has a very small body, his *tallit katan* must still be large enough to cover a nine-year-old child's head and most of his body.

The *Mikabtze'el* added that even if the tallit is large enough to cover the adult's head, back and chest, if he wears a tall fez and therefore the tallit cannot cover his back and chest, he should make sure to wear a larger tallit. Although it is possible to argue that this is not necessary, it is best to be stringent.

The *Mikabtze'el* pointed out that it appears from the Arizal's words that the Talmud's measure of "large enough to cover a child's head and most of his body" applies to a *tallit gadol* only. The *tallit katan*, however, can be somewhat smaller. The *Nehpa Bakesef* concurred with this, but the *Peri Ha'aretz* countered that there is no hint in the Talmud to make such a distinction.

**In practical terms**

**One square cubit:** The responsa *Peri Ha'aretz* (Vol. I, #1) ruled that the minimum size of a tallit obligated in tzitzit is one square cubit. This is likewise the opinion of *Bet David* (#8).

**One cubit long and half a cubit wide:** The responsa *Nehpa Bakesef* (#1, page 6b) related that he experimented with a nine-year-old boy and he found that a tallit one cubit long and half a cubit wide could cover the boy's head and most of his back.

**One-and-a-half cubits square:** Harav Hayim Palachi (responsa *Lev Hayim* Vol. I, #99) commented that the author of *Nehpa Bakesef* must have measured the boy's head together with his body, following the opinion of Harav David ben Zimra. It is clear from the *Sefer Hahinukh* (#386), however, that the tallit must be large enough to cover his head besides covering the majority of his body. Rav Palachi then did his own experiment with a nine-year-old boy and found that he needed a square cubit-and-a-half, and this is what he recommended.

**One-and-a-half cubits long and one cubit wide:** The *Hazon Ish* (*O.H.* 3:31) decided that the wording of the *Sefer Hahinukh* is just as ambiguous as the wording of the Talmud. Therefore, we can assume the lenient position that the words "most of his body" refer to the body including the head. Therefore the tallit can be one cubit wide and one-and-a-half long, so that 3/4 of a cubit will cover the boy's back and 3/4 cubit will cover the front of his chest.

The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Lekh Lekha* halakha 12) studied the words of the Arizal and found his instructions are for the tallit to be large enough to cover the child's body and his arms, but he did not mention covering the boy's front and back. Therefore, it is not necessary for the tallit to be one-and-a-half cubits wide as the *Lev Hayim* demanded, but it is necessary for it to be one-and-a-half cubits long. This is repeated in *Sefer Mikabtze'el* (*parashat Lekh Lekha* halakha 20). See more about this in responsa *Rav Pe'alim* (Vol. II, #6). The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (16:2) likewise commented that the *Lev Hayim's* measurement is larger than what is really needed.

**Two cubits long and one cubit wide:** Harav Zalman wrote in his prayer book that a *tallit katan* must be two cubits long. The responsa *Lev Hayim* commented that this is an unnecessary stringency. Nevertheless, the *Hazon Ish* likewise concluded that the tallit must be at least two cubits long and one cubit wide.

**Maran the Rishon Letziyon**

The responsa *Yehave Da'at* (Vol. V, #2) listed all these opinions, and concluded that we may follow the ruling of Harav Yosef Hayim – one-and-a-half cubits long and one cubit wide. Nevertheless, the custom is that even when wearing a *tallit katan* meeting this requirement, we do not recite any blessing over it. Instead, we recite a blessing on the *tallit gadol* and have in mind for that blessing to cover the *tallit katan* as well. Those people who have the custom to recite a blessing over a *tallit katan*, however, may do so if the tallit has these measurements. Maran the Rishon Letziyon repeated this in the index to responsa *Yabia Omer* (Vol. VIII, #2).

In his *Halikhot Olam* (Vol. I, page 10), however, he ruled that the *tallit katan* must be two cubits long and one cubit wide, not counting the space provided to insert the wearer's

head. If the tallit is smaller than this, one should refrain from reciting a blessing over it; instead one should recite the blessing over the *tallit gadol* having the *tallit katan* in mind. In general, the custom is never to recite a blessing over a *tallit katan*, he concluded.

The *Halakha Berura* (*Otzerot Yosef* page 98) asserted that we are to follow the ruling found in *Halikhot Olam* since it was written later than the other volumes cited here. The *Yalkut Yosef* (footnote on page 207) reconciled his father's rulings, explaining that ideally one should use a *tallit katan* that is two cubits long and one cubit wide. Nevertheless, there is a sound basis to use one that is only one-and-a-half cubits long and one cubit wide.

The *Yalkut Yosef's* interpretation does not fit the words of Maran the Rishon Letziyon at all, however. It is clear from his words in *Halikhot Olam* that one must not recite a blessing unless the tallit is two cubits long and one cubit wide.

**Harav Avraham David of Butchatch**

The *Eshel Avraham* Butchatch (*Tanina*, *Siman* 16) stated that in our times people should not recite a blessing over the *tallit katan* even if it conforms to the *Poskim's* measurements. This is because in our times people are embarrassed to walk through the streets wearing a *tallit katan* over their clothes, no matter how large it is. The responsa *Hesed le'Avraham* Teumim (Vol. I, #2) refuted this ruling. The criterion of "if an adult is not embarrassed to wear it in the street" means that he would not be embarrassed because of the garment's size. The fact that he is embarrassed because of the form and shape of this garment is immaterial to the issue of a tallit's minimum size to permit reciting a blessing. He would be obligated in the mitzvah of tzitzit despite his embarrassment, and therefore the blessing would be warranted as well. People are embarrassed to wear a *tallit katan* in public since our styles of clothing are different than they were in the Talmudic era when most garments were simply bolts of cloth wrapped around the body. Harav Shelomo Kluger (responsa *Ha'elef Lekha Shelomo* #4) concurred with this reasoning.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (responsa *Yehave Da'at* Vol. V, #2), however, demonstrated that a number of *Aharonim* agreed with the *Eshel Avraham*. The *Ma'ase Rav Hehadash* states that one must not recite a blessing on any *tallit katan* since the Arizal taught that it must not have sleeves attached to it, and people are embarrassed to be seen going through the street wearing such a garment. This is likewise the ruling of Harav Hayim El'azar Shapira in *Nimuke Orah Hayim* (*Siman* 16).

**The Common Custom**

The popular custom nowadays is not to recite a blessing over any *tallit katan* regardless of its size – even if it is two cubits long and one cubit wide. There are several reasons for such a practice:

**a)** There is yet another opinion, cited in responsa *Yehave Da'at* and in *Halikhot Olam*, that the *tallit katan* must be long enough to reach the knees of the person wearing it.

**b)** The opinion of the *Eshel Avraham* of Butchatch.

**c)** Even if the tallit is fashioned to conform to the full measurements, it might shrink later on once it is laundered.

**d)** The tzitzit strands might become torn and invalidated through wear and laundering.

**e)** The *Poskim* debated whish is the proper text of the blessing one should recite over a *tallit katan*.

**f)** According to some *Poskim*, after reciting a blessing on the *tallit katan* at home, one must not recite a blessing on the *tallit gadol* upon arriving in the synagogue.

The responsa *Yaskil Avdi* (Vol. VIII, #22:1) concluded that the proper custom adopted by Sefardic Jews is to put on the *tallit katan* without any blessing and to recite the blessing over the *tallit gadol* having the *tallit katan* in mind as well. This is likewise the opinion of Maran the Rishon Letziyon.

**Those who do recite a blessing are on safe ground**

Despite the above discussion, Maran the Rishon Letziyon pointed out that those people who have the custom of reciting the blessing over the *tallit katan*, as long as it has the proper measurements, have a valid practice. They should not be persuaded to change their custom. All the reasons given above for not reciting the blessing can be countered, as follows:

**a)** The majority of *Poskim* concluded that the full measurements of a *tallit katan* are two cubits long and one cubit wide.

**b)** Many *Poskim* rejected the reasoning of the *Eshel Avraham* of Butchatch.

**c)** It is unlikely that the *tallit katan* will shrink after being laundered, and if it does the person can measure it and ascertain that this has happened.

**d)** It is always possible to examine the tzitzit strands to make sure that they have not been torn. Above in *Siman* 8:36, it was explained that according to Maran there is an obligation to examine the tzitzit before reciting the blessing.

**e)** Above in *Siman* 8:25 it was explained that all the *Poskim* agreed that one may recite the blessing of *al mitzvat tzitzit* over a *tallit katan*.

**f)** Although there are sometimes reasons to refrain from reciting a blessing when putting on the *tallit katan* while dressing in the morning, there are many situations when there is no such problem. For example, if someone goes swimming during the day, there is no problem with him reciting a blessing on his *tallit katan* afterward. Once he has gone for half an hour or more without wearing it, the blessing he recited in the morning no longer counts, as explained above in *Siman* 8:47. Since he is not about to wear his *tallit gadol* again that day, there is no problem with reciting a blessing on his *tallit katan*.

Based on this, Maran the Rishon Letziyon (responsa *Yabia Omer* Vol. VIII, #2) concluded that if someone changes into a different *tallit katan* during the day, he may recite the blessing of *al mitzvat tzitzit* on the new tallit. The

**ב.** שיעור זה של הטלית קטן, הוא מלבד הנקב של בית הצואר. כלומר, שצריך שיהיה שיעור הטלית אמה מלפניו ואמה מלאחריו מלבד הנקב, וחצי אמה מכל צד ברוחב הטלית שעל כל כתף. [תמונה צ"ד]

[הליכו"ע שם]



**The opening for one s head**

**2)** The measurements given in the previous halakha do not count the space through which one places one's head. There must be the measure of one square cubit in front of the person and one square cubit behind him. Also, the part of the tallit resting on his shoulders should be a half-cubit wide on each shoulder.[220] (Illustration №94)

*Yalkut Yosef* (page 208) concurred with this ruling, as long as the *tallit katan* has the proper measurement and the tzitzit strands have been examined and found intact. See above in *Siman* 8:24.

**220.** The *Mishna Berura* (16:4) and other *Aḥaronim* cited Harav Zalman's prayer book ruling that a *tallit katan* must be at least two cubits long, not counting the opening through which the wearer's head protrudes. That is, it must be at least one cubit long in front of the opening and one cubit long behind the opening. Maran the Rishon Letziyon (*Halikhot Olam* Vol. I, page 10) concurred with this.

**A *tallit katan's* width**

The Mahari"l (responsa *Heḥadashot* #4) ruled that the shoulders of a *tallit katan* must be wide. If the empty space is greater than the shoulders' width, they will not count at all. At first reading, this implies that the total width of the two shoulders must be greater than the width of the opening. The *Maḥatzit Hashekel* and the *Petaḥ Hadevir*, however, explained that it means simply that the shoulders must be wide enough so that the entire tallit is considered one garment and not two pieces connected by two shoulder straps. According to this interpretation, the *Kaf Haḥayim* Sofer (16:6) suggested that it should be sufficient if each shoulder is three fingerbreadths, since that is the minimum size of a "garment."

The *Ḥazon Ish* (*O.Ḥ.* 2:9) interpreted the Mahari"l's words according to their simple meaning. His instructions (*Kovetz Igrot* Vol. I, #10) are that, considered that a cubit is 60 centimeters according to his measuring system, the opening must be no more than 18 centimeters wide so that each shoulder will be at least 21 centimeters wide. According to the measuring system we follow, a cubit is 48 centimeters, and so the opening must be no wider than 14 centimeters so that each shoulder will be at least 17 centimeters wide. (Illustration №94)

Maran the Rishon Letziyon did not elaborate, and it appears from his words that the two shoulders must equal 48 centimeters besides the width of the opening. If this is what he means, it is a stringency uncharacteristic of his rulings. Even the *Mishna Berura*, who ruled stringently that the opening cannot count toward the length of the *tallit katan*, ruled quite leniently regarding its width, and each shoulder can be as narrow as three fingerbreadths. The *Ḥazon Ish* ruled that the shoulders must be wider, but he agreed that the opening does count as part of the width.

It must be, therefore, that Maran the Rishon Letziyon meant only that the two shoulders together with the opening must equal a cubit. A careful reading of his words reveals that although he stated that the opening cannot count as part of the length, he did not state that the opening cannot count as part of the width.

**The slit extending the opening**

The average woolen *tallit katan* manufactured today has an oblong opening for the head extended by a slit on the front side to make it easier to put on. It is likely that the slit-open section counts toward the length of the garment since none of the material is missing along that section; it is only slit in half. Indeed, this is the ruling of the *Eshel Avraham* Butchatch, cited in the *Piske Teshuvot* (footnote 17). This is likewise implied in the words of Harav Zalman in his prayer book. Nevertheless, the *Ḥazon Ish* had a button and buttonhole fashioned at the top of the slit in his *tallit katan*. In practice, he never bothered to button up the slit, but the fact that it was possible made it as if the slit was officially closed. (Illustration №94)