

ויוצא בו בשוק או אמה על אמה
The proper size of a tallit katan
Rabbi Jaclyn Rubin

On Menahot 40b, a braita gives the measurements for a talit which requires tzitzit: a garment that is big enough to cover the head and majority of the body of a minor and that an adult would wear out in a temporary way. [There is some debate as to a garment that is big enough to cover the head and majority of the body of a minor but that an adult wouldn't wear outside even in a temporary way: seemingly the Rambam and the R"l Abuhav say this garment does require tzitzit, but the Beit Yosef and the Rambam according to his interpretation say this garment would not require tzitzit. The Taz points out that this beraita is not relevant for a garment that an adult would wear in a more permanent way, since it is obvious that this garment requires tzitzit. There is also some debate about what age minor we are dealing with: the Tur says a child of 9 and the Rambam says a child who can go to the market by him or herself. The Ra'avad adds that a child who goes to the market him or herself won't lose the garment, and the BY reads the Tur's opinion as indicating that 9 is the age an unsupervised child won't lose the garment. The Beur Halakhah thinks the child is 13 and isn't embarrassed to wear only this talit katan in the summer.] This is the only indication in the Talmud of an appropriate size for a talit, and this makes sense: if it is a four-cornered garment that someone would reasonably wear, it requires tzitzit.

In the late 1300's, the transformation of the talit from a garment which was worn naturally as clothing to a ritualized garment is evident in the debates over the form of the talit katan, even before any formal measurements are introduced. R. Hayim Or Zarua (4) explains that one must wrap oneself in a talit, and not simply wear it, in order to say the berakhah בציצית להתעטף. He is opposed to the new garments in Ashkenaz, where half of the cloth is in front and half in back, with a neck hole in the middle. The Maharil (HaHadashot 4) permits such a garment, noting that many learned rabbis wear such a garment, but notes that his rabbi was careful to make the shoulder straps wide—borrowing a concept from Eruvin that too much open space makes it like two separate pieces and not one—and that he has not seen such garments with buttons or loops (such that one could remove one half from the other). [Presumably the straps are often thin straps, as described in the Mishnah Berurah.] The Terumat HaDeshen (45) describes the alternative: the entire garment hangs in back of the wearer, with only the two front tzitzit hanging over the shoulders and a strap to hang the garment around one's neck. This, notes the Terumat HaDeshen, is considered wrapping and not wearing. However, he goes on to say that many learned people who are careful with the mitzvah of tzitzit, wear a garment with a neck hole. Furthermore, our clothes are not clothes that wrap naturally. We can see, then, that the garment is no longer one that is naturally worn—our clothes don't have four corners. Yet the desire to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit spurs people to create garments that are appropriate. The tension remains present between a garment one would naturally wear and one that fulfills the requirements of tzitzit as it had been in the past—even though in the past it was a natural garment and it became only a ritualized version.

In the late 1600's, the Haham Tzvi (Likutei Teshuvot 122) argues against borrowing a concept from Eruvin in order to demand wide straps on a talit katan. The concept, he points out, is only

applicable to walls, and in general open space doesn't make things null. Sheilat Ya'avetz (1:20) points out that in a garment things do not need to be combined with air to make a single unit the way a wall does in this construction of an eruv. Mahatzit HaShekel (OH 16) points out that the language from Eruvin is metaphorical, indicating that the straps should be easily recognizable, part of a garment and not just holding two garments together. At essence here seems to be the fact that clothing styles are changing, and therefore the way one fulfills the mitzvah of tzitzit must be reevaluated. Demanding wide straps cuts against the ritual nature the talit katan takes on—it must be a real garment, in some plausible sense. Allowing straps of any size emphasizes the ritualized character of the garment.

The discussion of formal measurements for a talit katan is not raised until the early-mid 1600's. The Tzon Kodashim (on Menahot 41a) derives from Rashi that the minimal size is an amah by an amah. Mahatzit HaShekel (OH 16) finds this argument less than compelling, though he notes that in Moravian amot this would translate to $\frac{3}{4}$ amah by $\frac{3}{4}$ amah. The Pri HaAretz (1:1) cites the Derekh Hokhmah as requiring $\frac{3}{4}$ amah in length and $\frac{1}{2}$ amah in width, the the Pri HaAretz himself requires an amah by an amah. Further, he points out that there is no basis for distinguishing between the talit katan and the talit gadol. The Beur Halakhah suggests an amah by amah front and amah by amah back, so that if the two sides are not in fact considered one garment, one still has the correct shiur [though in that case each side doesn't have four tzitzit]. The concern with measurements indicates a fully-ritualized garment: one wouldn't be as concerned with measurements if it were about whether the garment were one someone would plausibly wear or not, much like the original beraita. However, the Beur Halakhah moves back towards the direction of a true garment when he notes argues that, though the halakhah is that a garment which one is embarrassed to wear to the market is not considered a proper garment, in our day, when we wear the talit katan under our clothes, this factor is not enough to cancel its identity as a garment.

In much of the discussion in the Aharonim, the concern is moreso what size garment necessitates a berakhah and not what garment necessitates tzitzit. The assumption seems to be that a garment of any size can have tzitzit, but that it would be a berakhah levatalah to recite the berakhah in this context. This again indicates the ritualized nature of the debate, as opposed to a concern about which garments require tzitzit or not.

It seems that the Ari's insistence that a talit katan not have arms, as cited in the Mishnah Berurah, is a complete acceptance of the talit as a ritual garment and not a real garment.

Although the measurements indicate more of a ritualized garment, as would the concern with the berakhah, the measurements also indicate a desire to make a tallit katan garment-like. The need for recognizable straps make it seem more like a garment than what the people of Ashkenaz came up with. Perhaps the straps they used were a different material from the cloth and therefore made it like even less of a normal garment.

One last note: the Hazon Ish rules that the should straps should be at least three finger-widths.

Thoughts on pulling it all together, summary of a discussion following the presentation of this material at Yeshivat Hadar, and thoughts *l'ma'aseh*:

It seems that the best compromise for women is at least a sleeveless tank top, that has something more substantial than spaghetti straps. While a tank top is a garment the way it is used today, and therefore not like the Ashkenazi tallitot ketanot that the poskim rail against, I think there are two considerations:

- 1) How much is the garment supposed to be ritualized, and, especially once most of the sides are cut to make four corners, how much it becomes ritualized even if it is meant to be mostly a garment?
- 2) In terms of the argument between the Maharil and the Haham Tzvi, I understand the resistance to allowing such thin straps: on some level, they don't seem like part of the garment, but are there to hold up the garment. I am not sure how one would measure the the garment: do the straps count as part of the measurement to cut more than half-way up? Would they not count for the measurements of an amah by an amah (or whatever measurements one holds by)? My instinct would be to be mahmir in both cases, but that may make such a garment more difficult.

In addition, the following consideration was raised: if one allows a tank top because it is a proper beged, but maintains that men's tallitot ketanot fall more on the ritual side of the spectrum, men's tallitot and women's tallitot have become different issues, and are disconnected in a substantial way. That is precisely why I am not willing to give up on the shiurim outlined above, even if even the minimal size is a little big for women potentially – I am not sure how the discussion translates without becoming disconnected and straying from the sources.

The issue of *tzniut* came up as well. Is my discomfort with tank tops partially because I don't consider them an appropriate garment in any case? I think that may play into it, and I am not sure how one separates *tzniut* from tallitot ketanot once we have entered the realm of talking about what makes something clothing. It was pointed out that there are situations where women would wear a tank top as a garment, whether under clothes or in certain situations alone as a garment, just as men would wear tallitot ketanot in some situations as a single garment, and it has not ceased to be a garment completely.

It was suggested that a tallit katan be something one can't easily take off. This, I think, doesn't offer an answer to whether or not a tank top as opposed to anything else fulfills this function, but it is an interesting take on what a tallit katan should be—something with some substance, not merely a representation of something else.