

“After years of thinking about it, I started wearing tzit-tzit around Pesach, during a year of study in Jerusalem. With the help of a friend, I made three tallitot k'tanot out of my own tank tops, and tied the fringes in my living room, linking them to lace or beads on the corners of the tank tops. I wore one almost every day, carefully tucking in the tzit-tzit in to avoid harassment on the streets of pious, non-egalitarian Jerusalem. But in friends' homes I would take them out, and proudly show them off. When people ask why I wear them, I often say it's my friendship bracelet with God. I also love the four corners, which remind me of a foundation of a home, strong and rooted. Over the past few years, it has been hard for me to keep up the practice all the time, especially as not all my wardrobe choices work with a tallit katan. My guess is it will come in and out of my life as a meaningful mitzvah. I definitely recommend trying it.”

-- R. Shoshana Meira Friedman

“Many people who wear tzitzit tuck the fringes into their clothes, so they are not visible. When I first donned my fringes, I considered doing this; after all, it would spare me from the stares, questions and unpleasant interactions (as an introvert, I find even polite inquiries sometimes feel intimidating). But one of the things I love most about my tzitzit is the way they function as an identifier. I was raised to dress in a fashion that identified me in a more normative way as an observant Jewish girl, wearing skirts and long sleeves in public. During my time in high school, I've developed serious philosophical issues with religious codes of modesty — skirts especially are physically restrictive, and requiring a group to restrain themselves in this way seems to me to be less an issue of respect for the body (which, in any case, should be unrelated to the amount of skin covered) and more an attempt to constrict women and limit their power. Now, my more comfortable jeans and T-shirt make me all but indistinguishable from any teenager on the street. Wearing tzitzit is meaningful for me because when they dangle for all to see, my values are on display. Even though the consequences of this choice are not always what I would like, my tzitzit and what they represent — feminist, observant Judaism — are worth the trouble.”

--Avigayil Halpern

“I started to wear tzitzit when I was in a liberal arts college, after spending the year learning at seminary in Israel. In college, where being religious wasn't the norm, I realized that I wanted people to know how strongly my religious commitment was part of who I was without me having to explicitly speak about it first. Tzitzit seemed to be about that exactly - a sign of being a person dedicated to Torah and mitzvot, both so other people would know something about my identity and so that I would constantly be reminded of my own commitments.”

--Aviva

“There is a story in the Talmud (Menachot 44a) about a man who solicits a beautiful and talented prostitute. As he is getting undressed to consummate the arrangement, his four tzitzit slap him in the face. He immediately gets out of bed, leaving the prostitute confused and offended. So he explains to her that his tzitzit remind him of God's divine justice, and she is so impressed that she finds his rabbi, converts to Judaism, and eventually marries her would-be client.

When I first thought about wearing tzitzit, I was held back in part by the fact that they are a mitzvah attached to an undergarment. Did I really want my relationship with my intimate clothing to reflect that aggadah about the man and the prostitute, such that between my social self and my nudity was an ever-present reminder of my religious commitments? And even if I did want that, it was hard to imagine that tzitzit could really do for me what they did for the man in the story—that is, keep me from letting my bodily desires influence my better judgment, yet win me a life of totally halakhically sanctioned sex with a great-looking partner who shared my religious commitments. I was afraid that even with tzitzit, I would not be able to live up to the example of the Menachot man in a battle against my yetzer hara; or alternately that my tzitzit would make me feel too self-conscious and restrained; or else that they would be a turn-off to partners for whom my intimate self would seem either too frum or not frum enough or just weird.

It so happens that my bashert and I fell in love just a few weeks after I finally started wearing tzitzit. I certainly don't take this as proof of the story's representation of tzitzit; this is not some kind of weird kiruv promise: "Don't worry ladies, if you start wearing tzitzit, you'll find a husband right away!" Sex and gender-related anxieties about tzitzit are real and worthy of attention. Questions about self-presentation and Judaism are legitimately difficult ones. And everyone knows that finding the right match is harder than splitting the Red Sea. But I do think that ideally, tzitzit can and should help people seek out relationships with partners who, like the prostitute, value tzitzit-wearers enough to at least be curious about their commitments and perhaps even to join them on their path. Tzitzit are a reminder (if, at times, one that can feel like a slap in the face) that even our most intimate moments include the Divine too."

--Sarah

"I started to wear tzitzit after studying my son's bar-mitzvah parsha, Shlach Lecha. I realized that I had been seeking a reminder of God's presence in my life throughout the day and that this could be such a symbol for me. When I put my tzitzit on in the morning, I thank God for the opportunity and ability to wear him throughout my day. During the day, I feel the fringes under my clothing and immediately feel a calm come over me. I am so very grateful I knew other women who wore tzitzit, who could teach me and answer my many questions."

--Felicia Seaton

"I started to wear tzitzit 10 years ago because it was an easy mitzvah. My thinking was that there are 613 mitzvot and some are intrinsically difficult for everyone and some are particularly difficult for me. I figured tzitzit could be an easy one for me-- wake up in the morning, put on my tzitzit-- mitzvah accomplished! I only have to do it once a day and I have to get dressed anyway.

Over time there have been distractions and difficulties. There have been times when doing this mitzva inevitably became focused on how people react to my tzitzit and who reacted to them. During certain times of the year and occasions for dress up tzitzit have brought on conflict with ideas I had about fashion or modesty. When I was pregnant and nothing fit, wearing tzitzit brought an unwelcome focus to my relationship with my pregnant body.

But for me, at its best and at its core, wearing tzitzis is about snagging an easy mitzvah and using that action to strengthen my resolve to look for other easy mitzvot to grab on to.”

--Joanna

*We welcome more contributions to this compilation! Please email information@netzitzot.com if you would like to write a short reflection.