

טלית

Tallit

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַתְּטִיף בְּצִיצֵת

The Tallit (Jews from Europe call it a “Tallis”) is a prayer shawl—a special cloth made beautiful with the tzitzit tied onto each of the four corners, and a beautiful collar called the “atarah” (עֲטָרָה) or “crown” on which is often embroidered the blessing said when the tallit is put on. It is called the “atarah” (crown) for a number of reasons. First, often the tallit is put over the head when prying so as to block out all distractions. When we pray, we want to have our full attention to be given to HaShem! So when the tallit with the atarah is put over the head, it is like a crown. And maybe that will help us remember that when we pray, we’re praying to our King. What is more, it is when we humble ourselves in prayer that we gain strength to live as HaShem has commanded us. If we want a crown on our head, the best way is to pray. Secondly, we have the atarah on our tallit because it reminds us of the wise saying: “Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and the glory of the children are their fathers.” (הָאֲבוֹת עֲטָרַר זְקֵנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְתַפְאֶרֶת בְּנֵי אֲבוֹתָם, אבותם, Prov 17:6). Even as HaShem is our Father, and therefore our crown, so we, His children, can be a crown for Him.

Since prayer is so important to us, we are careful with our tallit. We fold it nicely when we’re finished, and put it in a special bag to keep it clean. We respect the tallit and the tzitzit on it. We don’t let the tzitzit drag on the ground, and we take the tallit off when we go to use the bathroom. Before we put the tallit on, we cover ourselves with it, recite the blessing along with Psalm 36:7-10, and then carefully cover ourselves with the tallit. We remember that HaShem Himself is covered with shining light like a tallit, and that we share the splendor of His glory when we talk to Him in prayer. When we cover ourselves with the tallit, it is as though we’re in our very own place, alone with HaShem, talking to Him.

It is our tradition to wear the tallit to all day-time services. The only evening service we wear the tallit is erev Yom Kippur, at the Kol Nidrei service.

Here’s how the blessing for putting on the tallit goes:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha’olam asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav
v’tzivanu l’hitateif b’tzitzit

(Blessed are You, Adonai our g-d, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments
and commanded us to wear tzitzit)