

Women and Tallitot and Aliyot
Ohev Yisrael
10.25.23

The Torah mentions regulations for the wearing of *tzitziyot* (tassles) on the corners of a four-cornered garment. Such clothing in ancient times were four-cornered garments, for both men and women. The wearing of the *tzitziyot*, however, was traditionally a male practice. After the Second Temple period, the style of clothing changed but men continued to observe the biblical commandment by wearing an undergarment called a *tallit katan*. Centuries later a ceremonial garment was created by what we now call a *tallit*. It was worn during times of prayer and certain religious ceremonies. This too was something observed primarily by men.

Admittedly, there is one instance of women wearing a *tallit katan*. During 11th c. France the famed biblical and Talmudic commentator, Rashi, had his daughters wear a *tallit katan*. He saw the commandment not as gender specific. However, there are no other instances of such practice.

Until the mid-20th c. the practice of wearing a *tallit katan* throughout the day and a *tallit* during times of prayer was primarily male practice. Like a yarmulke/kippah, this has come to be associated as a male garment. The Torah forbids men to wear women's clothing and vice versa. (see Dt 22:5) Based off biblical practice and long-standing Jewish tradition the *tallit* and *tallit katan* would be considered garments that are for men only. However, with the rise of the Reform and Conservative movements, women have been wearing *tallitot* during prayer, particularly when participating in a Torah service.

We at Ohev Yisrael continue to view the *tallit* as a male garment in its traditional form. However, given some historical precedent and popular modern Jewish practice, and given it is a distinctly female iteration, we do see it as permissible for women to don a *tallit* during services. It should be treated with honor and respect, just as is expected from men who wear it.

We, however, do not believe women should wear a *tallit katan* or yarmulke/kippah. These are still very much considered male garments. If a woman wants to cover her head, there is a tradition that married women cover their hair as a sign of modesty, reserving the sight of her hair only for that of her husband.

When women are called up to participate in the Torah service, they are not required to cover their heads. Jewish tradition requires all married women to cover their hair as a sign of modesty. It is a common practice for some women to cover their heads when lighting candles, but this has no biblical precedent, nor even much from the side of tradition. If women want to do so out of honor to the Lord and/or their husbands when approaching the Torah, they may do so. There is, however, no obligation for a woman to do so.