

## Additional Document for 6.6 – Women Wearing Tallitot and Kippot

(This commentary is from Traditional Jewish sources.)

Also included in this section are some rabbinic commentaries that take into account the biblical command of how to wear *tzitzit*, and women are not expected to fulfill that command, neither biblically nor traditionally.

“Women are not obligated to wear a tallit. This is because tallit is a daytime mitzvah, and they are exempt from fulfilling almost all time-bound positive commandments (such as reciting the Shema, which is done morning and night, or taking the Four Kinds on the holiday of Sukkot). Nonetheless, women do fulfill many of these mitzvot if they so desire.

Yet the prevailing custom is that women do not wear tallitot. A number of reasons for this reticence are found in Halachic works:

**A.** Both women and men are Biblically forbidden to wear clothing normally associated with the other gender. For example, men may not wear skirts. Since a tallit is traditionally a male garment, for a woman to wear one would constitute a violation of this statute.

**B.** Although women observe many time-bound mitzvot though they are not obligated to do so—an admirable practice for which they are certainly greatly rewarded—a tallit is different because there is no obligation whatsoever to wear a tallit—even for a man. Rather, in the event that he wears a four-cornered garment, a man must attach fringes to its corners.

Since a man is not obligated to seek out such a garment, women who are entirely exempt from this mitzvah (i.e., they may wear fringeless four-cornered garments) do not wear them at all.

**C.** A woman who fulfills this mitzvah, which she is not obligated in doing and is not performed by the vast majority of her gender, draws undue attention to her excessive piety in an inappropriately ostentatious manner. [The concept of abstaining from a particular activity because it is deemed to be ostentatious is a general rule in Jewish law, applied both to men and women in various cases.]

**D.** On a mystical level, the inner workings of this mitzvah are male-oriented and just don’t “do it” for a woman.

So what is a woman who wishes to wear a tallit to do?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, eminent 20th-century halachic authority, writes that a woman who desires to wear a tallit may do so, provided that she wears a distinctively feminine tallit to avoid the problem mentioned above.

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He cautions, however, that this applies only to women whose desire to wear a tallit stems from a yearning to fulfill this mitzvah, though recognizing that they are not required to do so, and not to individuals who don a tallit as a “protest,” a means of challenging what they perceive to be a gender bias in Jewish law. Such an individual is not fulfilling a mitzvah, and to the contrary.”

*(Citation from Chabad.org,*

[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/587787/jewish/Is-it-appropriate-for-a-woman-to-wear-a-tallit.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/587787/jewish/Is-it-appropriate-for-a-woman-to-wear-a-tallit.htm) quoting “Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim IV, section 49.”)

*(Biblical citation: Deuteronomy 22:5 – “A man’s apparel is not to be on a woman, nor is a man to wear woman’s clothing—for whoever does these things is detestable to Adonai your God.”)*