

A Short Guide to Tsitsit with Tekhelet

ויאמר ה' אל משה לאמר. דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם ועשו להם ציצת על כנפי בגדיהם לזרתם ונתנו על ציצת הכנף פתיל תכלת. במדבר ט"ו: ל"ז-ל"ח

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying, Speak to the children of Yisrael, and bid them that they make them fringes in the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of each corner a thread of blue. Bemidbar 15; 37-38

How many strings on each corner?

תנו רבנן כמה חוטין הוא נותן? בית שמאי אומרים ד', ובית הלל אומרים ג'...
מנחות מא:

The Rabbis taught, How many strings does one place [on each tsitsit]? Bet Shamai say four and Bet Hillel say three... Menachot 41b

What is the ratio of white to tekhelet strings?

מכמה גדילים אתה עושה? אין פחות משלושה - דברי בית הלל. בית שמאי אומרים: שלושה של צמר ורביעית של תכלת. והלכה כבית שמאי. ספרי שלח (קטו)

How many strings must one place? Not less than three - this is the opinion of Bet Hillel. Bet Shamai say: Three [strings] of [white] wool and a fourth of tekhelet. And the halacha is according to Bet Shamai. Sifre Shelach (115)

כמה גדילים נעשים? אין פחות משלושה חוטים כדברי בית הלל. בית שמאי אומרים: מארבעה חוטים של תכלת וארבעה חוטים של לבן... והלכה כדברי בית שמאי. ספרי כי תצא (רלד)

How many strings are placed? Not less than three strings according to Bet Hillel. Bet Shamai say: Four strings of tekhelet and four strings of white. And the halacha is according to Bet Shamai. Sifre Ki Tetzei (234)

*Note: The Vilna Gaon claims that the correct version of this Sifre is "בג' חוטין של לבן - ורביעית של תכלת" - "With three strings of white and a fourth of tekhelet." This change would harmonize the two quotes from the Sifre.

There are three different opinions of the *Rishonim* regarding the ratio of white to blue strings:

- **Raavad** (השגות הלי ציצית אי:וי) and the **Aruch** (ערך תכלת) - Based on the *Sifre* in *Shelach* hold that one full string (when folded it becomes two of the eight) must be *tekhelet*.
- **Rashi** (מנחות לח. ד"ה התכלת) and **Tosafot** (שם וכן מא: ד"ה בית שמאי) - Two full strings (four of the eight) are *tekhelet*.
- **Rambam** (הלי ציצית אי:וי) - Half of one string (when folded becomes one of the eight strings) is *tekhelet*. The Rambam understands the *posuk* in Bemidbar in the following manner: ונתנו על ציצת הכנף (=לבן) פתיל תכלת - *put upon the fringe of each corner (= white) one thread of blue*. Only the windings (פתיל) around the white core (כנף) must be *tekhelet*.

Issues regarding the windings (krichot)

Chulyot

וכמה שיעור חוליא? תניא, רבי אומר כדי שיכרוך וישנה. תאנא, הפוחת לא יפחות משבע, והמוסיף לא יוסיף על שלוש עשרה. הפוחת לא יפחות משבע - כנגד שבעה רקיעים, והמוסיף לא יוסיף על שלש עשרה - כנגד שבעה רקיעין וששה אוירין שביניהם.
מנחות לט.

And what is the measurement of a chulya (link)? We learned in a Braita, Rebbe says so that you can wind once, then again, and a third time. We learned in a Braita, One who minimizes should not have less than seven, and one who maximizes should not exceed thirteen. One who minimizes should not have less than seven - this is analogous to the seven heavens, and one who maximizes should not exceed thirteen - this is analogous to the seven heavens and six spaces between them.
Mehachot 39a

When tying *tsitsit* with *tekhelet*, there is a notion of *chulyot* (literally links). There is an argument as to what the numbers seven and thirteen refer. Most *Rishonim* explain that these are the amount of *chulyot* (each of which is made up of three twists as Rebbe states). Some *Rishonim* explain that each *chulya* can have between seven and thirteen twists. As for Rebbe's three twists, this is explained either as the number of *tekhelet* twists in each *chulya* (and the number seven includes both the white and the *tekhelet*), or that Rebbe is talking about the absolute minimum required to fulfill the *mitzva* (*bedieved deorayta*), but the best method (*lechatchila derabanan*) should have between seven and thirteen twists.

Color of twists

תנא, כשהוא מתחיל, מתחיל בלבן - 'הכנף', מין כנף; וכשהוא מסיים, מסיים בלבן - מעלין בקודש ולא מורידין.
מנחות לט.

We learned in the Mishna, When one begins, he begins with white - "[the fringe of each] corner", the same kind as the corner [ie. The same color as the garment]; And when one concludes, he concludes with white - one always increases holiness and never decreases.
Mehachot 39a

There is an argument as to the explanation of this passage:

- **Rav Amram Gaon** (גאוןיקה ח"ב עמ' 330-331) holds that the first *chulya* is white, the next is *tekhelet*, and so on alternating white and *tekhelet* for seven or thirteen *chulyot*.
- The **Rambam** (הלי' ציצית א' :ב-ג') holds that the first twist of the first *chulya* and the last twist of the last *chulya* are white, and all the other twists are *tekhelet*.
- The **Raavad** (השגות הלי' ציצית א' :ד) holds that the twists of each *chulya* alternate between white and *tekhelet*.

The Knots

Kesher Elyon

מנחות לט.

ואמר רבה שמע מינה קשר עליון דאורייתא.

Rava says, this implies that the upper most knot is required from the Torah.

Mehachot 39a

Rashi (מנחות לט. ותוספות שם) brings down two possibilities regarding the placement of the upper most knot.

1. Closest to the garment, in order to connect the strings to the garment
2. At the end of all the twists, which adds stability to the windings

Double or single knots

There is an argument as to the nature of the knots of the *tsitsit*. The Geonim (גאונים ח"ב עמ' 331) hold that a knot can be one string tucked under itself. Rabbenu Tam (מנחות לט. ד"ה לא) compares the knots of *tsitsit* to knots in other laws like *Shabbat* and therefore requires a double knot.

Knots on each chulya

מנחות לח: אמר רבא שמע מינה צריך לקשור על כל חוליא וחוליא

Rava says, this implies that one must tie a knot after each and every chulya.

Mehachot 38b

Five Knots

ציצית, שש מאות. שמונה חוטין וחמישה קשרים, הרי שש מאות ושלוש עשרה.
תנחומא, קרח י"ב

[The word] tsitsit is numerically equivalent to 600, 8 strings and 5 knots adds up to 613.

Tanchuma, Korach 12

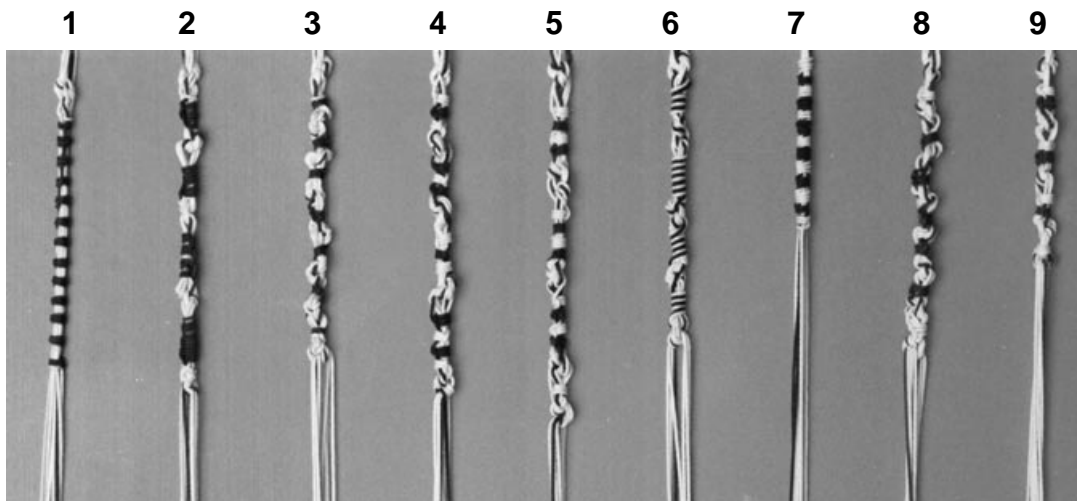
The length of the windings and the strings

אמר רב הונא אמר רב ששת אמר רב ירמיה בר אבא אמר רב... ונויי תכלת שלישי
גדיל ושני שלישי ענף.
מנחות לט.

Rav Huna said in the name of Rav Sheshet in the name of Rav Yirmiyah bar Abba in the name of Rav: The most ornate tekhelet ought be a third windings, and two thirds hanging threads.

Mehachot 39a

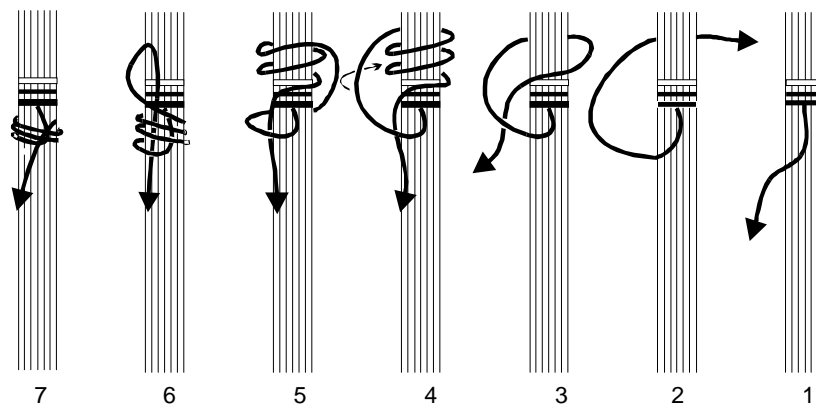
Various opinions regarding the krichot for tsitsit with tekhelet



The principles discussed above are applied differently by the *poskim*. The numbers correspond to the accompanying picture. The following is an (incomplete) list:

1. The **Rambam** - all twists are *tekhelet* except the first and last. Seven or thirteen *chulyot* are tied with a knot between each that keeps them together and separate from each other. The Yemenites have a tradition (even with white *tsitsit*) of tying a special knot around each *chulya*.
2. The **Rambam** according to the **Radzyner** - has all the twists *tekhelet* except the first and last. There are five knots: between the first and the second knot there are seven twists, between the second and third - eight twists, between the third and fourth - eleven twists and between the fourth and last - thirteen twists. Each group of three is separated by winding the *tekhelet* around and inside them to hold them together.
3. Another understanding of the **Rambam** - all twists blue except the first and last, with a double knot between each *chulya*.
4. The **Chinuch** - thirteen *chulyot*, alternating white and *tekhelet* distributed between five double knots. Between the first and second knot - three *chulyot* (white, *tekhelet*, white). After the second knot another three *chulyot*, (*tekhelet*, white, *tekhelet*). After the third another three (white, *tekhelet*, white), and after the fourth - four *chulyot* (*tekhelet*, white, *tekhelet*, white).
5. The **Vilna Gaon** - thirteen *chulyot*, alternating white and *tekhelet* distributed between five double knots. Between the first and second knot - four *chulyot* (white, *tekhelet*, white, *tekhelet*) and the same between the second-third, and third-fourth knots. Between the fourth and last knot - one *chulya* of white.
6. The **Raavad** according to **Rav Natronai Gaon** - five knots. Between each knot, seven to thirteen twists, with the twists alternating white then *tekhelet*. Between the second and third knot, the amount of twists is not definite.
7. **Rav Amram Gaon** - seven or thirteen *chulyot* alternating white then *tekhelet*. A knot at the beginning and at the end (according to the **Baal Haitur**, a knot after each *chulya*). (These knots are not double, but rather the winding string tucked under itself.)
8. The first *shitta* in **Tosafot** - seven *chulyot* of three twists each, separated from each other by a double knot. The first *chulya* is white, the next are *tekhelet*, and the last *chulya* is white.
9. The second *shitta* in **Tosafot** - first a double knot, then one *chulya* of white and one of *tekhelet*, then a second double knot, again white then *tekhelet* and a knot, then again white and *tekhelet* then a knot, and finishing with one white *chulya* and a double knot. This has seven *chulyot* and five knots.

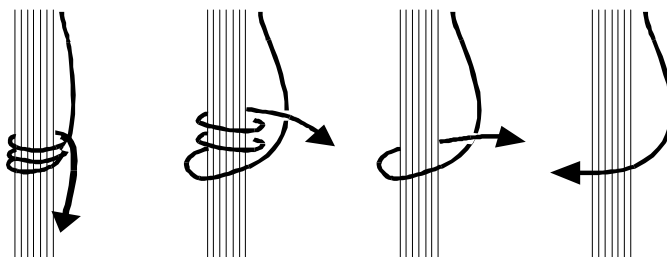
Tying a *chulya* according to the Yemenites



1. Hold the *tsitsit* with the *tekhelet* string towards the front.
2. Bring the *tekhelet* string along the left of the *tsitsit* and pass it under the others higher than where the *chulya* is to be.

3. Wind the string over the others and through the loop created in step 2.
4. Repeat step 3 twice, so that all together you have three loose twists through the loop higher than the intended place for the *chulya*. Now align the string back together with the others.
5. Begin to unwind the the loop of step 2 around to the left and under all the *tsitsit* at the position that you want the bottom of the *chulya* to be.
6. Continue unwinding the loop from bottom to top setting the second and third twist adjacent to the first.
7. After three twists, pull the end of the *tekhelet* string to tighten the *chulya*.

Tying a chulya according to Radzyn



For more details see:

- התכלת, ר' אליהו טבגר, ירושלים, תשנ"ג (available from P'Til Tekhelet)
- התכלת, ר' מנחם בורשטין, ספריית, ירושלים, תשמ"ח
- Using ציצית in תכלת, Rav Hershel Schachter, (...)
- (תחומין כרך ט"ז) חידוש התכלת ובירור ענייני ציצית ותכלת, יהודה ראק
- חוט תכלת, ר' יצחק ברנד, תשנ"ו (available from P'Til Tekhelet)

Ordering from P'Til Tekhelet

Amutat P'Til Tekhelet provides *tekhelet* according to any of the various *shittot*. We offer no *psak halacha* regarding which view to choose, and urge you to study the sources and consult a Rabbinic authority. As a service, P'Til Tekhelet will provide the *beged* and tie the *tekhelet* according to the requested *shitta*.

Price List

Description	Size	Price
Set of Rambam Tekhelet (1 of 8 strings)		\$75.00
Set of Raavad Tekhelet (2 of 8 strings)		\$70.00
Set of Tosafot Tekhelet (4 of 8 strings)		\$115.00
Talit Gadol Wool with black stripe	regular (60")	\$45.00
Talit Gadol Wool with black stripe	large (70")	\$50.00
Talit Gadol Wool with white stripe	regular (60")	\$45.00
Talit Gadol Wool with white stripe	large (70")	\$50.00
Talit Katan Wool with black stripe	regular (24")	\$12.00
Talit Katan Wool with black stripe	large (26")	\$13.00
Talit Katan Wool with white stripe	regular (24")	\$12.00
Talit Katan Wool with white stripe	large (26")	\$13.00
Talit Katan All Cotton	regular (22")	\$7.00
Talit Katan All Cotton	large (26")	\$8.00

* For a complete *beged* with *tekhelet* tied on, please add \$10.00

To order a please specify:

Number of strings

Rambam (1 of 8)

Raavad (2 of 8)

Tosafot (4 of 8)

Beged

Type _____

Size _____

Shitta for tying

1 - Rambam according to Teimanim

2 - Rambam according to Radzyner

3 - Rambam with double knots

4 - Chinuch

5 - Vilna Gaon

6 - Raavad

7 - Rav Amram Gaon

8 - Tosafot with a knot between each chulya

9 - Tosafot with five knots

10 - Other _____

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