Wrapping Ourselves Blindly

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The mitzvah of tzitzis is one of our most recognizable and familiar mitzvos. Children customarily begin wearing tzitzis from a very young age (generally from their fourth year) and continue wearing tzitzis as part of a daily ritual throughout life. However, despite this familiarity the mitzvah of tzitzis is one that is filled with much lore and law. There are many views and customs regarding even the most basic laws and practices involving tzitzis, such as how we tie them onto the corners of the garment, through how many holes they are to be placed, and what type of garments require them. In this article we discuss and analyze the custom of donning tzitzis with the act of “atifa,” or “wrapping,” which is subject to many diverse views and customs.

I. The Mitzvah of Tzitzis and the Talis

Under Torah law tzitzis are required to be affixed only to a garment with four (or more) square “corners,” and according to other views, it is a requirement only when actually wearing the four-cornered garment. The Gemara in Shabbos 147a and Menachos 41a implies that dur-

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1 To illustrate this point, the most prevalent custom regarding how tzitzis strings are tied and knotted (in a sequence of 7, 8, 11 and 13 “wrappings”) is not found in Shulchan Aruch or the Rema, but appears to be based on the custom attributed to the Arizal (R. Isaac b. Solomon Luria, 1534–1572).

2 The Gemara in Menachos 42a quotes a disagreement between Rav Nachman and Rav Chisda over whether the mitzvah of tzitzis is dependent on the garment or on the person who wears it. The halacha follows

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ing the times of the Talmud (and presumably in earlier times as well), most people wore clothing that consisted of a single four-cornered garment that was wrapped around the body. However, even though present-day clothing does not consist of a single square or rectangle garment, nor does it generally have four corners, it has become customary to wear a single square or rectangle garment with four corners (known as a talis) during the morning prayers, especially when reciting the morning Shema.

As with most other positive commandments, a brachah is recited when fulfilling the mitzvah of tzitzis. Before putting on a talis, the brachah of הלעטפה בнятиеיה (“who commanded us to wrap ourselves with tzitzis”) is said. The literal translation of the word תפילת/atifah is “wrapping oneself up.” The word הלעטפה in the brachah, it then seems, reveals atifah as a predefined method of donning the talis (as opposed to simply putting on or wearing it). There are also other specific references to atifah in connection with wearing a talis. For example, Rambam in Hilchos Tefilla (5:5) states that it is the custom of talmidei chachamim to pray only while עטופים (see also Rambam Hilchos Tzitzis 3:11).

Indeed, there are various customs as to how to do this specified “wrapping” when donning the talis. In this article we will describe the one that appears to be the most common. We will explore the background of this custom and other halachos pertaining to atifah.

the opinion of Rav Nachman that the mitzvah is dependent on the wearer, i.e., it is required only when a person is actually wearing a four-cornered garment. See Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 19.


4 “Sefer Milim - Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature” by Prof. Marcus Jastro, p. 1063.

5 We note, however, that it is not at all clear that the use of the specified language of הלעטפה in the brachah necessarily means that there is a predefined method of wrapping the talis. As will be explained further, it appears that the usual method of wearing garments during the period of the Talmud was via atifah, in which case the language of הלעטפה in the brachah may simply mean we are commanded to put on or wear a garment with tzitzis in the usual manner of wearing a garment.
This custom is one that appears to be the most widespread (especially in our community)—to wrap the *talis* so that it completely covers the face and the eyes. This is performed in a series of steps, where the wearer first holds the *talis* with two wide-spread hands over the head. The *brachah* is then recited, after which the *talis* is placed over the head and pulled down over the face all the way to the mouth (or below it), so that the *talis* completely covers the face. Finally, all four corners of the *talis* are then gathered and thrown over the left shoulder. This position is maintained for the amount of time it takes to walk four *amos* (approximately 6-8 feet). This custom of performing *atifa* is demonstrated in a series of illustrations by R’ Dovid Feldman in *Shaar HaTziyurim*, which is printed in the back of the *Mishnah Berurah* published by *Oz V’hadaar* (see Figure 1).

There seemingly is mention of this specific custom in the *Mishnah Berurah* (8:4), which writes:

בשעה תפשת מכסה ראשה והטלית עלショップה עד פנים

During *atifa* you cover your head with the *talis* until it reaches to the mouth.

Other than making vague references to the *Bais Yosef* and the customs of the Arizal, the *Mishnah Berurah* does not present us with any other source for this custom. Given its apparent absence in classical sources, it would seem important to identify where it originated in order to analyze its appropriateness.

As briefly mentioned above, during the times of the Talmud (and in ancient times generally) most people wore clothing that consisted of a single square or rectangle four-cornered garment that was draped and fastened (or “wrapped”) around the body. This garment was generally worn as a shawl, cape or tunic. This was typical of the clothing worn by the people in the Middle East during that period (and in many instances even today), and was also somewhat similar to the

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6 The *Mishnah Berurah* in *Shaar Hatziyurim* (*Orach Chaim* 8:10) brings the *Bais Yosef* as the source for this custom without providing any specific citation. It is not clear where in the *Bais Yosef* this specific custom is mentioned. The custom of the Arizal in certain aspects of wearing *tzitzis* is also mentioned by the *Mishnah Berurah*, but it is unclear if the intent was to include the custom of *atifa* as well.
togas worn in ancient Greece and Rome. Accordingly, it is possible that the various customs found in wrapping the \textit{talis via atifa} reflect the typical way in which this garment was wrapped around the body during the times of the Talmud. However, although the \textit{Gemara} in \textit{Shabbos} 147a and \textit{Menachos} 41a describes some specifics of how these garments were worn (at times, for example, partly doubled and sometimes with the ends thrown over the shoulders), there is no indication of ancient garment-wearing customs in other elements of the way we perform \textit{atifa} (such as covering the face). Thus, it is not clear why these specifics should be incorporated into what we call \textit{atifa} when putting on a \textit{talis}. There are also some other difficulties with performing \textit{atifa} via covering the face, which will be discussed in more detail below. We will also see that these difficulties and alternative customs have already been addressed by other prominent authorities.

\section*{II. What is Atifa}

Although we are most familiar with \textit{atifa} in regard to \textit{tzitzis}, there is in fact no specific mention of \textit{atifa} with \textit{tzitzis} in Tanach or the \textit{Gemara}.\footnote{See \textit{The Tallith Katan} (these were the standard garments that were worn “as late as the classical Greek period . . . similar garments were worn in Talmudic times”).} However, there are explicit mentions of \textit{atifa} in Tanach and the \textit{Gemara} in two other \textit{mitzvos}: \textit{Atifa} required of a \textit{metzora} and \textit{atifa} required of a mourner, an \textit{avel}. In fact, the \textit{atifa} requirement of these two \textit{mitzvos} is specifically linked in the \textit{Gemara} and \textit{halacha}.\footnote{We note that the concept of performing \textit{atifa} with a \textit{talis} as part of the \textit{mitzvah} of wearing \textit{tzitzis} is mentioned in the \textit{Tur} and by other \textit{Rishonim}, but not specifically in the \textit{Gemara} or the \textit{Shulchan Aruch}. Even these discussions in the \textit{Rishonim} are premised on other sources of \textit{atifa} (such as those for \textit{metzora} and \textit{avel}, as discussed below). As mentioned above, there are other specific references to \textit{atifab} when donning a \textit{talis}, but not necessarily as part of the \textit{mitzvah} of wearing \textit{tzitzis}. See, for example, Rambam, \textit{Hilchos Tefilla} (5:5); \textit{Hilchos Tzitzis} (3:11) (regarding the custom of \textit{talmidei chachamim} to pray only while \textit{עטופים}).}
1. Atifas Metzora

One of the sources of atifa is found in the procedures to be followed by a person afflicted with tzoraas (referred to colloquially as leprosy)—a metzora.

When a person is afflicted with tzoraas, a white-colored affliction on the skin or in the hair, and is declared impure (טָמֵא) by a kohen after an examination (or, in some cases, multiple examinations), the metzora is subject to procedures designed to exclude him from society. These procedures include having him remain all alone “outside the camp” and calling out loud to anyone who comes near that he is ritually impure. The metzora is also required to tear his clothes and refrain from cutting his hair.

The Torah in Vayikra (13:45-46) states:

אֲשֶׁר וְהַצָּרוּעַ וְרַפּוּעִים יִהְיוּ בְּגָדָיו הַנֶּגַע בּוֹ פָּרוּאשׁוֹ יִהְיֶה וְעַל-שָׂפָם יִקְרָא טָמֵא וְטָמֵא יַעְטֶה:

And the person with tzoraas in whom there is the affliction, his garments shall be rent, the hair of his head shall be unshorn . . . and he is to call out “Impure, impure!” All the days wherein the plague is in him he shall be impure; he is impure; he shall dwell alone; outside the camp shall his dwelling be.

The verse includes the phrase וְעַל-יַעְטֶה שָׂפָם. The word יעטה is translated by Onkelos as יתעטף,9 and thus it seems clear from these verses that the metzora must perform “atifa,” which we would translate as “cloaking.” Furthermore, it would seem from the specific designation of שָׂפָם in the verse that the atifa by a metzora includes a requirement to specifically cover the mouth or the lips.

We note that the exact translation of the phrase וְעַל-יַעְטֶה שָׂפָם (vis-à-vis the relationship between cloaking and the lips) is subject to many diverse opinions. Simply translated, the phrase seems to state: “he shall cover his [upper] lip”10 or “he shall wrap on his lips.”11

9 Specifically, Onkelos translates פָּרוּאשׁוֹ יִהְיֶה as חבלא יתעטף, tying in to the next section regarding atifa by an avel. See also Targum Yonasan.
10 Soncino Pentateuch, p. 465 (see also Soncino Chumash, p. 682).
11 The Pentateuch with Commentary from Rashi, Feldheim (vol. III, p. 57).
However, other translators include not only what the *metzora* should do but *how* the cloaking should be done. Some translations state: “he shall cloak himself to his lips”\(^{12}\) or “he shall cloak himself up to his moustache.”\(^{13}\) These translations indicate that the *atifa* requirement is to cover the lower part of the face up to the lips as opposed to covering the entire face or the eyes.

Other translators take the opposite approach. Their translations specifically state: “he shall cover himself down to his mustache,”\(^{14}\) “he shall cover himself down to his upper lip”\(^{15}\) or “he must cover his head down to his lips.”\(^{16}\) These translations indicate the *atifa* requirement is to cover the face down to the lips, which would seem to include a requirement to cover the eyes as well. We stress that these translations appear to represent an interpretation of וְעַל-שָׂפָם as opposed to a literal translation. Accordingly, deciding which of these translations is more accurate would depend on examining other sources discussing how *atifa* is required to be performed by a *metzora*.

The *Gemara* in *Moed Katan* 15a discusses the obligation of *atifa* by a *metzora*.

And in the case of a *metzora* what is the law with regard to his wrapping the head? Come and learn: The Torah states regarding a *metzora* “he shall cloak himself to his lips.” It follows by implication that a *metzora* is obligated in wrapping the head.

The *Gemara*, however, does not elaborate on what the Torah means with its requirement of a *metzora* to “wrap the head to his lips.”


\(^{15}\) *The Pentateuch T’rnumath Tzvi* (Judaica Press), p. 422 (emphasis added).

\(^{16}\) *The Living Torah* (Moznaim Publishing), p. 567 (emphasis added).
2. *Atifas Avel*

A second source that specifically mentions the requirement to perform an *atifa* is in regard to the practices of a person in mourning—an *avel*. There are several obscure mourning practices that for one reason or another are not practiced today or are practiced in only limited form. These include the requirement to “turn over the mourner’s bed” and an explicit requirement to cover the head via *atifa* (see *Moed Katan* 24a).

Many of the mourning rituals and practices are derived from *Yechezkel* (24:17). When instructing *Yechezkel* regarding the destruction of the Temple, God warns him to refrain from mourning upon the imminent death of his wife. In this context, *Yechezkel* mentions many practices observed by mourners from which he, and the people, refrained. These practices include *atifa*, and specifically, the covering of the mourner’s mouth or lips:

The verse in *Yechezkel* (24:17) states:

Be silent from groaning, do not practice rites of mourning for the dead, don your headgear upon yourself and place your shoes upon your feet, do not veil yourself to the lips, and do not eat the bread of other people.

The *Gemara* in *Moed Katan* 15a derives the laws of mourning from these verses, i.e., everything from which God instructed *Yechezkel* to refrain must be observed by an *avel* including the covering of the mouth through *atifa*. The *Gemara* states that there is a specific obligation of *atifa* by an *avel*:

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17 *Yechezkel* uses this as a lesson in instructing the people not to mourn over the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. As Rashi explains, the people were instructed to refrain from mourning either because (i) they “had no consolers” as everyone among them was a mourner, or (ii) they were afraid to mourn in front of the Babylonians in whose midst they were living.
A mourner is obliged to engage in wrapping the head, for since the Merciful One told Ezekiel when commanding him not to mourn “and do not veil yourself to the lips,” it follows by implication that all other mourners are required to do so.

Although there is neither a description of what atifa is nor a discussion of the procedure for atifa in the initial discussions of the Ge\textit{mara} (Moed Katan 15a) regarding the requirement of atifa by a metzora and an avel, the Ge\textit{mara} in a subsequent discussion regarding mourning practices does elaborate on what is meant by “atifa” of an avel.\textsuperscript{18}

1) The \textit{Bavli}

The \textit{Gemara} (Moed Katan 24a) discusses whether an avel must refrain from some mourning practices on Shabbos. Shmuel is of the opinion that, among other halachos, an avel must refrain from performing atifa on Shabbos, while Rav is of the opinion that an avel may refrain from atifa on Shabbos, but is not required to (i.e., an avel may do atifa even on Shabbos if he so chooses). In explaining the disagreement between Rav and Shmuel, the \textit{Gemara} states that they are each in accord with their own opinions regarding how atifa is performed. According to Shmuel, atifa was an elaborate process. Because this process would make it readily apparent that the person performing the atifa was an avel, he ruled that an avel must refrain from performing atifa on Shabbos. According to Rav, atifa was a simple and common act without an elaborate process. Therefore, performing atifa on Shabbos would not make it readily apparent that the person performing it was an avel. The \textit{Gemara} states:

\begin{quote}
שמואל דאמר לטעמיה שמואל... וכל טיפה שיאמר כטיפת ישנאים
יהנה טיפת הכלה רל' דע גובי דירוכם.
\end{quote}

Shmuel is consistent with his reasoning stated elsewhere. For Shmuel said elsewhere... any wrapping of the head that is not like the wrapping of the Ishmaelites is not deemed a proper wrapping

\textsuperscript{18} The implication of the \textit{Gemara’s} discussion of atifa by an avel is that it also applies to the requirement of atifa by a metzora. This is also evident from Onkeles’s translation of יָטִּיפה in the verse of metzora as מצולמה ומצולמה.
of the head. Rav Nachman demonstrated this by wrapping himself in his cloak up to the hollows of his cheeks.

From Rashi’s explanation to the Gemara it seems that according to Rav, atifa is simply covering the head. According to Shmuel, however, atifa is much more of an elaborate procedure which the Gemara calls atifes Yishmaelim or “wrapping of the Ishmaelites” (i.e., the Arabs). Furthermore, Rav Nachman demonstrated this elaborate procedure by wrapping himself in his cloak “up to the hollows of his cheeks.”

The Rishonim further elaborate on what is meant by atifes Yishmaelim. Rabbeinu Chananel explains atifes Yishmaelim to mean covering—in addition to the head—the lips, beard and nose with a turban or talis. He also implies that even though the halacha follows Rav, Rav agrees that it is better for an avel to perform atifes Yishmaelim, but if the avel simply covers his head he still fulfills the obligation of atifa. Tosfos, on the other hand, says that the halacha is in accordance with Rav but makes no mention as to whether Rav agrees that it is better to do atifes Yishmaelim or not.

R. Menachem Meiri (Moed Katan 15a) writes:

ראשושיעטוףאלאהראשבגלוייעמודשלאהראשבעטיפתחייבאבלהשפהכנגדולמטההעינייםמקצתהמכסהעיטוף(חדושיא). An avel is obligated to wrap his head so that he does not stand bareheaded. He should wrap his head, a type of wrapping that covers part of his face opposite his eyes and below opposite his lips.

He further implies (Moed Katan 24a) that atifa is to be done in accordance with Shmuel, but this “complete” atifa is not to be done on Shabbos. Rather, an atifa that simply covers the head and the beard also fulfills the obligation of atifes avel and may be performed even on Shabbos.

Rambam in Hilchos Avel (5:19) also explains how an avel is to perform atifa:

תניןלאלבלי Şaўمؤורברשותהרואה:شورיאやはりלהווקלאלאמעשהעל שפםכללShaarאחלתיוريعןבעטיפותהרואש:הופדורשכשהב ראשבןועהמהמקפתהמעטעלפיShaarועהעלשפוםיעשה.

How do we know that an avel is forbidden from uncovering his head? Because it was said to Yechezkel “do not veil yourself to the
lips.” We infer from this, that other mourners are obligated to wrap their heads. With the scarf that covers the head you wrap from the edge a little onto the mouth as it says “he shall cloak himself up to his lips.”

Rambam appears to follow Shmuel and seems to agree with the explanation of Rabbeinu Chananel that atifas Yishmaelim requires the covering of the head and the mouth with the edge of the mourner’s cloak or scarf.

The Bais Yosef says that the Tur agrees with this explanation of Rambam. In Yoreh Deah (386), the Tur writes:

An avel is obligated to cover his head, meaning that he is required to cover his head so that it not remain bare. Shmuel says that any “covering” that is not like the Yishmaelim’s is not considered a proper “covering.” Rav Nachman explains that atifas Yishmaelim means that the covering must be wrapped up to the hollows of his cheeks. Rav Hai Goan writes that the “hollows of the cheeks” is the the area of the beard on the cheek, and this covering must be above the nose. Indeed, we can see the Arabs today using part of their turbans to cover their mouths19 and the tips of their noses.

From these sources it appears that atifas Yishmaelim involves an elaborate covering of the head while also covering the mouth and lips with the edge of the cloak, turban or scarf. There is no mention, however, of covering the eyes or the face.

2) The Yerushalmi

The Yerushalmi in Moed Katan (3:5) also discusses the performance of atifa by an avel. It states:

19 Our version of the Tur states פימים/mouths, and most current editions state that this is indeed the correct version. However, there are other versions that state פנים/faces. This is discussed in more detail below.
The exact meaning of this statement in the Yerushalmi is subject to some debate among the commentators. It appears to be composed of three clauses. We will therefore explore each of these in more detail.

The Yerushalmi first states that:

(1) "הלא תטסה על שפם מוכן שמה פרפר לכסות את פיו. רכמסה מלבך אמר.

According to this Yerushalmi, atifa requires the covering of the פיו/mouth, which is in accord with the Bavli and the Rishonim mentioned above. However, Ramban in Toras Adam (quoted by the Bais Yosef and the Drisha in Yoreh Deah 386) quotes the Yerushalmi as saying פיו/"he is required to cover his mouth") instead of פניו/"his face"). This version is also found in the Yalkut Shimoni (Yechezkel 364). As this version specifically mentions covering the "face," it may be a source in support of the custom that atifa involves covering the entire "face," including the eyes. However, it is also possible that the Yerushalmi's version of the phrase "covering the face" really means nothing more than covering the mouth up to the nose, which can also be referred to as "covering the face" (albeit not the entire face). According to this understanding, the two versions of the Yerushalmi do not really disagree with each other all that much.

The Yerushalmi then states:

(2) "רך תטסה על שפם מוכן שמה פרפר לכסות את פיו.

This is clearly seen from Meiri mentioned above. Although Meiri states that atifas Yishmaelim consists of covering the head, and from below to the lips (but not the entire face) he later calls this an atifa where the "face is also covered" (Moed Katan 24a). Thus, it is clear that even covering the lower part of the face to the lips can also be called covering the "face."

Indeed, in any of the sources where there appear to be two possible readings of either פיו or פניו (such as in the Tur Yoreh Deah 386, quoted above), the variant versions may not disagree at all, as covering the mouth to the hollows of the cheeks or to the tip of the nose may be considered as covering the "face."
Regardless of the proper wording in the first clause, this second clause of the *Yerushalmi* is at first perplexing. The phrase מיכסינה מלרע is literally means “and cover from below.” This is followed by a statement by Rav Chisda that “people should not say that he has an ail-

ment in his mouth.” The most widely accepted explanation of this *Yerushalmi* is that מיכסינה מלרע is to be read as a question. Accordingly, the *Yerushalmi* is asking a question based on the rule established in the first clause: if an *avel* is required to cover his mouth (or his face), why is he also required to cover his head (ראש?)? In other words, because the verse in Yechezkel discusses “veiling yourself to the lips,” why not just require an *avel* to cover “from below,” i.e. only his mouth and not his head at all? To this the *Yerushalmi* answers that people then would think he had a mouth ailment, rather than that he is in mourning. By covering the head in addition to the mouth, however, an *avel* shows that he is covering for the specific purpose of ati-
fas *avel*. This interpretation of the *Yerushalmi* is found in the Bais Moshe, the Ritva in Barli Moed Katan and R’ Chaim Kanievsky in his commentary on the *Yerushalmi*.23 According to this explanation the *Yerushalmi* requires an *avel* to cover the head and the mouth “from below,” meaning that he is required to take the edge of his cloak and wrap it around the lower part of the face so that the mouth is cov-
ered. However, there is no requirement for the *avel* to cover the entire face or the eyes.

The *Drisha* (*Yoreh Deah* 386), on the other hand, had a different explanation of the *Yerushalmi*. With regard to the first clause, the *Drisha* begins by quoting the version of the *Yerushalmi* found in Ram-
ban which reads פניו instead of פיו. Further, the *Drisha* interpreted the second clause of מיכסינה מלרע as a statement and not a

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23 Rav Kanievsky, however, adds that the version that says פינוי is the better reading (“nicha tf’er”). This seems to be puzzling for two reasons. First, he doesn’t explain why it is better and second, based on his own explanation of the *Yerushalmi*, it would appear that פניו is indeed the better version because it accords with the understanding of מיכסينا מלרע. For a more detailed analysis of Rav Kanievsky’s commentary on the *Yerushalmi*, see the book review titled “Three commentaries on the Yerushalmi” by Heshey Zelcer in Hakirah Volume 1/Fall 2004.
question. Specifically, the Drisha interpreted the Yerushalmi as making an affirmative statement that an avel should cover his “face,” and that he must perform this covering from the “top to the bottom.” The Yerushalmi continues with the third clause that if an avel covered only his mouth it would seem as if he had a mouth ailment. Thus, the avel is required to cover his entire face from the top to the bottom, as stated in the first and second clauses.

The Drisha further noted that it appears that the Bais Yosef had a version in the Tur (see above), in regard to how an avel was to properly perform atifa, that read:

דמעה וטNSNumberה על פניםו על ראש וועל.

[The Arabs] wrap some of their headgear over their mouths and over the tips of their noses.

Because of his explanation of the Yerushalmi, the Drisha questioned the wording of פניםו in this clause of the Tur. If an avel is required to cover his face from “top to bottom” to the mouth (as understood by the Drisha), then he would already be covering his nose! If so, why would the Tur have to say that in addition to using his headgear to cover “over his mouth” an avel should also cover the tip of his nose? The Drisha therefore held that the correct reading of the Tur should be פניהם, in which case the Tur is stating that “[the Arabs] wrap some of their headgear over their faces and over the tips of their noses [and presumably, down to their mouths].”

According to the Drisha and his interpretation of the Tur and the Yerushalmi, atifa requires covering the face from the top of the head to the bottom below the mouth, while according to the other commentators atifa requires covering the head and the mouth from below only. This apparent difference in how to interpret “covering the mouth” can explain the difference in certain translations of פניםו על יעתה and can also be seen in contemporary renderings of the atifa by a metzora.25

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24 Our current version of the Tur reads פניםו, and most current editions state that this is indeed the correct version. However, there were apparently other versions of the Tur that read פניםו.

25 As discussed above, the atifa of an avel must also be performed by a metzora. In fact, Rashi (Varikra 13:45), based on Onkelos, comments that
From this Drisha we may have a source for the current custom of covering the entire face while performing atifas talis. However, ascribing the current custom with respect to talis to this Drisha presents some difficulties. We note that there is no direct link (other than the fact that we mention "atifá" during the bracha when donning a talis) between atifás avel and atifás talis. Also, the Drisha’s interpretation of the Yerushalmi and the Tur presents its own difficulties. First, the Drisha’s explanation is apparently based on a version in the Yerushalmi that reads פניו/face and not פיו/mouth. As discussed previously, none of the extant versions of the Yerushalmi have this reading, and we know of this variant version only from a statement in Ramban’s Toras Ha’adam. Second, even if the version that reads פיו and not פניו is correct, there is no indication that “covering the face” means

the atifa of a metzora is derived from the practices of an avel (אベル). Much as with the disagreement over atifa by an avel as to whether it requires covering the entire face or only the head and mouth, we can see that there are different interpretations of the requirement of atifa by a metzora. Some have depicted the atifa by a metzora in line with R’ Chaim Kanievsky and the Ritva (as well as the other Rishonim mentioned above on atifás Yishmaelim, such as Rebbeinu Chananel and Rambam), i.e., that there is a specific requirement to cover the mouth and lips from underneath. See, e.g., figure 2 from The Little Midrash Says—The Book of Vayikra, Benei Yakov Publications and figure 2a, available at <www.torahtots.com/parsha/vayikra/tazria2.htm>. Others have depicted the atifa of a metzora in line with the Drisha’s interpretation, i.e., that there is a specific requirement to cover the entire face from top to bottom. See, e.g., figure 2b from Rabbi Menachem Moshe Oppen, The Laws of Tzoraas: A Pictorial Guide to the Laws of Tzoraas as Presented in Parshas Tazria, CIS Publishers, p. 50 (hereinafter The Laws of Tzoraas). Rabbi Oppen in his commentary already points out these differences of opinion on how atifás metzora is to be performed. See The Laws of Tzoraas, p. 51. In his notations, Rabbi Oppen lists a number of Rishonim that hold that there is a specific requirement to cover the mouth and lips, but not the entire face or eyes, including Meiri (Moed Katan 24a), Rambam, Rashi (Moed Katan 15a), Rabbeinu Chananel and the Tur. See The Laws of Tzoraas, p. 81, nn 80-81. In support of the opinion that there is a specific requirement to cover the entire face from top to bottom, Rabbi Oppen quotes the Mishnah Berurah Orach Chaim 8:4. See The Laws of Tzoraas, p. 81, n. 82.
rect, there is no indication that “covering the face” means covering the entire face (including the eyes), as opposed to simply covering the lower part of the face. Third, it is based on an interpretation of מָלַעְרָך and almost all other commentators on the Yerushalmi. Fourth, and perhaps most difficult, it is based on understanding מָלַעְרָך as meaning “from top to bottom” rather than as “from the bottom.” This differs from almost all other commentators’ understanding of מָלַעְרָך in the context of the Yerushalmi. It also seems to directly contradict the plain translation of מָלַעְרָך, as we see, for example, in Onkelos to Bereishis 1:7 who translates מָלַעְרָך as “from the bottom.”

Another difficulty with the Drisha’s explanation that there is a requirement to cover the entire face during atifas avel is that it requires a reading in the Tur of:

шеמהוֹרין קַצָּת הַמִּצְנָפָה עַל פָּנָיָם וּלְרָאָשׁ הָחוֹצֵמָם שְׁלָחְנִין

rather than

שָׁמַהוֹרין קַצָּת הַמִּצְנָפָה עַל פָּנָיָם וּלְרָאָשׁ הָחוֹצֵמָם שְׁלָחְנִין.

As discussed above, our current versions of the Tur state פהוֹמ, and most current editions state that this is indeed the correct version. Because of these difficulties, and the fact that the overwhelming number of commentators interpret the Yerushalmi differently than the Drisha, it would seem problematic for this to be the source of our current custom of atifas talis.

III. Atifas Talis

Unlike atifas metzora and atifas avel, atifas tzitzis is not directly discussed anywhere in the Talmud. However, it is alluded to in a few different places. The first is a Tosefta in Brachos (6:15) that, in discussing various brachos for certain mitzvos, states that when wrapping with tzitzis, the bracha of בציצית להשתפוי is to be recited:

העשתה ציצית [לשתוף] אומר בורר שנותנו נשיאתו ושתינו-matchan אומר

לשתופו [בציצית].

While the Tosefta does not mention a requirement or any specific law of atifa by tzitzis, it apparently alludes to this by describing a per-
son wearing tzitzis as “wrapping” and the blessing made while donning tzitzis as “to wrap.”

A second place where atifas tzitzis is alluded to is in the Gemara in Arachin 2b, which discusses at what stage a child is obligated in various mitzvos with regard to the mitzvah of chinuch. The Gemara states:

... For it was taught in a braisa: A minor who knows how to wrap himself is obligated in the mitzvah of tzitzis.

On this Gemara, Tosfos offers two explanations. The first is that a child must know how to wrap himself, which implies that atifa is a requirement for the mitzvah of tzitzis. The second explanation is that when the Gemara says “a minor who knows how to wrap,” it simply means that the child knows how to place two tzitzis in the front and two in the back. It does not, however, mean that the child must know how to wrap.

As noted earlier, the references in the Tosefta and the Gemara to atifa by tzitzis may simply be there because this was the usual method of wearing garments during the period of the Talmud. Thus, the language of the Gemara may simply mean this was the usual manner in which garments with tzitzis were worn, but not that there is a specific predefined method of wrapping the talis. This accords with the second explanation in Tosfos and accordingly, taken on its own, these sources do not seem to shed any light on the debate on whether there is a specific requirement of atifas talis.

That debate has been carried on by the Rishonim and poskim. The Tur (Orach Chaim 8:1) quotes the opinion of the Geonim that tzitzis do indeed require atifa, and more specifically, atifas Yishmaelim.

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26 This is similar to a previous discussion in the Gemara regarding the mitzvah of lulav, where the Gemara says that if a minor knows how to shake the lulav he is obligated in the mitzvah. As we know, the requirement to shake a lulav is only “l’chatchila,” but a person still fulfills the mitzvah by just picking it up (see Succah 42a). It is entirely possible that the same reasoning applies with regard to tzitzis, i.e., the mitzvah can be fulfilled by simply putting on the tzitzis without meeting a requirement to perform a specific atifa.
However, the Tur also quotes the opinion of the Baal HaItur that a full wrapping is not required when wearing a talis; rather, a person is simply required to wear a garment with tzitzis in the normal fashion.

The Bais Yosef comments that the reason for the Geonim requiring atifas Yishmaelim is based on a two-pronged analysis. First: based on the Tosefta in Brachos that says that the brachah on talis is הלתחשה להשתפכה, it is inferred that there must be atifa. Second: based on Shmuel’s statement in Moed Katan that only atifas Yishmaelim is an atifa, the Geonim concluded that atifas Yishmaelim is required when wearing a talis.

The Bais Yosef further comments:

In explaining the Baal HaItur’s position, the Bais Yosef puts forward two explanations. The first is that although atifa is required by talis, the balacha follows not Shmuel but rather Rav, who says that atifas Yishmaelim is not essential for a proper atifa. In the second explanation, the Bais Yosef quotes Mahari Abuhav who states that in fact, the balacha may indeed follow Shmuel; however, atifas Yishmaelim is a requirement only for an avel (and a metzora), but is not required by talis, which requires only covering/wearing and not wrapping. This is probably based on the fact that the verses on avel and metzora specifically mention cloaking or veiling the lips, while the verses on tzitzis make no such statement. The Bais Yosef later confirms that the second explanation was substantiated by the text of the Baal HaItur.
Despite the position of the Geonim, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 8:1) quotes only the view of the Baal HaItur that atifas Yishmaelim is not required when donning a talis. Thus, in fact there may be no need to cover the head at all, although “it is proper to cover the head.”

Nevertheless, upon first donning the talis it seems that our custom is to do the premiere atifas Yishmaelim.

We note that although the Tur and the Bais Yosef discuss atifas Yishmaelim, neither explains how it is performed. However, other Achronim do attempt to describe the procedure of atifas Yishmaelim.

The Prisha (Orach Chaim 8:2) explains the procedure of atifas Yishmaelim as follows:

"You cover your head and lower your talis until your mouth."

This accords with his own view expressed in the Drisha in Yoreh Deah (386) that an avel is required to cover his entire face—מכלשת—“from the top to the bottom.” Similarly, the Mishnah Berurah (Orach Chaim 8:4, quoted earlier) states:

"during atifas talis you cover your head with the talis until it reaches to the mouth."

On the other hand, the Taz (Orach Chaim 8:2) states that atifas Yishmaelim does not involve covering the face, because he mentions two distinct aspects: covering the head and also covering the mouth.

Other poskim are less clear. The Magen Avrohom (Orach Chaim 8:2) states that atifas Yishmaelim namely, that the head and the mouth must be covered, but not necessarily the entire face. Similarly, the Shulchan

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27 Apparently in deference to his first explanation of the Tur and the opinion of the Geonim.
Aruch Harav describes the process of atifas Yishmaelim somewhat vaguely:

למכות ראשך עד גומות עם יפוחך למכות פנים.

“You cover your head with your face until the hollows of your cheeks beneath the mouth.”

The Aruch HaShulchan also describes atifas Yishmaelim by stating:

וע绋תober הנף וכל ראש ומכות פנים חמה

“You wrap most of your body, your entire head and cover your mouth with the talis.”

We stress that neither the Magen Avrohom, Shulchan Aruch Harav, Aruch HaShulchan nor the Mishnah Berurah states that atifas talis must be performed by covering the face “from the top to the bottom.” They state only that the covering must be done until it reaches the bottom of the mouth or until the mouth. These statements can also be understood to mean that only the head and the lower part of the face must be covered.28 Only the Drisha/Prisha specifically states that atifa must be performed by covering the face “from the top to the bottom.”

In general, it appears that most poskim do not interpret atifas Yishmaelim as requiring more than simply covering the head and mouth, in accord with most or perhaps all Rishonim, as discussed above.

IV. Is there an Issue with the Current Custom of Atifa?

As discussed above, it appears from most Talmudic and halachic sources that atifas Yishmaelim requires covering the head and the lower part of the face up to the mouth. However, not only is this apparent from these sources, but simple logic as well suggests that atifas Yishmaelim consists of covering the head and wrapping the face without

28 It is noteworthy that the Shulchan Aruch HaRav states in his own siddur that the lower part of the face must be covered, but not the entire face down to the mouth. This seemingly clarifies the statements in his Shulchan Aruch to mean that only the head and the lower part of the face must be covered. See The Laws of Tzoraas, p. 81 n. 82.
covering the eyes, unlike the current custom of covering the entire face during *atîfa*. It simply does not make sense to contend that the *Yishmaelim* walked around with their eyes and face covered. This would seemingly reduce them to walking around as virtual blind people. Moreover, we can simply go out and observe (much as the *Tur* and *Bais Yosef* did) the distinct traditional headdress of Arabs, in which the head and lower part of the face and mouth are covered, but the eyes are not. This can provide a strong indication of the same in ancient Arabic headdress. In addition, there appears to be historical evidence backing that up. This is clearly illustrated in the Schefer edition of the *Maqamat Al-Hariri*, an Illustrated Arabic Manuscript from the 13th century (see Fig. 3).

It is also evident that Arabs in the tenth to thirteenth centuries CE wore garments that wrapped the body and head without covering the eyes, as illustrated in George Marcais, *Le Costume Musulmans d'Alger* (Paris, Librairie Plon, 1930, p. 29) (see Figure 4). It is interesting to contrast the wrapping technique illustrated in Figure 4 (the Arabic garment illustration) with that of Fig. 1 (the *talis* illustration as depicted by R’ Dovid Feldman in *Shaar Hatziyurim*), which supposedly demonstrates *atîfas* *Yishmaelim*. The wrapping techniques depicted in both illustrations are very similar in how the garment is initially held over the head and wrapped around the body. However, the most obvious difference between the two techniques is that in the *talis* illustration, the garment is draped over to purposely cover the face and eyes, while in the Arabic illustration the face and eyes always remain uncovered.

Many recent authorities make this point. For example, Rav Ovadia Yosef emphatically opposes *atîfa* that involves covering the eyes. He writes (*Yechava Daas* 5:1):

> It is clear that *atîfas* *talis* involves covering the neck and throat and not the entire face and eyes, as some of our Ashkenazik brothers are accustomed to do, because this is certainly not the way that the Arabs wrapped themselves. The Arabs wrap themselves by specifically leaving their eyes uncovered in order to be able to see where

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29 See *Stepping Out* “Headwear and mantles in Egyptian and western Arabic dress in the fifth to seventh centuries after the *Hijra* (late 10th to 13th centuries CE)” at <http://www.levantia.com.au/clothing/-stepping_out.html>.
they are going, because if they covered their eyes, they would surely not be able to stand.

Rav Ovadia Yosef goes on to cite numerous Rishonim and Achronim that share this same view. Furthermore, he asserts that “the custom of covering the face and eyes during atifa is a mistaken custom and an incorrect practice.” In further support of his position, he cites Rav Chaim Elazar Shapiro of Munkatch (the “Minchas Elazar”) who writes:

I am mystified regarding those who are accustomed to cover their faces and eyes during atifa, in that they think that this is truly how the Arabs wrapped themselves. How is it possible to say this—can Arabs walk around in such a fashion? Surely they would stumble and fall into holes and pits… Finally, we see in the Middle Eastern countries and Eretz Yisrael that the Arabs—who have retained the customs of their forefathers—wrap their kaffiyehs around their necks and do not cover their entire face.30

Many other contemporary poskim take this stand. For example, the Badai HaShulchan (Ktos Hashulchan 7:14) asks: how it is possible to say that the Yishmaelim walked with their eyes “closed” and without being able to see in front of them? He therefore explains that the proper way of performing atifa is to cover “starting from the bottom—from the neck up to the mouth.”

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Liebes (Bais Avi, vol. 3, chapter 12) also addresses this issue. He writes:

I have never understood the performance of atifa which I have seen among many bnei torah, in that they wrap the entire head and face until the neck and then they take all four corners and throw them over the left shoulder. They understand this to be atfas Yishmaelim. According to their understanding, Rav Nachman’s demonstration “until the hollow of the cheek” is to be understood as covering the entire head and face until the hollows of the lower cheek below the mouth. It is difficult to say that this is how Arabs wrap themselves because if they cover the entire face how will they see with covered eyes when they walk in the streets? The Mishnah in Shabbos 65a states that “[Jewish women in] Arab [lands] would go

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30 This is also quoted in the name of the Minchas Elazar in the standard Munkatcher siddur, the Shaar Yisaschar.
out with their head and face wrapped.” Rashi explains, “It is usual for them to have their head and face wrapped but not their eyes.” It is thus clear that they covered their head until their eyes. Therefore the eyes are totally uncovered as well as part of their face. It is thus clear that they would cover their head until their eyes. Their eyes are thus totally uncovered as well as a part of their face… Therefore one who wants to perform atifas talis correctly should cover the head until the eyes during the beracha, and afterwards to wrap half the body with the talis and take the two edges of the talis and place them above over the neck to the lower hollows of the cheek as Rav Nachman demonstrated.

The Nimukei Aruch Chaim and the Od Yosef Chai also state that the eyes should not be covered during atifas talis.31

V. Possible Sources for the Current Custom

Despite how untenable the position is for covering the entire face and the eyes, some authorities offer explanations as to how covering the eyes may be compatible with the dress of the Arabs. For example, T’Shovos U’Bearurim Me-Admor M’Lubavitch notes that the Arabs would cover their eyes in order to protect them from the sand in the desert. They are still able to see because the garment would hang “in front”

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger in Imrei Shefer (Vayikra 13:45) similarly echoes this view and provides some insight into why there is a specific requirement to cover the mouth. He quotes the Gemara in Aruchin 15b which states: "אמר לו הקב"ל LeoneBuffers: "כל אבריו של אדם ומס碼 אנמה מאת, כל אבריו של אדם וברון אנמה את, ולא ישימינו של שיח וארון, כל אבריו של אדם וברון אנמה את, ולא ישימינו של שיח וארון.

The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to the tongue: “All of a person’s limbs are upright, yet you lie prone; all of a person’s limbs are external, yet you are internal. And not only that, but I have encompassed you with two walls, one of bone and one of flesh.” Rabbi Kluger comments: “Even though man has two walls, teeth and lips, to protect and watch over him so that he does not sin with his mouth, nevertheless man does sin with his mouth. This is the reason he is smitten with Tzoraas. Therefore the posuk says וְעַל יַעְטֶה שָׂפָם, ‘and he shall cloak himself up to his lips’—to show that if the two natural walls of protection do not help him, then he must wrap a third wall to try to assure himself that he not sin with his mouth again.” This of course has nothing to do with covering the entire face or the eyes.
of their eyes, and thus the practice of covering the entire face is still consistent with observable Arabic practice. However, even if this is correct, it does not seem to be a viable explanation because: (i) any covering of the eyes in this manner is generally used only as a temporary measure, which seems inconsistent with calling it the usual practice of the *Yishmaelim*, and (ii) the current custom of covering the entire face still does not accord with such practice, as the *talis* does not “hang in front of the eyes” but rather is pulled tightly over and across the face. On the other hand, covering the mouth only is consistent with usual Arabic practice because Arabs traveling through or living in the desert generally walk with their mouths and noses constantly covered in order to protect them from the sand, where the sensitive mucous membranes can be irritated with even small particles. For the most part, however, the eyes are left uncovered in order to be able to see where they are going.

Some current commentators appear to go to even greater lengths to justify the current practice of covering the entire face. For example, the recently expanded and annotated version of the *Mishnah Berurah* published by *Oz V’hadaar* contains a long essay on this issue. The editors state that the opinion of the *Prisha* that the *talis* is to be pulled down from the head until the mouth (and thereby cover the entire face and eyes) is explicitly shared by the *Mishnah Berurah*, *Shulchan Aruch Harav* and *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*. As noted earlier, these sources may vaguely imply that they agree with the opinion of the *Prisha*, but they do not state explicitly that the *talis* is to be “pulled down from the head until the mouth.” The editors further state that *atifas Yishmaelim* means to cover the head “and most of the face by pulling from the top of the head to the bottom until under the mouth” based on the *Gemara* in *Moed Katan* 15a, which states that “an *avel* is required to cover the mouth,” and on Rashi’s statement that Rav Nachman covered the hollows of the cheeks “below the mouth.” It seems quite a stretch to read into these statements that there is a requirement to cover the head “by pulling from the top of the head to the bottom.” The *Gemara* and Rashi do not say this. They simply state that there is a requirement to cover the mouth, without any mention of covering from top to bottom.

32 See *Mishnah Berurah HaMevoar*, *Oz V’haddar*, vol. 1, p. 13b-1, n. 43.
The editors go even further and state that the requirement to cover the face from the top to the bottom is explicit in the Yerushalmi Moed Katan (3:5). They write that “it is stated explicitly in the Yerushalmi that an avei is required to cover the mouth from the top of the head to the bottom only, and should not cover the mouth from below.” As discussed above, the Yerushalmi does not state explicitly that there is a requirement to cover the mouth from the top of the head to the bottom, and most commentators in fact do not interpret the Yerushalmi in this manner. Only the Drisha did, and while his opinion must be respected, it is implausible to state that the Yerushalmi is explicit in this regard. In fact, according to most commentators the Yerushalmi is stating exactly the opposite.

Seemingly even flimsier is the editors’ attribution of the requirement to cover the face to Rambam. Their source is an alleged passage of Rambam (Hilchos Avel 5:19) that states:

“the scarf that is on the head is wrapped from the top onto the mouth.”

A quick look at the source material reveals that Rambam never wrote such a statement. Rather, Rambam wrote:

“with the scarf that covers the head you wrap from the edge a little onto the mouth.”

Rambam never mentions wrapping from the top. He simply does not say what the editors attribute to him. Such statements by the editors sadly seem to be a classic case of intellectual dishonesty.

Both the details of this custom and the desire of some to justify it, against all logic, point to a different source for this practice. In fact, as we have noted, halacha does not require atifas Yishmaelim at all. It is possible that the Mishnah Berurah attributes our practice of covering the entire face, which includes the procedural step that “all four corners of the talit are then gathered and thrown over the left shoulder,” along with the covering and uncovering of the tefillin, to the Arizal. The Be’er Hevet quotes several sources in this regard. One of them is the Yad Abaron who quotes the Radvaz in the name of Rav Saadia: “throw the four corners to the left side so that there is nothing on the right, to correct the evil inclination as it says ‘Do not stray
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[after your heart].” He then tells us that the Arizal followed Rav Saadia and would do atifas Yishmaelim. Moreover, it is clear from Yad Abaron’s presentation that it is not for the mitzvah of wearing tzitzis alone that this requirement is being made, but for the wearing of a talis when reciting krias shema and tefilla. This also includes the premise that a person should be entirely enveloped while in prayer or while engaged in kabbalas oib malchus shamayim, to show that his entire being accepts the yoke of heaven. Thus, although not entirely clear, there may be a kabbalistic reasoning underlying our specific custom of atifa. It may also stem from more practical reasons, such as the idea that being entirely covered removes distractions that may hinder a person’s concentration while praying.

Nevertheless, it appears from most halachic, historic and logical sources that atifas Yishmaelim requires covering the head and the lower part of the face up to the mouth, and not the entire face and the eyes. Accordingly, the current custom of performing atifa that latter way appears to be a mistake and an incorrect practice.

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33 As discussed previously, Rambam in Hilchos Tefilla (5:5), under the description of proper dress for prayer, explains that “it is the manner of all the chachamim and their students to pray only when they are wrapped (מעוטפים).” Likewise, Hilchos Tzitzis (3:11) closes with the admonition: “In the hour of prayer there should be added care [in this mitzvah] and it is a great disgrace for talmidei chachamim to pray without being wrapped (מעוטף).” It is possible that the source for the relationship between prayer and atifa is the Gemara (Rosh Hashanna 17a) that speaks of God enwrapping himself (שנתעטף) as a sheliach tzibbur and reciting the thirteen midos of God’s mercy and teaching Moshe that the emulation of this process will always bring forgiveness. It is also possible that the kabbalists saw this particular atifa as an all-encompassing immersion of the person comparable to Moshe’s immersion in the clouds of glory on Mt. Sinai. It is this atifa that the Arizal said should be accompanied by the recitation of the verses “How great is Your mercy” and “Spread Your mercy,” as he may have felt that the physical eyes should be covered so that the inner eye could see more deeply.

34 This would also explain Rambam’s statement regarding atifa in Hilchos Tefilla (5:5) and Hilchos Tzitzis (3:11).
Figure 1
Figure 3

Figure 4