

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> The *Gemara* in *Shabbos* 147a and *Menachos* 41a implies that dur-

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\* Shimi Berger would like to thank Rabbi Seth Mandel for providing the source and inspiration for this article from his *shiurim* at Yeshivas Ohr Hachaim. The authors would also like to thank Rabbi Avrohom Zucker for his inspiration and encouragement.

<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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

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.<sup>3</sup> 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 *להתעטף בציצית* (“who commanded us to wrap ourselves with *tzitzis*”) is said. The literal translation of the word *עטיפה* / *atifa* is “wrapping oneself up.”<sup>4</sup> The word *להתעטף* in the *brachah*, it then seems, reveals *atifa* as a predefined method of donning the *talis* (as opposed to simply putting on or wearing it). There are also other specific references to *atifa* 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*.<sup>5</sup> 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 *atifa*.

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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.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *The Tallith Katan* in “Tzitzith: A Thread of Light,” NCSY/Orthodox Union, at <[http://tzitzis.net/-tallith\\_katan.html](http://tzitzis.net/-tallith_katan.html)> (hereinafter, *The Tallith Katan*).

<sup>4</sup> “*Sefer Milim* - Dictionary of the *Targumim, Talmud Babvli, Yerushalmi* and *Midrashic Literature*” by Prof. Marcus Jastro, p. 1063.

<sup>5</sup> We note, however, that it is not at all clear that the use of the specified language of *להתעטף* 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 *atifa*, in which case the language of *להתעטף* 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 *brachab* 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 HaTzitziyurim*, 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:

בשעת עטיפה מכסה ראשו בהטלית עד שיגיע עד פיו.

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.<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> The *Mishnah Berurah* in *Shaar Hatzitziyun* (*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.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, it is possible that the various customs found in wrapping the *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 *Gemara* in *Shabbos* 147a and *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 *atifa* (such as covering the face). Thus, it is not clear why these specifics should be incorporated into what we call *atifa* when putting on a *talis*. There are also some other difficulties with performing *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.

## II. What is *Atifa*

Although we are most familiar with *atifa* in regard to *tzitzis*, there is in fact no specific mention of *atifa* with *tzitzis* in *Tanach* or the *Gemara*.<sup>8</sup> However, there are explicit mentions of *atifa* in *Tanach* and the *Gemara* in two other *mitzvos*: *Atifa* required of a *metzora* and *atifa* required of a mourner, an *avel*. In fact, the *atifa* requirement of these two *mitzvos* is specifically linked in the *Gemara* and *halacha*.

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<sup>7</sup> See *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”).

<sup>8</sup> We note that the concept of performing *atifa* with a *talis* as part of the *mitzvah* of wearing *tzitzis* is mentioned in the *Tur* and by other *Rishonim*, but not specifically in the *Gemara* or the *Shulchan Aruch*. Even these discussions in the *Rishonim* are premised on other sources of *atifa* (such as those for *metzora* and *avel*, as discussed below). As mentioned above, there are other specific references to *atifab* when donning a *talis*, but not necessarily as part of the *mitzvah* of wearing *tzitzis*. See, for example, Rambam, *Hilchos Tefilla* (5:5); *Hilchos Tzitzis* (3:11) (regarding the custom of *talmidei chachamim* to pray only while 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:

וְהִצְרוּעַ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ הַנִּגַּע בְּגָדָיו יִהְיוּ פְרָמִים וְרֹאשׁוֹ יִהְיֶה פְרוּעַ וְעַל-שִׁפְמֹ  
 יַעֲטֶה נְטֵמָא טָמֵא יִקְרָא: כָּל-יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר הַנִּגַּע בּוֹ יִטְמָא--טָמֵא הוּא: בְּדָד יֵשֵׁב  
 מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבּוֹ:

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-שִׁפְמֹ יַעֲטֶה. The word יַעֲטֶה is translated by *Onkelos* as יתעטף<sup>9</sup> 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 שִׁפְמֹ 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-שִׁפְמֹ יַעֲטֶה (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”<sup>10</sup> or “he shall wrap on his lips.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Specifically, *Onkelos* translates יַעֲטֶה as כאבלא יתעטף, tying in to the next section regarding *atifa* by an *avel*. See also *Targum Yonasan*.

<sup>10</sup> *Soncino Pentateuch*, p. 465 (see also *Soncino Chumash*, p. 682).

<sup>11</sup> *The Pentateuch with Commentary from Rasbi*, 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”<sup>12</sup> or “he shall cloak himself *up to* his moustache.”<sup>13</sup> 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,”<sup>14</sup> “he shall cover himself *down to* his upper lip”<sup>15</sup> or “he must cover *his head down to* his lips.”<sup>16</sup> 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 ועל-שפם 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*.

מצורע מהו בעטיפת הראש ת"ש ועל שפם יעטה מכלל שהיב בעטיפת הראש.

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.”

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<sup>12</sup> *Artscroll Chumash*, Stone Edition, vol. III, p. 617 (emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> *Artscroll Rashi*, Sapirstein Edition, vol. III, p. 151 (emphasis added).

<sup>14</sup> *Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, available at: [www.chabad.org/librar/article\\_cdo/aid/9914/jewish.chapter-13.htm](http://www.chabad.org/librar/article_cdo/aid/9914/jewish.chapter-13.htm) (emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> *The Pentateuch T'rumath Tzvi* (Judaica Press), p. 422 (emphasis added).

<sup>16</sup> *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.<sup>17</sup> 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:

הָאֵינֶק דָּם מִתִּים אֶבֶל לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה פְּאָרְךָ חֲבוּשׁ עָלֶיךָ וְנִעְלִיךָ מִשִּׁים בְּרַגְלֶיךָ  
וְלֹא תַעֲטֶה עַל-שְׂפֵם וְלִחְם אֲנָשִׁים לֹא תֹאכַל.

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*:

אבל חייב בעטיפת הראש מדקאמר ליה רחמנא ליחזקאל ולא תעטה על  
שפם מכלל דכולי עלמא מיחייבי.

<sup>17</sup> *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 *Gemara* (*Moed Katan* 15a) regarding the requirement of *atifa* by a *metzora* and an *avel*, the *Gemara* in a subsequent discussion regarding mourning practices does elaborate on what is meant by “*atifa*” of an *avel*.<sup>18</sup>

#### 1) The *Bavli*

The *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 *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 *Gemara* states:

שמואל לטעמיה דאמר שמואל... וכל עטיפה שאינה כעטיפת ישמעאליים  
אינה עטיפה מחוי ר"נ עד גובי דדיקנא.

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

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<sup>18</sup> The implication of the *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 יעטה in the verse of *metzora* as כאבלא יתעטר.



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 *שמעאלים* / *atifas 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 *atifas Yishmaelim*. Rabbeinu Chananel explains *atifas 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 *atifas 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 *atifas Yishmaelim* or not.

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

אבל חייב בעטיפת הראש שלא יעמוד בגלוי הראש אלא שיעטוף ראשו  
עיטוף המכסה מקצת הפנים מכנגד העינים ולמטה כנגד השפה. (חדושי  
המאירי מועד קטן טו עמוד א).

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 *atifas avel* and may be performed even on Shabbos.

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

מניין לאביל שאסור בפריעת הראש: שהרי נאמר ליחזקאל לא תעטה על  
שפם מכלל ששאר האבילים חייבין בעטיפת הראש; והסודר שמכסה בו  
ראשו, עוטה ממקצתו מעט על פיו, שנאמר ועל שפם יעטה.

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:

אבל חייב בעטיפת הראש פירוש שיכסה ראשו ולא יהא ראשו מגולה ואמר שמואל כל עטיפה שאינה כעטיפת ישמעאלים אינה עטיפה ואמר רב נחמן על גובי דיקנא וכתב רב האי דיקנא הוא שער שעל הלסתות ועטיפה זו למעלה מן החוטם וישמעאלים נראין עדיין שמחזירין קצת המצנפת על פיהם<sup>19</sup> ועל ראש החוטם שלהן.

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 mouths<sup>19</sup> 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:

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<sup>19</sup> Our version of the *Tur* states פיהם/mouths, and most current editions state that this is indeed the correct version. However, there are other versions that state פניהם/faces. This is discussed in more detail below.

ולא תעטה על שפם מיכן שהוא צריך לכסות את פיו. ויכסינה מלרע אמר  
 רב חסדא דלא יהוון אמרין פומיה הוא חשש.

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) ולא תעטה על שפם מיכן שהוא צריך לכסות את פיו.

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 Deab* 386) quotes the *Yerushalmi* as saying צריך לכסות את פניו (“he is required to cover his *face*”) instead of פיו (“his *mouth*”).<sup>20</sup> 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).<sup>21</sup> According to this understanding, the two versions of the *Yerushalmi* do not really disagree with each other all that much.<sup>22</sup>

The *Yerushalmi* then states:

(2) ויכסינה מלרע.

<sup>20</sup> We note that all known editions of *Yerushalmi* have the word פיו instead of פניו.

<sup>21</sup> 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.”

<sup>22</sup> 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 Deab* 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.”

(3) אמר רב חסדא דלא יהוון אמרין פומיה הוא חשש.

Regardless of the proper wording in the first clause, this second clause of the *Yerushalmi* is at first perplexing. The phrase *ויכסינה מלרע* literally means “and cover from below.” This is followed by a statement by Rav Chisda that “people should not say that he has an ailment in his mouth.” The most widely accepted explanation of this *Yerushalmi* is that *ויכסינה 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 (עטיפת הראש)? 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 *at-fas avel*. This interpretation of the *Yerushalmi* is found in the *Bais Moshe*, the *Ritva* in *Bavli Moed Katan* and R’ Chaim Kanievsky in his commentary on the *Yerushalmi*.<sup>23</sup> 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 covered. 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 Ramba-  
n which reads פניו/face instead of פיו/mouth. Further, the *Drisha* interpreted the second clause of *ויכסינה מלרע* as a statement and not a

<sup>23</sup> Rav Kanievsky, however, adds that the version that says פניו is the better reading (“*nicha tfei?*”). 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 פיו is indeed the better version because it accords with the understanding of *ויכסינה 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:

שמחזירין קצת המצנפת על פיהם<sup>24</sup> ועל ראש החוטם שלהן.

[The Arabs] wrap some of their headgear over their mouths<sup>23</sup> and over the tips of their noses.

Because of his explanation of the *Yerushalmi*, the *Drisha* questioned the wording of *פיהם* 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 *ועל שפם* and can also be seen in contemporary renderings of the *atifa* by a *metzora*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Our current version of the *Tur* reads *פיהם*, and most current editions state that this is indeed the correct version. However, there were apparently other versions of the *Tur* that read *פניהם*.

<sup>25</sup> As discussed above, the *atifa* of an *avel* must also be performed by a *metzora*. In fact, Rashi (*Varikera* 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 “*atifa*” during the *bracha* when donning a *talis*) between *atifas avel* and *atifas 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 פניו and not פיו is correct, there is no indication that “covering the face” means

the *atifa* of a *metzora* is derived from the practices of an *avel* ( "כאבלה (יתעטף"). 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 *atifas 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](http://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 *atifas 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), Rebbeinu 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 מלרע as a statement and not a question. As mentioned above, this is unlike the *Ritva* and almost all other commentators on the *Yerushalmi*. Fourth, and perhaps most difficult, it is based on understanding מלרע as meaning “from top to bottom” rather than as “from the bottom.” This differs from almost all other commentators’ understanding of מלרע in the context of the *Yerushalmi*. It also seems to directly contradict the plain translation of מלרע, as we see, for example, in *Onkelos to Bereishis 1:7* who translates מלרע 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:

שמחזירין קצת המצנפת על פניהם ועל ראש החוטם שלהן.

rather than

שמחזירין קצת המצנפת על פיהם ועל ראש החוטם שלהן.

As discussed above, our current versions of the *Tur* state פיהם, 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 להתעטף בציצית is to be recited:

העושה ציצית [לעצמו] אומר ברוך שהגיענו וכשהוא מתעטף אומר להתעטף [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:

הכל חייבין בציצית לאיתויי מאי לאיתויי קטן היודע להתעטף דתניא קטן  
היודע להתעטף חייב בציצית.

. . . 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 *כעטיפת ישמעאליים*, 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 *כעטיפת ישמעאליים*.<sup>26</sup>

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 *להתעטף* 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 *talit*. 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 talit*.

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 Yishmaelin*.

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<sup>26</sup> 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* of *lulav* 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*.



וסדר עטיפתו פירשו הגאונים ז"ל כעטיפת ישמעאלים שהיא עטיפה גמורה נראה שטעמם מדמברכינן להתעטף בציצית, כדאיתא בפרק בתרא דתוספתא דברכות, אלמא עיטוף בעינן. ובפרק אלו מגלחין (מועד קטן כד.). אמר שמואל, כל עטיפה שאינה כעטיפת הישמעאלים אינה עטיפה. מחווי רב נחמן עד גובי דיקנא. ופירש רש"י, מחווי רב נחמן. עטיפת ישמעאלים. גובי דיקנא. גומות שבלחי למטה מפיו.

However, the *Tur* also quotes the opinion of the *Baal HaTtur* 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 *brachab* on *talis* is להתעטף, 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:

ובעל העיטור כתב דלא בעינן כולי האי אלא כדרך שבני אדם מתכסין בכסותן וכו' נראה שטעמו, מדאיתא בפרק אלו מגלחין דרב פליג עליה דשמואל, ומשמע דסבירא ליה דעטיפת הראש, אף על פי שאינה כעטיפת הישמעאלים, הוי עטיפה. וקיימא לן דבאיסורי הלכה כרבא לגבי שמואל. ורבינו הגדול מהר"י אבוהב ז"ל כתב, שטעמו דלא בעינן עטיפת ישמעאלים אלא גבי אבילות, אבל גבי ציצית שהתורה חייבה אותה בכסות שאדם מתכסה, ככה יהיה החיוב. נאמר שלשון להתעטף, לשון כיסוי הוא בזה הענין.

In explaining the *Baal HaTtur's* position, the *Bais Yosef* puts forward two explanations. The first is that although *atifa* is required by *talis*, the *halacha* 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 *halacha* 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 HaTtur*.

Despite the position of the *Geonim*, the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 8:1) quotes only the view of the *Baal HaTur* 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.”<sup>27</sup> 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:

שמכסים ראשם ויורד טליתו עד הפה.

“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—מלמעלה למטה— “from the top to the bottom.” Similarly, the *Mishnah Berurah* (*Orach Chaim* 8:4, quoted earlier) states:

בשעת עטיפה מכסה ראשו בהטלית עד שיגיע עד פיו.

“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 שישכסה גם פיו, that *atifa* requires covering the head and “also the mouth.” It seems that the *Taz* holds 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 *atifa* requires wrapping עד פיו, “until the mouth.” While “until the mouth” could be interpreted in accord with the opinion of the *Drisha* (i.e., that the *atifa* must cover the head and face down to the mouth), the *Magen Avrohom* may simply be describing two distinct aspects of *atifas Yishmaelim*: namely, that the head and the mouth must be covered, but not necessarily the entire face. Similarly, the *Shulchan*

<sup>27</sup> 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:

לכסות הראש עם הפנים עד גומות שבלחי למטה מפיו.

“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:

עטיפת רוב הגוף וכל הראש ולכסות פיו בהטלית

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

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.<sup>28</sup> 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

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<sup>28</sup> 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 *atifa*. 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).<sup>29</sup> 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'Algier* (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 Hatzijurim*), which supposedly demonstrates *atifas 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 *atifa* that involves covering the eyes. He writes (*Yechava Daas* 5:1):

It is clear that *atifas 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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<sup>29</sup> 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](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 *Risbonim* 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.<sup>30</sup>

Many other contemporary *poskim* take this stand. For example, the *Badai HaShulchan* (*Ktzos 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 *bonei 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 *atifa*s *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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<sup>30</sup> This is also quoted in the name of the *Minchas Elazar* in the standard Munkatcher siddur, the *Shaar Yisachar*.

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 *atifa* 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*.<sup>31</sup>

## 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'Shivos U'Beurim MeAdmor 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”

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<sup>31</sup> 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"ה ללשון: כל אבריו של אדם זקופים ואתה מוטל, כל אבריו של אדם מבחוץ ואתה מבפנים, ולא עוד, אלא שהקפתי לך שתי חומות, אחת של בשר" "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-שָׂפָם יַעֲטָהּ, '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'haddar* contains a long essay on this issue.<sup>32</sup> 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.

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<sup>32</sup> 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 *avel* 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 *Drisba* 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:

הסודר שעל ראשו, עוטהו מלמעלה על פיו.

“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:

והסודר שמכסה בו ראשו, עוטה ממקצתו מעט על פיו.

“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 *talis* are then gathered and thrown over the left shoulder,” along with the covering and uncovering of the *tefillin*, to the Arizal. The *Be’er Hetev* quotes several sources in this regard. One of them is the *Yad Aharon* 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



[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 *tzitzitzis* alone that this requirement is being made, but for the wearing of a *talit* 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 obl 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*.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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. ❧

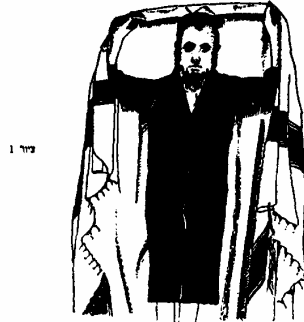
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<sup>33</sup> As discussed previously, Rambam in *Hilchos Tefilla* (5:5), under the description of proper dress for prayer, explains that “it is the manner of all the *chachamim* and their students to pray only when they are wrapped (מעוטפים).” Likewise, *Hilchos Tzitzitzis* (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 (מעוטרי).” It is possible that the source for the relationship between prayer and *atifa* is the *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashbanna* 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.

<sup>34</sup> This would also explain Rambam’s statement regarding *atifa* in *Hilchos Tefilla* (5:5) and *Hilchos Tzitzitzis* (3:11).

קטנות המליץ

קח את המליץ, בעודו כבול המוכן ציודו חליץו מבו אור, וקטלה אותו על סמך, ברוך את  
הציונות והיודי את המצותן זה סוף.



צדד 1

שנים את המליץ ואחז אותו בשני ידיו סמולו לראשו כמו צדד 1 והרד לראשיתו כבשית.



צדד 2

אחריהן תהא אותו על ראשו ויסוף אותו יד ידו כמו צדד 2.



צדד 3



צדד 4

המשל אותו לאחורו סדו וסמולו כמו  
צדד 4

הגבה את ארבעה כנפות המליץ כמו צדד  
3

Figure 1

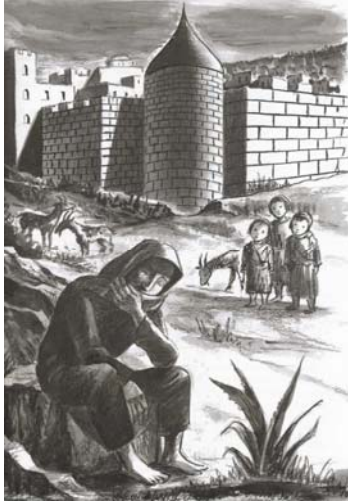


Figure 2



Figure 2a

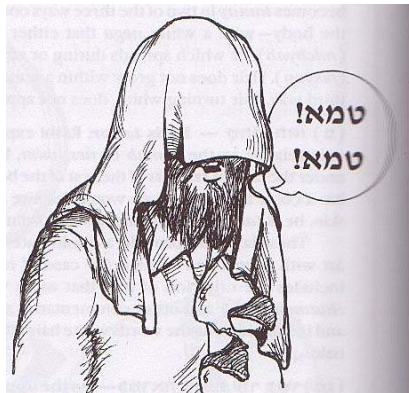


Figure 2b



Figure 3



Figure 4