

Tying your own Tzitzit in one of the Jewish styles

According to the Scriptures, there is no ‘right’ way to tie tzitzit or tassels. I choose to tie them this way sort of like I wear a belt buckle with a San Diego Chargers football team emblem on it. I ‘root’ for my ‘team’ by wearing a Jewish style. But I don’t wear them in quite the same fashion as my Jewish brothers (or sisters, sometimes). If you want to make them short and thick, that’s okay by me. If you want to make them out of rainbow colors (just make sure one thread is blue) that’s okay too. Since God is silent on specifics here, then in my opinion we are allowed ‘freedom’ to figure out our own style and preference. These are just my current preferences.

If you buy a kit then the strings will be close to the standard length (see bottom of article for web sites to purchase kits). The blue string is always much longer than the white threads. But if you make yours from scratch you will need to cut the blue thread 64” long, and the white ones 36” long, if the strings are about the thickness of the standard Jewish wool string (a little heavier than thread, a little lighter than cotton kite string). If you want to use Perle cotton (used for needlepoint), it is thinner than the wool string (and crushes more) and the strings should be about 54” for blue and 30” or so for the white. You can use these proportions to make your own, too.

I use a ½” split-ring key ring on four of my belt loops to hold the tassel. I just place them in convenient spots around my waist. Some people think that the tassels are only allowed to go on a right angle corner (square corner), but I think that is a limited definition. The earth is round, and it is said to have four corners; I am round also, so I must have four corners too! Actually, you can find corners in any circle – just draw one on paper then bisect it with two evenly spaced lines at right angles to each other and you’ll see what I mean. Since I wear Levi shrink-to-fit button fly 501’s they end up just inside each front pocket corner and just outside each back pocket corner. I place the key rings on the belt loops of all my pants, and then I just move the tassels from garment to garment. I also have a beat-up set that I wear while working, and a couple of nice sets for going out, so it makes it easy to switch around.



It takes a little patience to get the key ring around the belt loop, but once they are on you don’t have to take them off. I even wash my pants with the rings on (taking the tassel off), and I haven’t had one rust yet (of course we use a dryer). You can buy them individually or by the box from a locksmith. I think they cost about ten cents each or a little less by the box. The blue (*techelet*) on the standard sets is not colorfast, so don’t wash them. You can reduce the bleeding by soaking them in a solution of half white vinegar and half salt water and drying before tying.

If you elect to loop the tzitzit directly around the belt loop, you will find that the threads get cut after a few weeks. Using the key rings makes the top loop last much, much longer. I have some sets that are several years old. And since the regular wool sets cost about \$25.00 each, with about an hour or so to tie each set, then you'll want them to last as long as possible.

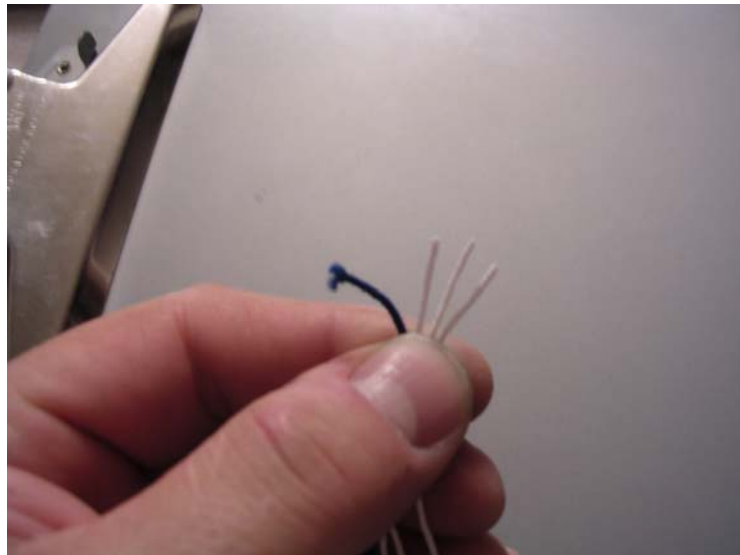
If you want to braid the top loop like I do, you will need to learn to make a four-strand braid. It is very easy once you know. The pictures below will help. Braiding the loop helps with moving the tassel around from place to place, because all four strings can be treated as one string. It loops onto the key ring like a luggage tag. The picture below shows the completed top loop.



Photo by Bruce Bertram

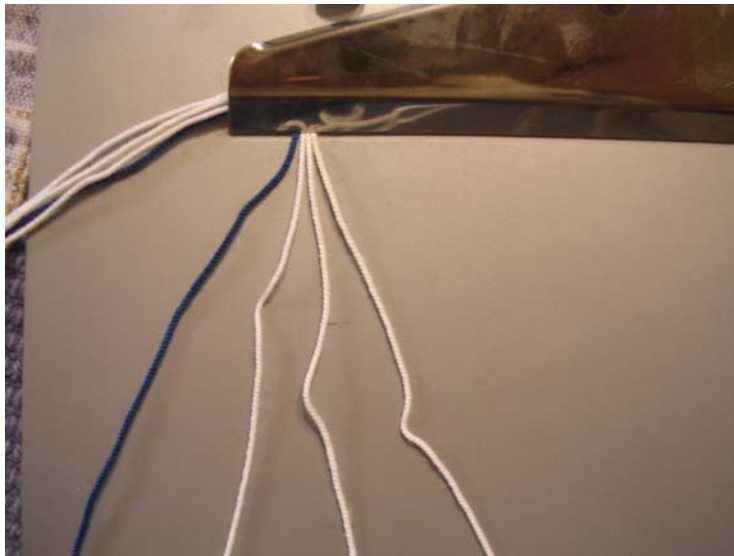
Starting the Tassel

1. **Make the four strings even.** Take the strings and line them up at one end so all the ends are even. If you have a blue string that is not blue all the way down (part of one end is still white) then line it up with the blue end up (white end down).



The blue string will hang down longer than the three white ones. Fold the set of strings in half so that you find the middle of the bundle, where one half is the 'short' side (blue string same length as white strings) and one half has the longer side of the blue string. The long side of the blue string is what you will use to wrap around the six white sections and the other blue section as a group.

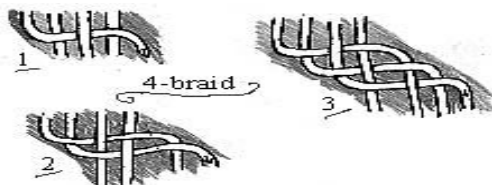
2. **Find the center of the four strings.** Once you have the middle, measure 1½” back down the section with the shorter blue thread to find the start point for the braid (you are going to make a braid three inches long with the center of the loop in the center of the string bundle). In other words, the loop is about 1½” tall (diameter) or 3” around (circumference). You can adjust the size up or down as you need. I find that this size works well to loop through the key ring. I like to use a clip board to hold the strings while I’m working on them, so you can make marks on the board to help measure. If you do it this way make a mark 1½” from the clip down the board, and another at the 3” spot. You can use the marks to make your loop by holding the top of your loop against the clip, then grasping the bundle of four strings (including the short end of the blue string) at the 1½” mark and placing it under the clip.



3. If you use a clip board, you can hold the four threads at the start point for the braid under the spring clip, and the board makes it handy to keep track of everything. Don’t pull too hard (and you don’t have to pull hard anyway) or they will come out. You can make a mark 3” down from the clip so you know where to stop braiding.

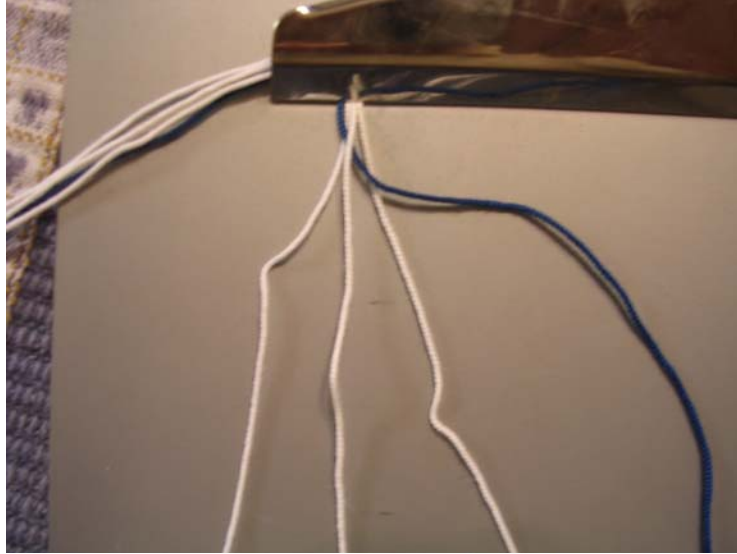
The Four Strand Braid

1. The ‘weaving method’ for a four-strand braid seems to be easier to do than the other methods (see www.virtue.to/articles/braiding.html for more on all the methods).

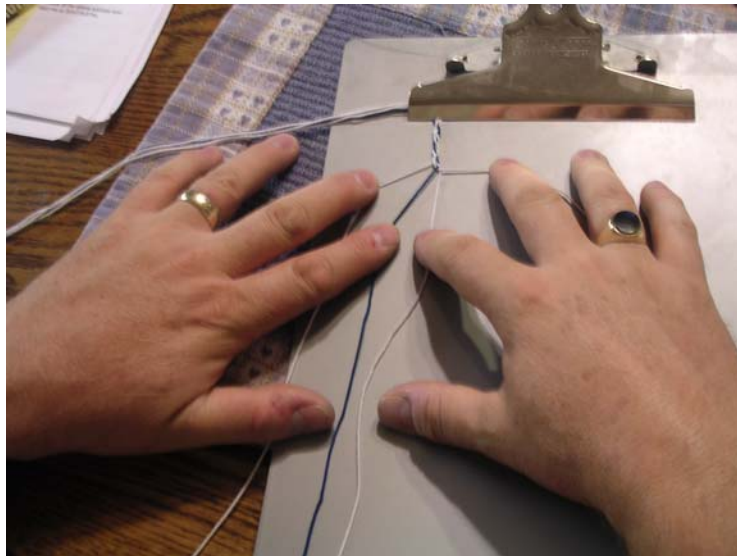


2. Starting with the strings under the clip (above), lift up the third string (third from the left) with your right hand, then take the left hand string, move it to the right, laying it

under the third string, snug to the top (figure 1 in the '4 braid' diagram above), and put the third string back down where it was.

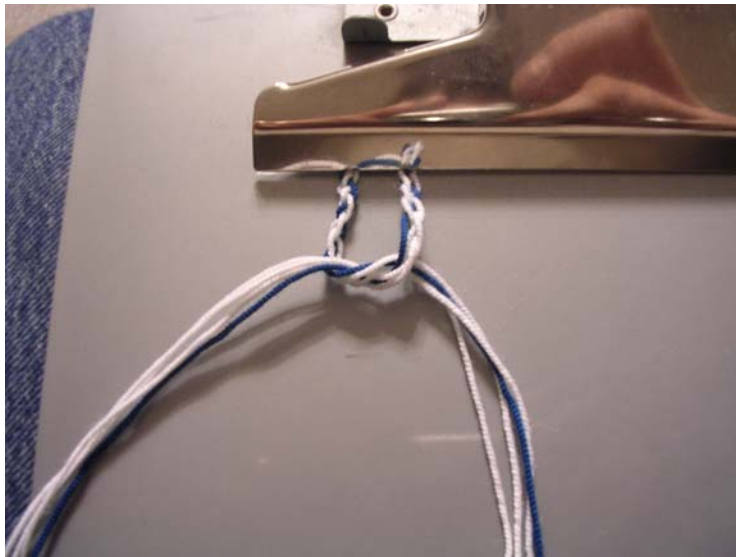


3. Repeat step 2 using what is now the new third string and the new left hand string. (After you move the first string, the new third string is the previous fourth, and the new left hand is the previous second string.) Don't sweat trying to keep track of the strings, just remember to keep lifting the third string and braiding the left hand string under it. It is helpful to keep the four strings flat and parallel so you can keep track of which one is the new third and which is the new left hand string. Occasionally you will have to 'tighten up' the braid by gently pulling apart the four strings (below). You can also work the tightness up towards the clip with a thumb nail.

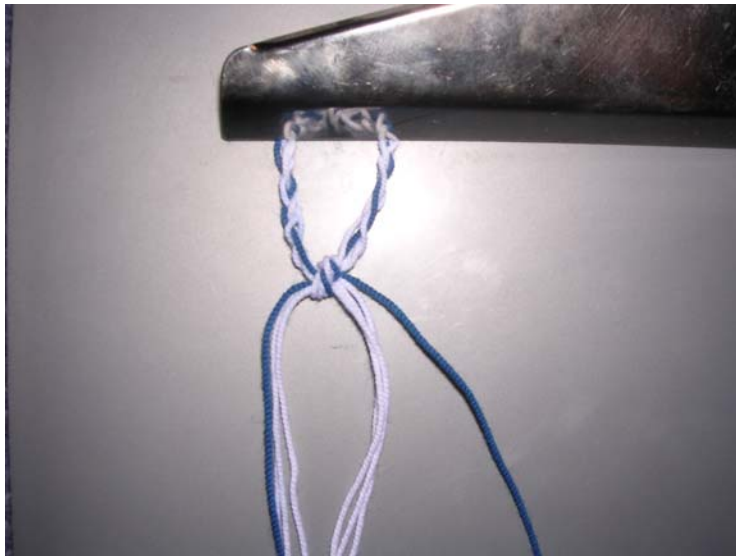


4. Keep the strings snug. Every once in a while you can tighten them by working the overlaps you have already done 'back up' the loop (see step 3). Don't worry about it

being real tight, though, just keep them as snug as you can, because they will separate a little no matter how tight you try to make them. All you are trying to do is make a neat braid for helping move them from key ring to key ring. Keep going until you reach the length of 3". Gently grab the lower end of the completed braid with your right hand, then unclip the top end and bring the two ends together making a loop, then make an overhand knot (like the one to tie your shoes) at the bottom of the loop (below).



Make a second overhand knot under this. You can also make a square knot if you know how.



Wrapping and Knotting the body of the tassel

1. Take the long blue string and wrap it around the other seven strings (as a group) seven times (seven wraps). A full wrap is one that goes around to the start point.

Another style I have heard about is to tie a simple overhand knot after each wrap of the blue string. This gives a spiral look to the blue wrappings in between the large knots.

2. Make another double overhand knot (or square knot).



3. Make eight wraps. The body will tend to twist, so try to keep it straight.
4. Make another double knot.
5. Make eleven wraps.
6. Another double knot.
7. Thirteen wraps.
8. Finish off with a double knot. This last knot will tend to keep coming loose for a while and you will need to tighten it on occasion.



9. After making all four, lay them parallel to each other on a flat surface (use the clipboard and clip each tassel at the same spot – usually just at the top double overhand knot). Trim the ends of each tassel even with each other and even with the others, and to the length you want. I leave them fairly long, because you can always make them shorter but it's a little hard to make them longer! Traditionally, you leave

the long blue thread a little longer than the others ('bout an inch). Also traditionally, you don't cut them with scissors, you bite them. I just cut them, myself.

Attaching Your Tassels



Attach and enjoy doing your Father's will. Most people will not know what they are, and usually they won't even ask. Maybe they think they're some sort of Native American fetish or something. If they ask I just tell them they are reminders, and if they ask "for what?" I tell them reminders to follow my Father's ways instead of my own. If they want to know more, then I get into more detail. For most who ask, saying they are reminders is enough. After a while the body of the tassel will relax and straighten out and won't look so much like a zigzag.

Where to Buy

Probably the best place to buy sets of strings for tying tassels in a Jewish fashion is www.judaicartkits.com. Good pricing but a set is still around \$25.00 (the blue dye is expensive right now). They have really nice kits that come with an additional set of regular (cotton, I think) strings if you want to teach or practice and a booklet with illustrations and instructions. The only (slight) difficulty with these kits is they are ordered with four white strings per tassel, and you have to order the techelet (the blue string) separate. Then you replace the long white ones with the long blue ones, so you have leftover white ones.

Or you can order multiple sets and enough techelet to replace the long white strings and use the replaced strings to make another set. For instance, four sets (each set has 16 white strings which will make a total of 16 tassels) plus 20 techelet will give you five sets with blue strings and one extra 4-strand tassel. You will replace the four long white strings in each set of four tassels with four blue ones, then use the long white ones with long blue ones to make additional sets (you will have a total of 84 strings which will make up 21 complete tassels).

<http://www.neatzit.com/> This site has a shirt you can get if you want.

<http://templestore.com/home.shtml> The Temple Store is in Israel. You find the tzitzit under 'Temple' on the first page. A little more expensive than some of the other sites, but postage is included and at least you are supporting Israeli merchants, which is always a good thing in my opinion.

<http://www.begedivri.com/techelet/HiddenBlue.htm> or www.begedivri.com Begeg Ivri is a site with less expensive sets of tzitzit than some others, and they have diagrams showing how to tie them. I think they are in Israel too.

May you be blessed in your desire to follow every Word given by your Father.

Bruce Scott Bertram

ENJOY!