

MINYAN MONTHLY

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Tevet 5755

Another View on Tallit for Women

--by Sharon L. Williams

I loved Ruth Sohn's article in the last Minyan Monthly, because it provided much needed information, as well as some personal reflections, on the meaning and use of a tallit in prayer. I've had very positive experiences with tallit myself, though it has been a bit of an adjustment getting used to wearing one. Perhaps being a convert had something to do with it; I felt a little like an upstart to do something so completely out of the norm in most congregations.

Being in the Minyan, where a significant number of women do wear a tallit, helped a great deal. For months, perhaps years, I found myself closely observing each woman's tallit and her particular kavanah and attitude about wearing it. Finally I decided to go out and buy one for myself.

Wearing it during personal prayers helped me get used to the feeling, and learn the blessings associated with the tallit. Once over my initial self-consciousness, I also find I miss wearing it if ever I go without.

As to the matter of establishing a minhag for women to wear a tallit at Library

Minyan services, especially for shlichot tzibbur and ba'alot kri'a, I have some mixed feelings. On the one hand, I agree with Ruth's opinion that we should not require women to wear a tallit. I'm not even sure how we would go about requiring such a thing. On the other hand, we don't "require" men to wear a tallit, but someone sitting in our services would quickly grasp that this is just something that is done here. Perhaps this is why it has never really been an issue for men.

On several Shabbat and festival mornings in past months, I have done a quick frequency count of the number of women wearing a tallit. Usually the percentage is about 25-33%. This indicates a strong minority, but hardly a well-established custom.

In talking to women who wear a tallit, I noticed that most had been through rabbinical training or had been bat-mitzvahed, and thus became accustomed to wearing one as a matter of course. For those who didn't, of course, there is always a first time, as for myself. Old habits die hard, however, and few of us will go out of our way to make such a change without a little encouragement.

As anyone who has long been in the Minyan knows, there is a special ritual associated with being called to the Torah. The person honored touches the

scroll with their tzitzit, to mark the beginning and ending of the reading. A woman without a tallit thus cannot observe this custom, unless she borrows the tallit of a man (or woman?) standing by. I myself have done this in the past, and I must admit it felt a little awkward. It could be argued that, for all those taking even a small leadership role in services, there is a responsibility for establishing and role-modeling appropriate ceremonial attire and behavior for the entire Minyan, especially the children.

Thus it seems to me that instituting a minhag of women wearing tallit is a natural extension of being an egalitarian minyan. No doubt it will take some time to catch on, as with all innovations, but there are some things we can do as a group to encourage the process.

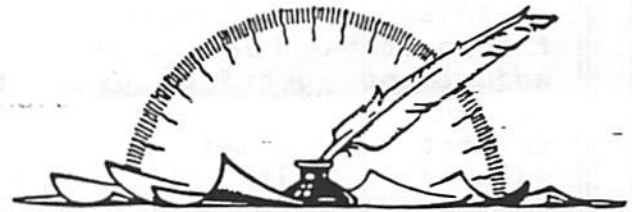
For example, some "women's tallitot" could be purchased to hang on the tallit rack at the back of the hall. Women's tallitot are usually distinguishable from men's by means of color, size and/or decoration. Having some clearly distinguished tallitot might help to offset the tendency to associate the tallit with "men's clothing" and shy away from it because of the biblical prohibition in this regard.

Women honored with an aliyah on a given morning could be directed by the gabbai to these tallitot and encouraged to wear one, at least for the duration of the reading. A woman who found she had forgotten her tallit would also have one available, a convenience taken for granted by men.

This would certainly be preferable to not being called for an aliyah because of lack of a tallit, which is another possibility, though not one I recommend. I tend to believe that, given the opportunity to try praying

with a tallit, many women would avail themselves of it. A woman trying a tallit in this fashion might discover she likes the sensation, and the added kavanah she experiences, leading her to purchase one of her own.

I would encourage the female members of the Library Minyan who are not accustomed to wearing a tallit to consider the issue. I have asked several long-time members who do not wear a tallit if they have a specific reason. So far, the only reason mentioned is that they are just not in the habit. Perhaps there are better reasons for a woman not to wear a tallit. If anyone knows of such reason(s), feel free to write and articulate your ideas for all to consider.



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NOTICE:

The editorial staff apologizes for errors in the Committees/ Contacts list in the November issue of the Minyan Monthly. The corrections have been made to this month's edition, so disregard last month's listings. Please call the editorial staff with any future changes. Thank you!



For Universal Peace

--by Ronnie Cohen

Once upon a time (actually it was a couple of months ago), the Minyan member davening Shacharit announced that in the Kaddish Shalem (full Kaddish) following the Amidah, the final paragraph would be expanded to include the following underlined phrase: OSEH SHALOM BIM'ROMAV, HU YA'ASEH SHALOM, ALEINU VE'AL KOL YISRAEL VE'AL KOL YOSHVEI TEVEL, VE'IMRU AMEN. [He who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Israel, and on all who dwell on earth, and let us say, 'Amen.']

Afterwards, I was approached (in my capacity as Chair of the Ritual Committee of the Library Minyan) by members of the Minyan who were concerned that this addition constituted a change in the liturgy, and as such, could not be done without the full discussion and consent of the Library Minyan. (Some of you who have been in the Library Minyan awhile might recall the discussions about similar proposed liturgical changes, such as the inclusion of the matriarchs in the Amidah, or the debate over full versus triennial cycle of Torah readings.)

Instead of initiating such a process, however, I thought I might use the Minyan Monthly as a forum in which to put forth my view that the full discussion and consent of the Minyan is not required for this change. I feel this change is well within the purview of the Shaliach Tzibbur, for the following reasons:

1. This new liturgical phraseology, which has been adopted for the Kaddish in the Reform Movement, has also been adopted in the Conservative Movement, albeit not for the Kaddish. The Sim Shalom prayer book (as well as some others

commonly in use in Conservative congregations) includes this innovative phrase in the final prayer (the prayer for peace) of the evening and afternoon Amidah, the prayer that starts SHALOM RAV. This can be seen on page 184 (the weekday Mincha service), page 220 (the weekday evening service), page 302 (the Friday evening service), page 310 (the festival evening service), page 582 (the Shabbat Mincha service, and page 594 (the festival Mincha service). I should point out that these are not presented merely as allowable variants, but are in fact presented as the standard versions of the Amidah for their respective occasions.

2. The corresponding prayer for peace at the end of the morning and Musaf Amidah prayers (the prayer that begins SIM SHALOM) has also been universalized throughout the Sim Shalom prayer book (in comparison to Orthodox liturgy) through the inclusion of the word BA'OLAM (in the world), although this is in accordance with Sa'adia's formulation, and thus doesn't constitute an innovation per se.

3. The Amidah prayer, according to Rabbi Rembaum, with whom I consulted about this matter, is much more part of the "core prayer service" than is the Kaddish. Therefore if we accept this change in the Amidah, in part of the very core of the prayer service, we should also accept it, at the least as an allowable variant, in the Kaddish.

Now, in the interests of full disclosure I should point out that there are three hidden premises in the above arguments: The first is that the Library Minyan is a Conservative Minyan, and any innovation accepted by the Conservative movement ought to be acceptable to the Minyan. The second, leaving aside the broader

issues of the place of the Minyan in the Conservative Movement, is that the Minyan, in agreeing to switch over to the Sim Shalom prayer book for essentially practical purposes (the Temple bought them for us; they were nice and new; the old Silverman prayer books were getting ratty), in effect also agreed to accept all the liturgical innovations included in it. And third, that one has the right to expect the Minyan to act logically and consistently in liturgical matters.

As I indicated earlier, I discussed this matter with Rabbi Rembaum. He informed me that in his capacity as Mara D'Atra (loosely translated as local ritual authority) of Temple Beth Am, he has absolutely no objection to this innovation, and would have no problem if Hazzan Lipton used this formulation in the service.

Finally, in terms of pure meaning, I personally would prefer that our prayers for peace be for a universal peace, rather than a peace for Israel alone.

I would hope that the editors of this august journal allow space for responses - from interested parties. Naturally, if the number and tenor of the responses indicate that my views are not widely shared in the Minyan (or if people start snubbing me in Shul, sending me hate-mail, dumping garbage on my lawn), I will be more than happy to call a meeting of the Ritual Committee to discuss this issue.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

To Michelle, Aaron and Rachel Wolf, on the birth of their new family member, Daniel Reuven, born Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1994.

TREASURER'S REPORT

-- by Dale Bodenstein

The Library Minyan gratefully acknowledges the following generous contributions:

Lawrence and Abigail Harris for Yom Kippur Aliyah - Yizkor.

David Aftergood - in honor of the Saigers.

Adolph and Herman Goodman Family Trust, in honor of Allen and Judy Weinstock and Family, and Esther and Eddie Friedman and Family. By Beverly, Andy and Joshua Liggett, and Rosemary and Herman Goodman.

Michael Leventhal, a friend of Allan Tobin and Janice Haddock, who visited the Library Minyan.

Jack Marder - in honor of Norm and Rachel Green and Family, and Art and Miriam Metz and Family, for their Rosh HaShanah Hospitality.

Dr. S. D. Rimmon and Joan Glance Rimmon.



TORAI GABBAI ('IM)
NEEDED



After the last Minyan Monthly was published, it was pointed out that the position of Torah Gabbai is unoccupied, indeed has been for several months now. The job consists of orchestrating the Torah service at least once a month, and lining up others to do it whenever possible. Good Hebrew reading skills are required, and Torah reading skills are recommended though not essential. Call Arnie Wuhrman for more information, (310) 657-5533.



An Open Letter to the Minyan

--by Karen Fox

I am concerned about an aspect of the realities of the Library Minyan in its current site. Although we have a wide variety of talented daveners and speakers, we find ourselves in a Makom Tefillah that may not be the most conducive to prayer, simply because the architecture of the Mirror Room does not allow sound to travel well.

It is often difficult to hear the shaliach tzibbur -- not simply because they must face the ark but also because the sound is projected forward and upward. Therefore, many of us simply daven or sing our own nusach, unfortunately, even when someone has prepared a new and different melody. On the high holidays, for example, when the shaliach tzibbur davened in a softer tone to emphasize the power of the prayer, their thoughtful melody was absorbed into the ceiling.

A person giving a drash is anxious to present their thoughts, but distractions such as rustling bodies and young voices detract from this. Even the past few B'nai Mitzvah -- as impressive as these kids are -- are doing double work to present and project. It seems a shame, a tircha d'tzibura -- an insult to the community that we cannot support our leadership in a simple way.

It is time we use a tool commonly found in synagogues, a microphone. We are no longer a haimish group of 25 people meeting in a small library. We are members of a large community of 200-250 people, members of a conservative synagogue in which we use electricity to see, for air conditioning, and for our security

system for safety each day, including Shabbat.

Like an automatic clock can be set to light a stove to warm food for Shabbat, or an elevator set to stop at each floor in an apartment building, a microphone can be set and turned on prior to Shabbat for the good use of the community, to aid it in prayer and study (I. Klein, p. 93; Maharam Schick, OH 157).

I turn to the steering committee and the members of the Minyan to put the process of this beneficial change into motion. I encourage a quiet, thoughtful process. Thank you.



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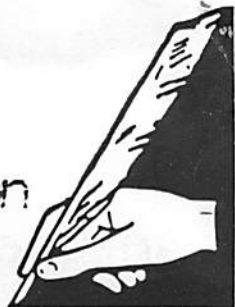


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 DON'T FORGET WE'RE STILL COLLECTING
 CANNED AND PACKAGED FOODS FOR
 SOVA

Editor's Column



--by Sharon L. Williams

Following up Ruth Sohn's article last month, I felt I had to both reinforce her main points and add my own perspective on the issue of women and tallitot. As usual, anyone with a different opinion is welcome to express it in these pages.

Likewise, feel free to respond to Ron Cohen's plea for certain freedoms of liturgical innovation, see page 3, or Karen Fox's suggestion of using microphones on Shabbat, page 5.

I would like to see someone address the issue of kippot and other headcoverings for women, and would be interested in hearing opinions from both men and women on this matter. In addition, we should consider whether single members of the minyan prefer to be set apart in some way, for example by not wearing a tallit for men, or a headcovering for women, as is the custom in some shuls.

It's hard to believe Hanukkah is over already, isn't it? Here's hoping it was a pleasant and happy holiday for all.

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