

# MINYAN MONTHLY

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Heshvan-Kislev 5755

## Tallit for Women

--by Ruth H. Sohn

Last weekend, I was on a retreat with a group of women from Long Beach, and during Shabbat morning services I offered my tallit to the woman next to me. She had never worn a tallit before. Together we said the berakha which is traditionally said before putting on a tallit. I showed her how to wrap herself in it, encouraging her to take her time. At the end of services the woman turned to me, beaming, and said:

"You know what? You have changed my life. Really, I love this -- it feels so right." I was very happy that another woman had discovered new depths to her experience of Jewish spirituality through the ritual of tallit.

It had felt right to me too, eighteen years ago, when I began wearing a tallit. The idea of a physical act to accompany the spiritual act of prayer -- wrapping oneself in a shawl to symbolize being enwrapped in God's Presence -- intrigued me. And once I started wearing a tallit, I found it enhanced my davening experience in a number of ways. I savored the feeling of being embraced by God's Presence as I wrapped my tallit around my head and upper body. Wrapping

myself in a tallit helped me center on the fact that I was preparing to pray. As I prayed, I welcomed the comfort and warmth provided by the tallit (at least the cooler part of the year!) symbolic of God's caring. Now when I daven without a tallit for Minhah or Maariv, I feel something is missing; I feel bereft.

From the start, I felt very comfortable as a woman wearing a tallit. This was a shawl. Women wear shawls. I did not feel I was wearing "men's clothing."

Why is it that traditionally women don't wear a tallit? The mitzvah of tsitsit (the tied strings hanging from the four corners of a tallit) is, according to Rabbinic law, obligatory for men but not for women. This exemption is one of the eight which are generally explained by pointing to the Rabbinic principle that women are exempt from all "time-bound positive commandments (mitvot aseih she-ha-zman gramah)" [Kiddushin 1:7]

The exemption from time-bound positive commands is usually explained, by those sympathetic to it, as Rabbinic sensitivity to the demands of women's home and childcare responsibilities. Because of the fact that this principle has virtually as many exceptions (6) as cases which prove the rule (8), many today question whether it was ever

(TALLIT, Cont.)

really the a priori basis for deciding law. More likely, the principle was stated by the Rabbis in an attempt to explain what was already existing practice in their day.

Through the centuries, the Rabbis differed over whether women could assume obligations from which they were exempt, and whether women who did assume these practices should say the accompanying blessings (which refer to these ritual acts as mitzvot -- commandments which God has commanded us to perform). In assuming these obligations, are women stepping into a new relationship to God?

In the Shulkhan Arukh for example, Joseph Caro permits women to assume at least certain of these obligations but not to recite the accompanying blessings. Moses Isserles, reflecting Ashkenazic practice, writes in his gloss. "Our custom is for women to recite the blessings on positive time-bound commandments."

While questions and disagreements persist in the Conservative Movement today over whether or not and how women can assume new obligations, the majority view is that women can assume the time-bound commandments and act as agents, fulfilling these obligations for other people.

I believe that we in the Library Minyan should encourage women and men to wear tallitot when they daven and when they come up for an aliyah. We should always encourage Jews to come closer to God and to Jewish tradition by "trying on" more ritual practice. However, not everyone -- male or female --

is comfortable wearing a tallit. Therefore, I am opposed to making it mandatory in the Library Minyan for either a man or a woman to wear a tallit.



Chair's Column  
"Kum A Herr"

--by Ruth Askren

The Library Minyan exists in a world that is certainly slightly crazy. Those of us who know and love the Minyan may think of it as a strong walking stick on a rough trail. And like the crooked man who walked a crooked mile, our walking stick is not without its jigs and jags. Which is to say, changes are coming down the pike and we shall be part of them.

Soon the main lobby of the synagogue, as well as other areas will undergo major physical renovations. Soon the Mirror Room will also undergo a complete remodeling, the better to accomodate our congregation. It will be challenging to deal with the changes as we help shape our kehilla and prepare for the twenty-first century.

As a community, we share our religious and spiritual lives together. We have an obligation to our future! Remember: PAY, COME, and SERVE!!

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## TEMPLE BETH AM CHILDCARE UPDATE

--by Teri Cohan Link

The childcare committee has made great strides during the past months. Foremost, we have succeeded in securing the support of the synagogue to implement a broad-ranging child care program. It is our goal to offer a "full-service" program year-round including, whenever possible, Hagim and summer vacation.

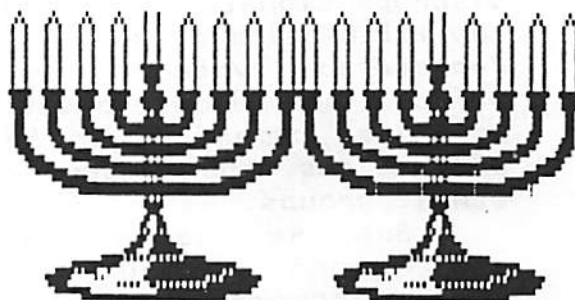
Rabbi Rembaum, on behalf of the synagogue, has committed funding and administrative support to build a program addressing our needs. We have also received encouragement and support from Marcie Klein, Education V.P.; Julie Schuer, V.P. Temple Beth Am; and Aviva Leibowitz, Pressman Academy Principal.

The program will include an over-all supervisor of child care who will supervise, train, and schedule the babysitters, act as an administrative liaison with the synagogue, and as an additional resource for both our "tot Shabbat" program and Junior Congregation. S/he will plan and help implement flexible plans for all

programs, help write a handbook for parents about our programs and safety procedures, and implement and staff an improved traffic flow from the various programs to organized and less-organized play. We have recently begun our search for candidates to fill this position. Please contact any of the co-chairs with names of possible candidates. This is a part-time position.

As part of our overall plan we hope to offer the older children attending Junior Congregation, probably from the fourth grade up, additional tefillot-related activities appropriate to their grades. We have not yet given sufficient attention to the teen services, although there are families who have asked us to address this issue.

Another of our major accomplishments during the past months has been to enlarge our committee to include members from both Library Minyan and Temple Beth Am. Our committee is now represented on the Educational Cabinet, so as to ensure both input and communication with the overall educational policy at Temple Beth Am. We all look forward to further positive changes in the future.



**HANUKKAH BEGINS EARLY  
THIS YEAR!  
NOVEMBER 27, 1994**

# COME, PAY, SERVE... AND VOTE!

-- by Jonathan Friedman

As members of the Library Minyan, we all acknowledge our threefold obligation to come, pay and serve. But we should also accept a fourth obligation, both as Jews and as Americans: the responsibility to vote (the non-citizens and convicted felons among us are excused from this obligation). Voting is both a duty and a privilege; our right to vote is not denied to us by reason of our religion, nor can any fee be exacted from us for exercising that right. But the responsibility of voting is something we must accept voluntarily; it is not mandatory here, as it is in certain countries.

As members of a minority community, particularly one that is a shrinking percentage of the population, it is extremely urgent that we vote diligently. Jewish community interests have been adequately protected by the political process, and our concerns have been addressed. But that has happened partly because American Jews have been disproportionately involved in the political process. We have registered, voted, run for office and contributed to political campaigns in higher proportions than many other ethnic groups.

But we cannot become complacent about past accomplishments; political consultants track ethnic voting closely, and know in great detail who votes. In fact they

know specifically whether you vote, and how regularly.

I am not calling upon Minyan members to vote for the candidates of my choice (whose identities are known to most of you); I am calling upon you to vote for the candidates of your choice. And for those who complain about the choices this November, I must ask: Did you vote in the June primary and help choose the candidates? If not, you are part of the problem! And if you find all of the candidates for a particular office to be objectionable, exercise your right to write in a name, or simply skip that race.

Mark Twain, a great friend of the Jewish people, wrote a book called Concerning the Jews. In it he urged Jews to become politically involved: "In politics, organize your strength, band together and deliver the casting vote where you can, and where you can't, compel as good terms as possible." This is advice we should take to heart. I do not expect all of us to run for public office, although some of us will; not all of us will contribute to candidates, although many of us can and should; but every eligible member of the Minyan should be registered to vote, and every registered voter should go to the polls on November 8, or vote absentee. We owe this to our community; we owe this to ourselves.



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 DON'T FORGET WE'RE STILL COLLECTING  
 CANNED AND PACKAGED FOODS FOR  
 \*\*\*SOVA\*\*\*  
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## Editor's Column

--by Sharon L. Williams

After months with little to publish, we have a very full issue indeed. As a matter of fact, I had too much to print in just one issue -- what a dilemma! Ronnie Cohen submitted excerpts from his Yom Kippur drash, which will have to wait until the next issue. But I am sure he will be delighted, as Chair of the Ritual Committee, to see that we have finally taken up the issue of ritual garb for women. Anyone else with contributions, history and/or personal reflections on the subject of tallitot, as well as other ritual garb (such as kippah, tallit katan, tefillin) feel free to send me your thoughts.

I am slowly but surely entering the electronic age -- I now have a fax machine (the number is printed below)! The only caveat is, you must let me know the day before you fax something, so I can be sure to leave my computer on. Faxing in the evening is best, but again, give me a call first. I plan to have an address on the information superhighway soon, so it will be even easier to reach me. Keep those letters and articles coming!

Mail or FAX articles for the Minyan Monthly to:

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