

Looking around our congregation, or most Reform congregations, and seeing many Jewish adults wearing a tallit is not something exceptional today. Nor is it unusual that a significant number of the adults wearing talleisim will be women, but neither of those was the case a generation ago when I was first a rabbi.

The Reform movement had cast off the Tallit in many congregations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of a movement to be more rational and more American.

What need was there for this symbolic apparel that separated us further from our other American neighbors. For classical Reform Judaism what was most important was the philosophy of Judaism and the prophetic call for justice, not the folkways of a bygone era.

That began to change in the years after World War II, as more Jews from Eastern European backgrounds, who had grown up in more traditional settings began to enter the new Reform Temples being built out in the suburbs. Often these Temple were the first and for a long time the only Jewish presence and so attracted a more diverse membership.

This process was accelerated by the “Black is Beautiful” movement of the 60’s and 70’s where African Americans and other ethnic groups began to embrace difference and the expression of their unique identity.

As sociologists put it, we went from a melting pot to a salad bowl, in which different elements mix but maintain their integrity.

Wearing a tallit met an emotional need, it was a concrete symbol of the connection of the generations. It promoted spiritual meaning and emotional experience. As poet Marica Falk wrote, we put on the tallit “in order to recall and preserve the tradition of the generations.”

That doesn't mean that the tallit wasn't divisive for a period of time. A Century or a bit more ago, it had split Congregation Shearith Israel from B'nai Jeshurun.

When I was a student rabbi in San Antonio Texas in the late 1970's, the senior rabbi was still forbidden by the congregation from wearing a tallit on the bimah, as in their minds, that would be too Conservative. I believe it was well into the 1980's when wearing a tallit became commonplace in the Reform movement.

What about women? Judith Kaplan was not wearing a tallit at her Bat Mitzvah, the first in history, in 1922. When the number of Bat Mitzvah's began to pick up in the 1970's there was a lot of discussion about how girls should sew their own shawls but that they shouldn't resemble the male tallit. Preferably they should be pink. I had grown up in a Conservative congregation, and when I would go home to visit in those years, it was a conscious decision each time, would I wear a tallit

and call attention to myself in a way that would cause dissention in the congregation, or just let it go for the morning. Slowly the women who celebrated adult Bnai Mitzvah all over the country, adopted the practice of putting on a tallit, and that began to change what was acceptable. The Tallitotsthemselves became more diverse in appearance, so that men and women chose to wear talleisim that were more artistic.

The tallit is described at the end of this week's Torah portion. Perhaps it was in response to the spies who were so easily able to lead the people astray. Having a physical symbol, right on their bodies, would perhaps help the people.

The tzizit, the fringes, were not just worn on a garment for worship, but were to be attached to any four cornered garment, particularly to the outer garment simlah common at that time. Therefore it would be with the ancient Israelite wherever they went.

We know today from behavioral economics that reminding someone of a value immediately before they make a decision, makes a big difference in what they will do. Seeing those tzizit, those fringes, was meant to be a reminder of our values, with us at all times.

As Maya and Lily go forth from this day, we hope the memories of this morning, will act as a tzitzit, something to look upon in one's mind's eye, "to remember and to do all of God's commandments".