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As we are celebrating Israel’s 65th Birthday this year, I wish to continue with the idea and theme I suggested for this year, namely, Israel at 65.

This past week about ten women were arrested in Jerusalem. Were they terrorists? No.

Were they doing anything destructive? No. Were they doing anything that looked like they deserved to be arrested? No. So, nu? What did they do?

The Women of the Wall were there praying in the Women’s designated area, however they were wearing prayer shawls - Tallitot. They were praying in Hebrew, our liturgy, our prayers. However, it is difficult to believe that in Israel today, an Orthodox rabbi decides if a woman is provocative or breaking the law by wearing things considered to be worn only by men in prayer.

The answer to these women given by the Orthodox Rabbi is that we have already designated the other area near Robinson’s Arch for this purpose. ‘So why do you have to ruin everything?’

The women, rightly so, I believe are making the point that this control thing is new and was not always the case. Why does this rabbi at the Wall in Jerusalem have so much control? What difference does it make if someone is offended, when the women say, we are offended that we cannot wear a Tallit or Tefillin?

As an aside, it is a beautiful experience to pray in Jerusalem. So how holy is the site? Are we commanded to pray there?

It is interesting, especially since this week we read in Terumah about the details, the blueprint of the Tabernacle, the predecessor of the Temple. The idea is to create a sacred place where we can our forth our pain, suffering, or joy and happiness. The idea that the outer walls of the Temple of Solomon and the Hasmoneans, is off limits, or somehow violated by women in prayer shawls praying seems so unbelievable to us.

There are sections in the Torah which include commands to wear the appropriate garments for men and women, even suggesting appropriate colors. Years ago right after High School graduation, I worked part time for the General Cigar Company in Manhattan. One of my jobs was to take orders for ‘its a boy’, ‘its a girl’ Tiporillo Cigars. On occasion I would receive a call with an unhappy customer on the line saying you sent me the wring cigars. I would respond with: What do you mean?

They would counter: You sent me pink - “Its a boy!” not a girl!

So there is some basis for this idea. However, to legislate it, and make it a crime for women who are praying in a Tallit in their area of the Wall, that is just going too far. This is a clear example of a need for a change. How can the government of Israel support such a rule? This after all is not a closed synagogue space, but open to all, Jews, Christians, Moslems, and people of any faith. No one asks them if they are Jewish or follow Jewish law, or if they are wearing a religious symbol which is not a Jewish symbol. Pope John Paul II worshipped at the Wall with a very visible Crucifix and representing the Church and two billion Christian followers. Wasn’t it a truly spiritual moment for the world? The Israeli Press thought so! If women wish to pray at the Wall, who really can say no, or tell them what to wear, anymore than they can tell the Pope what to wear?

This is a problem, and the Women of the Wall deserve our support that some of our Rabbis do not control every aspect of their lives or prayer. I would agree with a rabbi who says these are the rules in our Temple or Shul. Years ago, in Temple Emanuel n NYC they would ask you to remove a Kippah or Tallit when you were visiting or at services because that was not the Classical Reform custom. Today it is different.

The outer Wall of Solomon's Temple is what is left after centuries of destruction and neglect. The Romans destroyed the Temple between 67-70 CE. Now that we have a Jerusalem rebuilt and an Israel celebrating sixty-five years of Independence, are we tearing down the the common fabric of decency by allowing Women to be arrested for wearing a Tallit? I think Israel can do better. By what stretch of the imagination is a Woman in a Tallit wrong? We think otherwise.

We hope that the Government and courts of Israel can come to terms with modernity and rights for women. We are so proud when we see women in the uniform of the IDF, such as my daughter-in-law, Hagar. Women should be able to exercise their rights without fear of arrest at the Wall, or on a public bus if they sit in an area designated for men, or if they wish to dress contrary to the stringent codes of the ultra-orthodox communities.

Real Orthodoxy includes tolerance. This incident requires all of us to work for rules which are not at the whim of one man, rather based on modern law, which could never justify such a foolish and discriminatory arrest. Thank you to the ‘Women of the Wall’ for being willing to be arrested, thus drawing attention to this unfair and arbitrary treatment of women. Women should decide for themselves and/or with their own rabbis whether they can wear a tallit.

Lets hope that the Government of Israel can find a solution which reflects modern sensibilities and which is not a throwback to medieval beliefs. We need to rebuild a Temple of Judaism built on mutual respect. A building or Temple, no matter how historically important cannot replace that. The Temple of Judaism is our love, kindness, and caring for each other. V’Ahavta Lereiacha Kamocha - Love Your Neighbor As Yourself.