



# MASORTI MATTERS: HOW MERCAZ-CANADA & CANADIAN FOUNDATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN ISRAEL

## How can expressing our Jewish identity be a crime?

Every Rosh Hodesh, Women of the Wall conduct services at the Kotel in Jerusalem. They daven Shacharit in the women's section, making no effort to infringe in any way on the much larger section reserved for men. Women of the Wall has members from all movements, including many from Masorti, and each month Masorti has a delegation of men and women (including members of the NOAM youth movement) at the Kotel with Women of the Wall.

This morning, once again, two women were detained by police for the offense of wearing their tallit the way we all typically do, rather than making it look like a scarf or item of apparel. One of those detained was Rachel Cohen Yeshurun, a leader of a Masorti kehilla. She spoke to Masorti leadership, telling how she was brought in for questioning and fingerprinted. She, and all those involved, deserve a kol hakavod from us.

Last night, while with a group of women from Hadassah and not specifically davening for Rosh Hodesh, Anat Hoffman, the leader of Women of the Wall, was detained and kept overnight in jail. Why? Apparently while at the Kotel she was too enthusiastic and loud in her rendition of Shema so it was deemed she was disturbing the peace.



Women of The Wall wearing tallitot in the acceptable "women's" style.

Interestingly, Shmuel Ben-Ruby, spokesperson for the Jerusalem police, said, "It is not a law. It is a decision from 2003. The decision of the High Court of Justice is that the women must behave according to the customs of the site," said Ben-Ruby. "The customs say men with tallit, women without tallit. It is like a women putting on tefillin," he said.

Ben-Ruby explained that the police will not detain women who are wearing a multicolored "women's" tallit, draped around the neck. They will only detain women who wear their tallit "like a man," referring to the more traditional black and white or blue and white prayer shawls worn folded around the shoulders.

Yizhar Hess, Executive Director of the Masorti movement in Israel, put it well when he said: "In all honesty it must be said we have misunderstood our own history. The Kotel was never liberated, rather, it was handed over to the Ministry of Religion and to the Haredim who fully control the area. In a process of exclusion, this national symbol has been turned into an Orthodox synagogue. The women of Hadassah may be good enough to build hospitals but not good enough to pray and sing."

As Anat Hoffman wrote for today's Haaretz newspaper, "Together we will make the dream of Israel's Declaration of Independence come true: "Israel] . . . will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion."

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