

Shlom Bayyit

Reminding Us of Our Jewishness - Part II



Consider the tallit, tefillin and mezuzah. There's the Hamsa – the five fingered hand and Chai – the charm that signifies "life." Symbols and garb...they play a significant role in our ritual and in our Jewishness. Last month, the symbol: Magen David; this month the ritual

garb: **Kippah**, the most instantly identifiable mark of a Jew.

You say Kippah and I say Yarmulka!

The Yiddish word, yarmulka is believed to come from the Aramaic, *yira malka*, which means "awe or fear of the King." In Hebrew, **Kippah**, (plural kippot) means "dome." Your choice!

It's not a Commandment, then why the Custom?

Moses and his mentors would be quite surprised to see Jews of today donning a **Kippah**. This ritual headwear is not mentioned in the Torah and did not have widespread use until modern times. There is evidence that only the high priests, *Kohanim*, when serving in the Temple, were required to cover their heads (Exodus 28:4.) The use of a head covering is hinted at in 4 places in the Talmud. In the morning blessing, we thank God for "crowning Israel with splendor." (Talmud – Brachot 606) In another reference, it says that Rav Huna ben Joshua "never walked four cubits with uncovered head because God dwells over my head." It appears to have been mentioned as an act of piety but not a mitzvah. Therefore, no blessing is said when placing the **Kippah** upon one's head.

It is commonly thought that the commandment, "Don't follow any of their traditions" (Leviticus 18:3) explains the custom. In the western world it was good manners among Christians to tip or remove one's hat as a sign of honor and respect. Jews, persecuted by the Gentiles, began to keep their heads covered at all times, in order not to "go in their tradi-

tions." Other sources say that during the Middle Ages, Christians demanded Jews cover their heads. In ancient Rome servants were required to wear a head covering. It has alternately been proposed that, as servants of God, Jews adopted this practice.

What about Women?

Among Jews who follow strict Halacha (Jewish Law) married women are required to wear a head covering for modesty - a scarf (tichel), wig (sheitel), a snood or net like cap, a hat. In Liberal Jewish congregations, women often wear a head covering, like a lace chapel cap, as a gesture of egalitarianism. When performing the mitzvot of lighting the Shabbat candles, women cover their heads.

To Kippah or not to Kippah?

- o Orthodox Jews wear 2 head coverings – the black **Kippah** under a hat – 2 coverings in order to show more reverence.
- o Chassidic Jews wear a fur hat, a *shtreimel*, on Shabbat and holidays.
- o Modern Orthodox can usually be recognized by the knitted **Kippah** they wear.
- o Among Liberal Jews it is expected that while engaging in prayer, performing a ritual, and studying Torah, the **Kippah** is worn.
- o The Reform Movement originally abolished its use but wearing one is now more the norm.
- o **Kippot** are worn at the Shabbat table.
- o Even among observant Jews, when the **Kippah** may conflict with business or career interests it may not be worn – note - U. S. Senator Joe Lieberman
- o When entering a sanctuary all men, Jewish or non-Jewish are invited to wear a **Kippah** out of respect.
- o **Kippah** patterns designate not only religious but sometimes political affiliations. One does not wear the **Kippah** while bathing or swimming.

Wear a **Kippah** as a sign of our respect, as a reminder that God is above us and we are beholden to a higher authority. When we cover our heads, we show our reverence and declare our Jewishness.