

The Shabbos meal was over and it was time for *Birkat Ha'Mazon* -- *bentching*, or Grace After Meals. David realized he didn't have his head covered, as he couldn't find his yarmulke. So David asked his older brother Josh to put place his hand on his head until the prayer was over.

However, big brother Josh grew impatient after a few minutes, and removed his hand.

Dad, watching the proceedings, said, "Josh, this is important. David doesn't have a yarmulke. Please put your hand back on his head!"

But to that Josh said to his father in response, "Dad, I understand it's important to wear a yarmulke during prayers. But -- am I my brother's kipah?"

There are a number of words used to describe the familiar religious head-covering we see so often: Yarmulke, Kipah, Kapl, Skull Cap, Beanie.

Have you ever wondered what yarmulke means?

The word yarmulke is a contraction of two Aramaic words *yarei* and *malka*, meaning "awe of the King". This name expresses one of the main purposes of wearing a yarmulke – to remind us that G-d is always above us and watching at all times. What about kipah? Everyone here has heard of *Iron Dome*, Israel's game-changing missile defense system. In Hebrew, Iron Dome is called *Kippat Barzel*. The kipah we wear is a dome; it reminds us of Hashem's protection.

Sam and Joe were discussing the current state of health insurance.

Sam: "These days, health insurance is like those hospital gowns when you go for a procedure."

Joe: "How so?"

Sam: "It doesn't quite cover everything!"

But unlike modern health insurance policies, the yarmulke and kipah remind us: With Hashem, we've **always** got coverage!

There are many things to learn from the kipah. Today, on the occasion of Daniel Chayet's Bar Mitzvah, I'd like to share three lessons:

First. A few moments ago we mentioned numerous names for the yarmulke. But as many different names as there are, there are even more *types* of kippot. In fact, there are more different styles and colors of yarmulkes out there than you can shake a lulav at! What do they all mean?

Let's discuss a few of the more popular type of kippot.

Crocheted Known in Hebrew as a *kipah seruga*, a knit yarmulke, this type of kipah is flat and made of thin yarn. It comes in many colors and sizes, and is typically worn by Religious Zionist and modern Orthodox Jews

Suede This 4-piece yarmulke is made of soft suede material. The suede kipah is typically worn with hair clips, and is also popular among modern Orthodox Jews.

Terelyn This 4 or 6 'slice' (piece) black cloth is a material somewhat lighter than velvet. Many Chasidim of the Lubavitch and Gerrer sects wear it, along with yeshivish and charedi Jews. A terelyn kipah is popular among rabbis teaching in yeshivas and seminaries

Velvet Kapl A 4 or 6 slice velvet kapl is made of black velvet fabric with a polyester lining. The overwhelming majority of Hasidic boys and men, other than those who belong to the Chabad-Lubavitch and Ger sects, wear the black velvet six-slice kapl. The 4 piece velvet kapl is typically worn by men of less stringent Hasidic sects. Many Litvish (non-Hasidic ultra-Orthodox men) in places like Lakewood and Brooklyn wear this yarmulke.

Breslov Yarmulke Also called the Na Nach Kippah, a knit yarmulke of thick white yarn, with the Breslov mantra *Na Nach Nachma Nachman Me-Uman* knitted in blue or black around the circumference.

Bukharian Originally from Bukharian Jews from Central Asia. Larger than a *kipah sruga*, they are also worn by Jews who like the look and don't feel constrained by cultural expectations. They are especially popular among boys.

Character These are kipot worn by ...characters! They may be of different colors, and have imprinted or puff-painted images of child-friendly themes -- from cartoon characters to sports team names. Any sports team is an acceptable image ...other than the Chicago Cubs!

In all, there are at least a dozen type of yarmulkes for different types of Jews. But are there really different types of Jews?

Sid and Al are having lunch at a kosher deli. Sid asks Al, 'Do you know of any people of our faith born and raised in Tunisia?'

Al replies, "I don't know; let's ask our waiter."

When the waiter arrives, Al asks, "Are there any Tunisian Jews?"

The waiter says, "I don't know; I'll ask the cook."

He returns from the kitchen after a few minutes and says, 'No, Sir .No Tunisian Jews.'

Al isn't satisfied and asks, "Are you absolutely sure? I just can't believe there are no Tunisian Jews!"

"Sir, I asked everyone in the kitchen" replies the exasperated waiter. "All we have is Apple Jews, Orange Jews, mixed Pineapple Jews, and Tomato Jews. But no Tunisian Jews!"

There is no such thing as a Tunisian Jew! There are no Israeli Jews, American Jews, Mexican Jews, or Tunisian Jews. There are Jews who live or who come from Israel, America, Mexico and Tunisia. But a Jew, is a Jew, is a Jew, period. Furthermore, there is really no such thing as Reform Jews, Conservative Jews or Orthodox Jews. We are all Jews -- with the only

meaningful distinctions being that some Jews do more and know more, while some Jews do less and know less.

What should be our goal? To become *better* Jews.

Different colors and styles of kippot are wonderful for the expression of individual identity. But a kipah is a kipah is a kipah. And a Jew is a Jew is a Jew.

A second lesson from the kipah.

One of the biggest issues that people who didn't grow up wearing a kipah have when considering whether or not they should start wearing one is that once they put on the kipah they automatically "stick out" in a crowd and everybody knows that they are Jewish.

This reminds me of the story ...

Two bumblebees were whizzing in the air and conversing. One of them complained of not being able to find anything to eat and being so hungry. "Go to NHBZ synagogue!" suggested his friend. "It's a Bar Mitzvah today. There'll be plenty of food." A few hours later he spotted his formerly hungry friend, now looking completely full. "What's that round thing on your head?" he asked. "It's called a kipah." "What's it for?"

"I didn't want them to think I was a wasp!"

Just like the bumble bee in the joke who didn't want to stick out as the only "wasp" at a Jewish event, many Jews are self-conscious about their Jewishness and want very much to "fit in" to the non-Jewish society in which they live. To them a yarmulke achieves the opposite effect, in that it separates the Jew wearing it from those around him. They're afraid of how people will look at them.

But you don't have to look at it that way.

Wearing a kipah is a statement that means, "I'm a proud Jew." There is plenty to be proud of. And the truth is, non-Jews admire and respect Jews who observe their religion.

A number of years ago I was with my children at the zoo. A woman approached us and began to make small talk and in a friendly way noted, "I see you and your boys are wearing yarmulkes." The woman explained that although she wasn't Jewish, she grew up near an Orthodox neighborhood in Chicago and often saw the young Jewish boys running around "with their tzitzits flying, and holding on to their yarmulkes." She smiled and said she very much enjoyed getting to know several Orthodox families.

As she prepared to take leave from our brief conversation, she said, "You know, it's so wonderful seeing Jewish people do what they're supposed to be doing."

Non-Jews respect us when we're proud of who we are. Our neighbors admire us when they see we're proud of our religion. We are admired by non-Jews when we stand up for Judaism and for Israel. The world is waiting for the Jew to be a Jew. Wearing a kipah shows you're proud to be a Jew.

And finally, a third lesson from the kipah.

"You didn't shampoo your hair so we can't operate!"

This shocking statement was made by a nurse to the wife of the head of a Day School in Minneapolis who had not been given instructions on how to prepare herself for surgery. The only way she would be able to avoid postponing the operation and remaining in the hospital an extra day was to rush out to a drugstore and buy some shampoo. But when she reached the nearby pharmacy she was disappointed to find it closed. After desperately banging on the door she was relieved to see a clerk open it, only to be told that there was no way he could sell her anything since all the computerized cash registers had been shut down.

Explaining her urgent need for the shampoo, the lady begged the clerk to give her a tube and promised that her husband would arrive at eight o'clock, opening time, on the next morning to pay for it. Her appeal touched the clerk's heart and he agreed.

The next morning her husband, a religious Jew (wearing, of course, a kipah), arrived at the promised hour to make payment. To his surprise, this created a hubbub among the clerks. They had made bets that morning as to whether he would actually come to pay. One clerk who lost the bet cried out, "It's not fair. You didn't tell us his wife was Jewish!"

When you're Jewish -- and you know others know you're Jewish -- you have to be particularly careful how you act and speak. When you wear a kipah you have to think twice before cutting in line in the cafeteria, or being unpleasant to the checker at the supermarket, or driving in a rude and aggressive way.

As Jews, we have to live up to a certain standard of behavior. Wearing a kipah and being cognizant of what it represents helps us be better ambassadors for all Jews, for the Torah, and for G-d.

So Daniel, we have discussed three lessons from the kipah:

- 1) A Jew is a Jew is a Jew. There are many different types and colors of yarmulkes, but every kipah is a kipah.
- 2) Be proud to be Jewish. Wearing a kipah means you're proud of who you are.
- 3) Be a role model. A kipah on our head reminds us that not only G-d is watching, but others are watching. The visible sign upon our head helps us to better represent our people and our religion.

Daniel: You need look no further than your own parents as role models for these attitudes and perspectives. Not only are your mother and father intelligent, highly accomplished people, but they are non-judgmental and accepting of all Jews, enormously proud to be Jewish, and wonderful role models in our community. May you grow up to become in these ways, and more, like your dear parents; and assisted in these endeavors by your kipah!

Mazal tov, and Good Shabbos