

The Wearing of a *Kipah*

by
Scott Moore

Welcome to Worship Shorts!

On occasion I have been asked about the wearing of a *yarmulke* or *kipah*. What is the custom, and why do we wear one, especially in light of 1 Corinthians 11?

The wearing of a *kipah* has been a Jewish custom for men since before the 16th century. Initially it was only practiced by men of distinction, but it later became common practice. Today Orthodox and Conservative congregations almost universally wear them, while Reform are about half and half. Most will say that the wearing of the *kipah* is out of respect, either for the fact that we are under God's authority, i.e., He is our covering, or for the fact that we do not have a Temple in Jerusalem, and we are in mourning. Interestingly, a recent Torah portion notes that Aaron and his sons were required to wear head coverings when they were being consecrated.

At Ohev the practice has been more along the Reform tradition, leaving each person to do as he chooses, although we have considered the idea of promoting a more Conservative approach, which is for men to wear one while in the sanctuary, while praying, while studying the Torah, and while teaching.

It is not necessary to be Jewish to wear a *kipah*. A Gentile who visits a Conservative congregation will be expected to wear one, and one will normally be provided by an attendant before entering the sanctuary.

Today's worship short is not about the wearing of a *tallit* or prayer shawl, but there is an important aspect of the *kipah* connected with the *tallit*. Generally, only Jews wear a *tallit*, and most Jews know that if you are wearing a *tallit*, you should also be wearing a *kipah*. Since there are some cases at Ohev where a Gentile may wear a *tallit*, the person who does so should also be aware that a *kipah* should also be worn - along with the *tallit*.

Now what about 1 Corinthians 11? Here I will quote David Stern from his Jewish New Testament Commentary. Speaking about his translation, which reads: "Every man who prays or prophesies wearing something down over his head brings shame to his head," Stern writes: "This is the literal translation, and it is used here to show that Sha'ul is talking about wearing a veil, not a hat." "The usual translation, 'with his head covered,' obscures this fact, and as a result an issue has arisen in Messianic Judaism that should never have come up at all, namely, whether it is proper for a Messianic Jewish man to wear a *kipah* in public worship."

So, you see, David Stern dismisses the idea rather firmly, and we agree, that 1 Corinthians 11 is not about hats, but is in fact about making an analogy that connects our need to have authority in our lives with customary practices relating to the normal dress of both men and women in ancient Corinth.

By the way, in modern times some women have also begun to wear *kipot*, and we are not opposed to this practice, though it should be noted that women ought not to wear any garment that appears to be a man's garment. So their *kipot* should reflect adherence to this Biblical injunction by having clearly feminine markings and colors.

Thank you for listening to Worship Shorts!