

At the end of last week's portion, Lech Lecha, G-d gave Abraham the commandment of circumcision. Abraham and his household were circumcised.

Aliyah #1

This portion begins on the third day after Abraham's circumcision, when the pain from his surgery was at its worst. Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day, and G-d was doing the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick by appearing to Abraham.

During this meeting Abraham notices that three travelers are passing by, and he runs to invite them into his home. Abraham was the epitome of hospitality. He runs to prepare a meal for them: first dairy food, then a whole cow's tongue for each one, served with mustard. (Incidentally, when he was getting the three calves to prepare for the meal, one calf runs away and Abraham chases it as far as the cave of *Machpaila*, where Adam and Eve are buried. Abraham notices the scent of Garden of Eden there, and that's why he later buys this property to bury his wife Sarah.)

The three travelers are really three angels, and one of them tells Sarah, Abraham's wife, that she will have a son in one year.

The angels ask Abraham where his wife Sarah is, and Rashi (the foremost biblical commentator) says one reason they asked was to pass her the *Kos Shel Bracha*, the cup of blessing on the wine which they held while saying the blessing after the meal. The Talmud learns from this that passing the wine to one's wife gives tremendous blessings to her, as seen from the miraculous birth of Isaac soon after.

Aliyah #2

The angels then departed to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gemmora. Abraham attempts to bargain with G-d by asking that the cities be spared if they contain only 50 righteous people. He keeps negotiating down until G-d agrees to forgive the cities for the sake of even ten righteous people.

Aliyah #3

The angels arrived in Sodom. Abraham's nephew, Lot, was waiting at the gate of the city looking for guests, something he learned to do while living with his uncle, Abraham.

Lot brought the guests into his house to stay. Unfortunately word of his guests spreads, thanks to Lo's wife, who told everyone in town on the pretense of going to borrow some salt from the neighbors. The people of the city surrounded Lot's house and demand that he turn over the guests so they can harm them. They pound on the door, but Lot refused to open it. The angels caused the wicked neighbors to become blind so that they can no longer find the door to Lot's house. Then the angels take Lot, his wife and his daughters outside the city and tell them to escape to the mountain before the city is destroyed. They warned Lot and his family not to look back at the city as they fled.

Aliyah #4

This *aliyah* continues with Lot's escape from Sodom. As Lot is escaping, his wife looked back and became a pillar of salt.

Eventually, Lot and his two daughters take shelter in a cave. The two daughters think the whole world has been destroyed, as with the flood at the time of Noah, so they decide that they need to re-populate the world through their father.

At the end of this *aliyah*, Abraham's wife Sarah conceives, and gives birth to a son. Avraham performs a brit milah on him when he is eight days old, and names him Isaac.

Aliyah #5

Here we learn that Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born, and Rashi explains that the whole world rejoiced with Sarah at his birth because many barren women all over the world were remembered with her, and many sick people were healed.

At the weaning celebration for Isaac when he was two years old, Sarah nursed all of the women's babies to show that even though she is an old woman of 90, she is indeed Isaac's true birth mother.

Later, Sarah noticed the bad ways of Ishmael and wanted him to leave so as not to influence Isaac. G-d says to Abraham: "Listen to your wife." (This verse is widely quoted to show that wives are held in high esteem in the Jewish family.)

Aliyah #6

King Abimelech noticed that G-d is with Abraham in everything he did, and he was therefore afraid of Abraham. So Abimelech wanted to make a treaty with Abraham for three generations, and Abraham agreed to do so.

Aliyah #7


This *aliyah* contains the famous story of the binding of Isaac. This was Abraham's tenth and final test. Here he demonstrated supreme self-sacrifice, which we, his descendants, inherit from him.

When Isaac was 37 years old, G-d told Abraham to bring his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Abraham woke up early in the morning and proceeds to do as G-d told him. When they reached their destination Abraham built an altar and, at Isaac's request, tied Isaac's hands and feet and places him on it.

Abraham was just about to sacrifice Isaac when an angel stopped him. Abraham noticed a ram stuck in the bushes and sacrificed the ram instead of Isaac.

G-d told Abraham that He will surely bless him and greatly increase his offspring. They will be as numerous as the stars of the heavens and the sand on the seashore, and they will inherit the gate of their foes. G-d also told Avraham that all of the nations of the earth will bless themselves by his offspring, because he listened to G-d's voice.

This *aliyah* is the Torah reading on Rosh Hashanah. In addition, the shofar we blow on Rosh Hashanah is a ram's horn, which reminds us of this story.

Later in this *aliyah*, some genealogical information is given, and we learn that Rebbekah, Isaac's future wife, is born. They meet in next week's portion, Chayei Sarah. 



If all the world is a classroom and all of life is a lesson, then certainly your profession and workplace are included. After all, He has unlimited ways to provide your livelihood. The fact that He directed you to this way of life means there is something inscribed there specifically for your soul.

From the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

A teen-age boy once visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe and expressed anguish that his life was full of struggle and disappointment. "Why can't it just be simple and easy?" the pained boy asked.

"Because human beings are not angels," the Rebbe replied. "Angels are impeccable, flawless, and always on target. Human beings, on the other hand, are fragmented and dualistic, vacillating between extremes and shaken by conflicts. Man's multi-dimensional and dichotomized composition, forces him to struggle throughout his entire life in order to come to terms with his soul.


The teen-ager continued to probe the heart of the saintly spiritual master. "But why did G-d create us

in such a complicated fashion?" he asked. "Would G-d not have enjoyed us far more if we were like the angels?"

The Rebbe responded with a question: "Did you ever consider the difference between a photograph and a painting?" He then proceeded to explain. "A photo captures any given scene far more accurately than a painting can ever hope to. Yet while a photo will cost you a few dollars, the inaccurate painting of the identical scene may sometimes go for millions of dollars. Why?"

"Because most photographs," the Rebbe said, "are inanimate items, lacking the input of a human soul. A painting, on the other hand, contains the richness of human imagination, the depth of human emotion and the esthetics of human creativity. That is what gives

a painting its tremendous value. Angels are G-d's photos," the Rebbe concluded, "while human beings are G-d's pieces of art."

Angels are flawless and faultless creatures, perfect shots of the spiritual realities. Yet it is precisely the fluctuating drama of human existence, the perpetual conflict between our inner light and darkness, and the human void searching for meaning and truth -- that turns our life into a piece of art. Only in the tormented chambers of the human heart can G-d discover genuine, awe-inspiring artwork. It is the goodness and spirituality that emerge from human doubt and struggle that bestow upon humanity a dignity and splendor that the highest of angels can never attain. 

Candle Lighting

Ottawa
November 14, 2003 at 4:16pm
Shabbat ends
Sat. at 5:22pm
Torah Portion: Vayeira



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Rabbi Chaim and Bassy Mendelsohn
in honour of their wedding anniversary
by the students of the Yeshiva

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In loving memory of Eliezer Aharon ben (yibadel l'chaim tovim) Mordechai Reuven. May his memory be a blessing.

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Thinking Jewish

Insights into the weekly Torah portion,
adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

This week's Torah portion, *Vayeira*, speaks about the greatness of our forefather Abraham, the very first Jew. Through Abraham's service, G-d's Name was made known throughout the world, and many people were brought to believe in Him.

The Torah states: "And Abraham planted an *eishel* (literally a grove) in Be'er Sheva, and called there in the name of G-d." The Torah specifically mentions Abraham's planting of the *eishel*, as this was considered a very great deed and a unique accomplishment.

The Midrash explains that an *eishel* is more than just a stand of trees under which wayfarers may find protection from the burning sun. An *eishel* is an inn, a place of lodging. Our Patriarch

Abraham established his *eishel* in Be'er Sheva, in the heart of the desert, to cater to travelers in that inhospitable climate.


Did Abraham know these travelers personally? Of course not. He had no idea who might arrive. All he knew was that these strangers would no doubt be hungry, thirsty and tired from their trek across the desert. His motivation was to make their journey more pleasant and less taxing.

Abraham provided his guests with all kinds of amenities, not just bread and water to satisfy their hunger and quench their thirst. His visitors were offered meat, fine wines, fruit and a wide array of delicacies, as well as a place to sleep to rest from their travels.

His visitors' spiritual needs were also taken into consideration. Next to the inn that provided all their physical

necessities, Abraham established a sanhedrin, a court of law, so that wise men could answer the travelers' questions and find solutions to their personal and business problems.

This same attribute of kindness and justice is the birthright of every Jew, an inheritance from our forefather Abraham. And the Torah portion of *Vayeira* teaches us how we are supposed to fulfill the commandment of *tzedaka* (charity):

It isn't enough to provide a poor person with the basic requirements necessary to sustain life. We must offer him more than just the bare minimum, bringing him pleasure and enjoyment. And not only must his physical needs be met but we must also try to help him resolve his spiritual struggles. This applies to every single Jew, even those we do not know personally, and constitutes the true meaning of the commandment of *tzedaka*.

Jewish Q&A

Dear Rabbi Berger,

Why do the Jews wear yarmulkes (kipah)?

-Graham W.

Dear Graham,

Yarmulkes are head-coverings, also known as beanies. One who wears a yarmulke is in effect saying that reality does not begin with me -- there is something above, a Higher Power. Hence its name, *yarmulke*, which is a contraction of *yarei malka*, which means "awe of the King."

It is a symbol of humility and submission to the Divine.

Technically, you can use anything to cover your head -- baseball cap, pillowcase, etc. Even those who don't wear a yarmulke all the time, will generally wear it when praying or studying Torah.

It is also known as "kippah," which means "dome."

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi M. Berger 

Next week's question: What is a Jew? Can a Jew lose his or her Jewishness?

Send us your questions: info@theluminary.com

A Jewish Experience

How Much Does A Kippa Weigh?

by Aaron Cohen

The air has turned crisp, the days have grown short. Winter, alas, is on the march. On goes the furnace, out comes the Thinsulate, and onto my head goes a hat. It can get chilly up there for a balding guy like me, especially at night, when the thermostat throttles back, and the house becomes cool and quiet after the kids have gone to bed. This is the best time to write, when it would be dark even if it were summer. But summer it's not, so late nights at the keyboard demand layers of clothing: a lined vest, slipper socks, and something to don on top, to keep the warmth from dissipating from my pate.

No need for a brim sitting in the kitchen, where I like to write. So my outdoor hats, and Indiana Jones fedora and myriad sports caps, are out. Alas, my fez, souvenir of a long-ago sojourn in Istanbul, doesn't fit. My old checked kaffiyeh? The one I bought in the Old City of Jerusalem before the Yom Kippur War? That would do the job, had it not become a threadbare shmatte by the time Camp David rolled around. A beret might fill the bill except the Israeli Army one I bought for my son is too tight, too military, and the French one purchased for my daughter is too floppy, too foo-foo, even for wee hours spent alone in the kitchen.

Not to worry. Saving me from chapeau angst is a growing army of kippot-yarmulkes-which are real troopers when it comes to combating cranial chill. Amazing, really, how a little fabric frisbee flips my head back into the comfort zone, even as the mercury drops. Lest you think me cavalier or even blasphemous, I don't take this kippa-wearing lightly. The kippa, you

see, warms my kepple in more ways than one. I look for any excuse to wear one besides a cold night of typing in the kitchen.

Recently I've taken to keeping one in my pocket, like a little security blanket. I'm ready to put it on at a moment's notice, just in case I enter a shul, say a prayer, or learn a little Torah. More and more I'm tempted to wear it just because I feel like it. What's going on here? I'm hardly observant, but out of the clear blue, I want to whip out that kippa, and clip it to my last holdouts of hair. Is this something over which to drey a kop, Dr. Freud?

On some days I find myself reaching into that pocket, running my fingers over the kippa, feeling the clips, turning the fabric in my hand, and wondering, How about now? Should I put it on? What would it mean? What would people think? Would it be an affectation, or a statement, perhaps misunderstood? Would it be an invitation to a mugging at the hands of some skinhead punk? Would secular people read too much piety into it?

How I envy my Orthodox brothers, for whom a kipa is just a kipa, and not a microcosm of the Universe. But a kippa, even if it is just a kippa, is no ordinary hat; it's a cap with a 'tude. It says, "Hey, I'm a Jew."

Consider what happened in East Wilmette right before Rosh Hashanah. It's early morning, I'm walking to the train, and the kippa urge overwhelms me. No one's around, so I slip it on my head. No sooner done when out of nowhere a car screeches to a halt by the curb. Down goes the passenger window. The driver yells something at me.

"What?" I ask, dazed. Is she asking directions, or is it something more ominous?


"Shana Tova!" she calls again. "It's rare to see a guy wearing a kippa around here. Where do you daven [pray]? Where do you live? What's your name?"

She gives me her and her husband's names, says she hopes to see me in shul, basically invites me to join a community. I'm at once thrilled, delighted, and taken aback.

"Whoa," I say to myself. "There's power in this here yarmulke."

I feel a little like an impostor, as though my kippa promises more than I deliver. I feel a little like I'm playing a trick, like I'm pulling a rabbi out of my hat.


"But I have an urge to wear my kippa," I rationalize to myself. "I'm a Jewish man, and Jewish men should cover their heads." No one told me so, it's just primal knowledge, something I feel in the kishkes. When I wear my kippa, I feel more at one with my Creator, more connected with my people. Sometimes it makes me feel better about myself, and helps me see more clearly how far I must yet travel, to close the gap between what I think I believe and what I do.

If you see me (or anyone else for that matter) walking down the street wearing a kippa, please, make no assumptions. That kippa may simply be a kippa, case closed. Or the guy under it may be trying to carry the weight of the world on his head. 

Reprinted from the Jewish United Fund monthly magazine, Chicago, Illinois, of which Mr. Cohen is the editor.

Everyone Needs to Laugh Sometimes

A guy gets a new dog and he can't wait to show him off to his neighbor. So when the neighbor comes over, he calls his dog into the house, bragging about how smart the critter is. The dog quickly comes running stands looking up at his master, tail wagging furiously mouth open in classic doggie-smile position, eyes bright with anticipation. The guy points to the newspaper on the couch and commands "Fetch!"

Immediately, the dog sits down, the tail wagging stops, the doggie-smile disappears; he hangs his head looks balefully up at his master, and says in a whiny voice, "Oy! my tail hurts from wagging so much. That dog food you feed me tastes absolutely terrible. And I can't remember the last time you took me for a walk..." The neighbor looks puzzled. "Oh," explains the dog owner, "he thought I said 'kvetch!'" 

Are your jokes better than ours? send them to us: info@theluminary.com