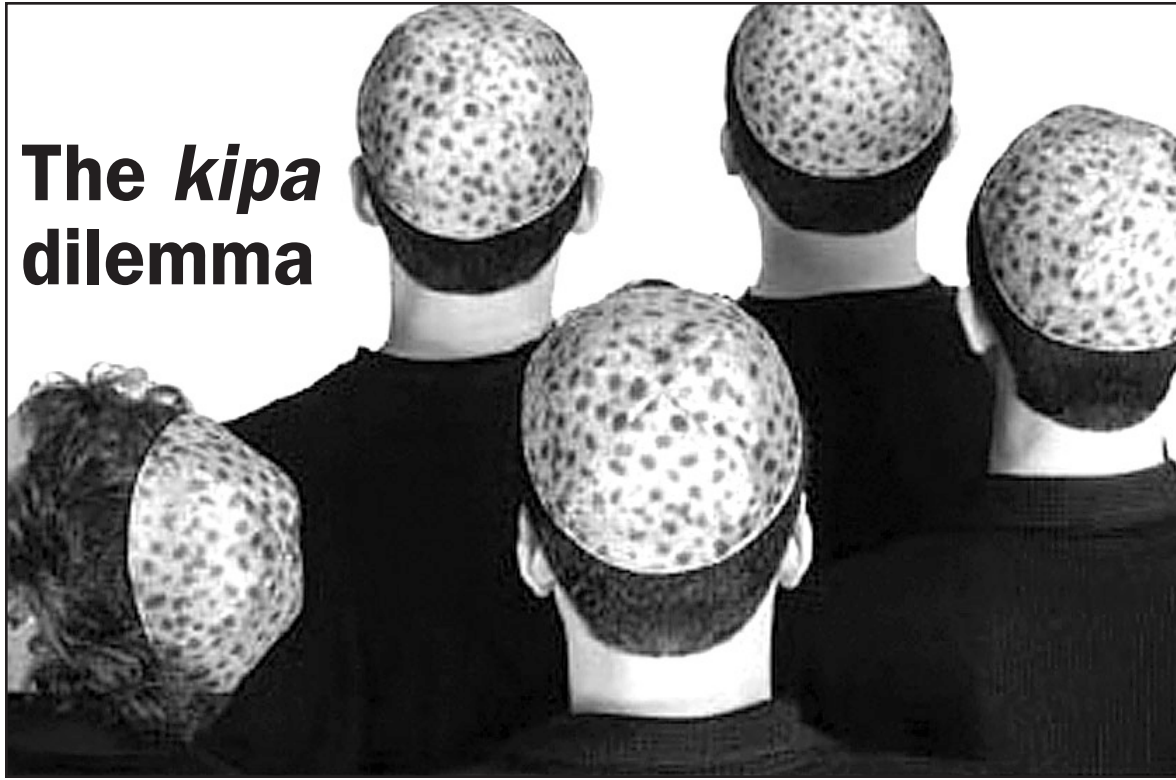


## The kipa dilemma



by Richard Rabkin,  
from Aish.com

The first time that I wore a kipa outside of synagogue, I was petrified.

I had just returned from Israel, where I became religious and where kipot are about as common as cell phones. But when I came back to Vancouver, I didn't have the courage to wear one for a variety of reasons. Most of all, I didn't want to make a "statement."

However, on my first visit back to the shul, I was informed that one is not allowed to carry anything on Shabbat; I couldn't put my kipa in my pocket after services! What was I going to do? I had an hour's walk home. What would people think of me?

I thought about sprinting home so people would see only a cat-like figure rushing by them, not giving them time to make out my head covering. But I realized that I wasn't cat-like, and I could probably sprint for about a block before I would drop to the ground in convulsions. I decided to bite the bullet and walk home wearing my kipa.

I must have looked like an escaped mental patient. When someone walked by me I would think, "What are you looking at? Are you looking at my kipa? Haven't you ever seen a Jew before? RACIST PIG!"

Actually the person walking toward me was probably thinking, "This man looks like a drug addict. I hope he doesn't beat me up."

As time went on, I got more comfortable wearing my kipa and wore it almost all the time.

When I applied to summer internships at law firms, I didn't wear it to interviews. "Who is going to hire me if I'm wearing a kipa?" I asked myself. But I discovered there were problems with not wearing it at work.

On my first day at the firm, my coworkers took me out for lunch to a restaurant called The Spotted Prawn, since they had no reason to think that I was "different." While they

ordered shellfish items forbidden to me, I wanted to ask if the chef could make me a special dish —roasted water, perhaps, with a side dish of sliced water seasoned in water. Instead, I ended up ordering a salad, although I knew I was still compromising my kashrut standards. From then on, it was bag lunches.

For professional and spiritual reasons, I decided to move to Toronto. With my previous kipa conflicts under my belt, I was determined to go to my interviews wearing one.

vator buddy — a partner at the firm — winked at me and laughed. "Good luck in the interview. Come by my office when you're done if you get the chance."

My interview went well, and I could see that my decision to wear a kipa was paying off. Some of the lawyers told me, without my asking, that I would have no problem observing Shabbat at the firm.

The firm wanted to take me out for dinner, but offered to set up a get-together in the office so I could

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The first meeting was with a downtown law firm. I got into the elevator, where I noticed another guy wearing a kipa and immediately felt relieved. We struck up a conversation and I told him about my appointment.

"Oh, that is a great firm," he said. "Congratulations on getting an interview there." He paused for a second and continued, "I should warn you. I've heard they don't really like it if people wear their yarmulkas to work."

My heart sank into the pit of my stomach. I am not sure if that was from hearing the news or because the elevator came to an abrupt stop at my floor. I exited cautiously and looked both ways, wary of setting off the "kipa alert alarm." I thanked the man for his advice.

"No problem," he said to me as he stepped out of the elevator as well.

"Good morning, Mr. Rothstein," the receptionist said to him. "Your nine o'clock appointment is here to see you." My ele-

attend without having to order roasted water. I didn't have to explain myself; my kipa did the explaining for me.

Once I put on the kipa on, everyone knew exactly where I stood. It was also a symbol for me to know where I stood, in that my internal "religious" thoughts and feelings had to be reflected by external actions.

You may think that I was overly neurotic about the dilemma, but the fact is that once someone puts on a kipa, he is making a statement. For me, it is a statement to myself and others of my commitment to Judaism and the Jewish people. After becoming more secure with my own Jewish identity, I have finally found the courage to make it.

**Richard Rabkin** received an undergraduate degree in religious studies from the University of Western Ontario, and a law degree from the University of British Columbia. Reprinted with permission from Aish.com, a leading Judaism Web site.

## Turning Points

with life coach Randy Nathan

Dear Coach Randy,  
My mom thinks that I'm not motivated and all I do is "instant message" all day. I get good grades and want to get into college, but I want to have fun, too! How do I balance school, work, friends, and all the other stuff going on in my life?  
Typical teenager

Dear Typical Teenager,  
Congratulations. It sounds like you know your priorities and realize what is important to you. As a teenager, you have so many pressures and have to make so many decisions that it seems nearly impossible to do anything at all. It's no wonder you are finding it difficult to balance your life. One of the best ways to understand how to balance everything in your life is to first review your schedule.

Create a time chart that lists each day of the week across the top. List all of your activities down the left-hand column (include sleep, school, daily tasks, family, friends, etc.) Next, fill in the average time spent on each activity during the day and the total hours each week. On the right-hand column leave room to total everything out. Remember, there are only 168 hours a week.

What do you notice? How you spend your time reveals a lot about you. How does your chart look to you? Where do you spend your time? What surprises you about your chart?

Now you have a better picture of what you do each week. What you do with this information is up to you. However, think about this question: What are you willing to do about the balance in your life now that you have this information?



Dear Coach Randy,  
I am a high school senior and have been involved in a Jewish youth group. My parents want me to get involved with Jewish activities in college, but I'm feeling burned out with the Jewish "thing." What can I do?  
JK

Dear JK,  
Being involved with a Jewish youth group is very rewarding, but it can take up a lot of time and energy. It doesn't surprise me to hear that you are feeling burned out. College is an exciting time and offers numerous life experiences. I applaud your willingness to address this issue now rather than waiting until you are already at school.

Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side make a list of the experiences you had while active in your youth group. On the right side, write the feelings attached to those experiences. As you reflect on this activity, notice what you write and take note of your inner energy. How do you feel when you bring up these memories? What makes these life experiences and feelings important at this time? Chances are what you get from being involved is not so much the experiences as it is the feelings derived from them.

Once you connect to those feelings, it's likely that sense of being burned out will subside and you'll be ready for an amazing experience in college whatever you choose to do.

**Randy Nathan, MSW**, is a certified empowerment coach who works exclusively with high school and college-age students. Through the powerful coaching process, he empowers and motivates young people to face the major challenges, transitions, and opportunities in their lives. For further information, visit [www.yppoach.com](http://www.yppoach.com).

**Have a question for Coach Randy? High school and college-age people can contact him by writing to Real-Life@njewishnews.com.**

**Torah haiku**  
by Ron Kaplan

**Va'aera**

Blood, frogs, gnats, beasts, boils, and hail. Seven plagues down and still Pharaoh says, "Stay!"