

IF THE SHOE FITS MUCH BETTER...

by Rabbi Label Lam

You shall come to the Kohanim, the Levites, and to the judge who will be in those days; you shall inquire and they will tell you the word of the judgment. You shall do according to the word that they will tell you, from that place that HASHEM will choose, and you should be careful to do according to everything they will teach you. According to the teaching that they teach you and the judgment that they will say to you, shall you do; you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left. (Devarim 17:9-11)

Right or left: Even if they say that your right is left and your left is right. Even more so if they tell you that your right is right and your left is left. (Rashi)

What is meant by being confused between right and left? A child knows the difference. Why should we need sages great in Torah to tell us such simple things that my four year daughter can figure out?

Here's an amazing story I heard twenty years ago. A young yeshiva student took a job teaching in a local Hebrew Day School. With all his idealism and fresh enthusiasm he started to install in addition to the curriculum basic laws of Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law. One of the parents most prominent on the school board asked her son with genuine curiosity what he had learned that day. He explained that the new rebbe had told them that when putting on shoes in the morning one is required to first put on the right shoe and then the left shoe. When tying the shoes a right handed person ties the left shoe first and a left handed person ties the right shoe first. The mother was shocked and angered. How dare he pollute our dear children's minds with these antiquated superstitions? He should rather teach good Jewish values.

She called a board meeting and arranged that this young teacher should be dismissed. Her son finished Hebrew Day School up until the 8th grade and went on to public high school. Later he was accepted at an Ivy League college. In college he was taking pre-med courses and was struggling in chemistry. He managed with the help of a lab partner and then there was chemistry between he and his female companion who as it turned out was not Jewish. He told his parents that he was in love and wanted to marry this girl. Not wanting to interfere with his happiness they agreed and a big wedding was planned.

The night the wedding was to take place he was readying himself in his hotel room for the elegant black tie affair. After fitting the bow tie and the cummerbund he now turned his attention to the shiny pair of new shoes in front of him. Before stepping in he reminded himself that this is an important

occasion and a dusty old memory began to stir in the back of his mind about which shoe to put on first. Then he remembered, "We put on the right shoe first because that's the foot that leads towards...Mitzvos! MITZVOS! What am I about to do?! My children won't even be Jewish if I follow through with this. I'm the end of the chain. I've forgotten all about Mitzvos!" Then with Samson's strength, believe it or not, he called off the wedding.

That night a phone call reached his rebbe from so many years earlier. The young man reminded him that he was the one whose mother had caused him to lose his job. The rebbe said, "I've forgiven you! Things worked out fine! I'm happy where I am!" The young man related what had just happened and tearfully told him, "I really called to thank you for saving my life."

Classically, right and left are not absolute directions but rather expressions of relative strength and weakness or of ranking priorities. We may be all too tempted to ridicule and dismiss sagely standards, "What difference does it make anyway which shoe we put on first?" However, if we are told that something that seems to us a trivial point is really very important and we defer to their wisdom, oddly left is made right and if the shoe fits much better... Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.