

ANYWHERE ELSE?

by Rabbi Label Lam

And these are the garments you shall make: A Breastplate, an Ephod, a Robe, a Tunic of a box-like knit, a Turban, and a Sash. They shall make these garments of sanctity for Aaron your brother and his sons to minister to Me. (Shemos 28:3-4)

...And you shall make for them Headdresses of splendor and glory. (Shemos 28:40)

And you shall make a Head-plate of pure gold and engrave upon it, engraved like a signet ring, "Holy to HASHEM!" (Shemos 28:36)

These are the eight glorious garments to be worn by the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest when performing the service in the Holy Temple. There is one area of "clothing" that is conspicuously absent from the Kohen Gadol's wardrobe. Can you guess? You got it! Shoes! Why? Amongst all the elaborate and decorative outerwear that adorns the Kohen Gadol, why do his feet remain bare?

Let us hearken back to a slightly earlier time when Moshe was shepherding the sheep of his father-in-law, wandering in the desert, and he turned to take note of the phenomenon of the burning bush. At that moment HASHEM spoke to Moshe and demanded of him, "Take off your shoes from upon your feet because the ground that you are standing upon is holy!" Why was he told to remove his shoes? The Ramban answers, "because in places of holiness such as the Temple, even Kohanim may not wear shoes!" That begs the question, "Why are Kohanim, as Moshe at that moment, not to wear shoes?"

In the Yalkut Shemoni there's a dispute about the original stature of Adam the First Man before he was diminished. One opinion says that at one time he reached from the earth to the heavens. Another opinion states that he stretched from one end of the world to the other end of the world, so that when he would lie down his head was in the east and his feet were in the west.

What is meaning of the discussion? I once heard from a great person an approach to this argument between the sages. It's a debate about the nature of mankind. People are curious and they love to travel to new and exotic places. This is consistent with notion that the Talmud Sanhedrin states, that the dust that was used to form Adam was gathered from all over the world. Man has a connection to all over the planet. Therefore there exists in the hearts of men this insatiable appetite for adventure-

to move horizontally about the world, even mentally, imaginatively wondering about events in distant lands. This is a basic description of one dimension of human nature.

Then there is another type of man. He has no desire to budge from his place. Maybe he wandered enough and came to understand, as the phrase says these days, "been there- done that". Such a person discovers the real limitless adventure in life is not horizontal like the snake moves but vertical like Yaakov's ladder planted here on earth while ever striving for the heavens. That is a different type of person altogether.

When Moshe discovered that "burning bush" his horizontal journeying ceased and he became anchored to that place. When one removes their shoes it expresses a commitment to remain here. This is where it is happening! This is hallowed ground! Perhaps the same can be said for the Kohen. Shoes are for travelers in sideways direction. A golden plate that declares, "Holy to HASHEM" is for one whose head is reaching for the heavens.

I heard directly from the mouth of Rabbi Shimshon Pincus ztl that once while on a flight from America to Israel the plane made a stopover for a brief period in London. When the connecting flight was ready to continue, he was deeply involved in Davening Mincha. In spite of all the announcements, "now boarding..." , "last call for flight #..." he continued to remain steadfast and focused on his prayers. As a result, he missed the flight. This created a load of logistical problems for him to get another flight and then catch up with his luggage. When asked why he allowed that to happen, he replied, "I was talking to HASHEM! Why would I want to be **anywhere else?**"

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