

LOOK BEYOND YOUR NOSE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 176, Shalosh Seudos in Shuls: Is There a Problem? Good Shabbos!

What is the Reason for the Removing One's Shoes in a Holy Place?

In the Halacha portion of the shiur we began with the Medrash on the pasuk [verse] "Remove your shoes from your feet" [Shemos 3:5]. We learn from this pasuk that it is forbidden to wear shoes in any place where the Divine Presence is revealed. The Medrash further comments that we find the same concept by Joshua and by the Kohanim in the Temple: they removed their shoes when in a place where the Divine Presence was revealed. We understand that from a Halachic perspective this is a manifestation of the Awe of the Temple (Morah Mikdash), but what is the reason behind this? Why are shoes removed in the Beis HaMikdash? Wouldn't walking barefoot seem to indicate a lack of decorum?

The Shal"oh quotes a fascinating concept in the name of his Rebbe, the Maharsha"l. In earlier times, people recited each of the morning blessings independently at various stages of getting dressed and prepared for the new day. When one put on his clothing, he recited the blessing "who clothes the naked", and so forth. [Nowadays, our custom is to recite all of the blessings at once as part of the morning service.]

The Shal"oh comments that one of these blessings, "Blessed are You... who provides me with all my needs," is meant to be recited when a person puts on his shoes. The Shal"oh explains that there are four levels of existence: Inanimate objects, plant life, animal life, and -- at the top of the pyramid -- living creatures that can speak (i.e. -- human beings). The Maharsha"l says a Jew must understand that the human being is on top of this pyramid for a purpose and that everything below him is there to serve him. He is in fact "master of the universe" and can use inanimate, plant and even animal life for his own purpose, which is to serve G-d. In other words, the way G-d set up creation was that plants and animals should serve human beings. The Maharsha"l says that the way this is symbolized is by putting on shoes, made of leather (the skin of animals). The message to man is "You are on top

of everything -- you are in charge." This is not a license to abuse or to waste. Man must act responsibly, but it was all created for him.

For this reason, when a person puts on his shoes he recites the blessing "for You have created for me all my needs." Wearing shoes demonstrates that I am in control of even the highest form of animal life.

Therefore, the Be'er Yosef says, when one is in the Presence of the Divine, he must remove his shoes. If wearing shoes demonstrates to man that he is "in charge", then we obviously understand why it becomes incumbent on him to remove that symbol in the manifest Presence of G-d. In the Presence of the Shechina, there is a Higher Force and man must clearly recognize that he is no longer "in charge". He demonstrates this recognition by removing his shoes.

Yael's Killing of Sisera Was an Act of Kindness

The Medrash says, "from here we learn that one who accepts upon himself a certain mitzvah, that mitzvah will not cease from him." If a person makes an effort to garner a particular command, that command, and its associated reward, will remain with him and his descendants for generations after. Where do we see this? Moshe Rabbeinu was a fugitive from justice, running away from Pharaoh. Yisro welcomed Moshe into his home, fulfilling the mitzvah of hosting guests. Yisro put himself out for the mitzvah of Hachnosas Orchim.

How do we see that the mitzvah of Hachnosas Orchim remained with the descendants of Yisro? Yisro's granddaughter was Yael, wife of Chever haKeni [Shoftim 4:17]. She too performed the mitzvah of Hachnosas Orchim by welcoming Sisera into her tent. As any good hostess she gave him to eat and to drink and even to sleep. But as we all know, he woke up one head shorter! Yael killed Sisera. And this is the end of the Medrash.

What kind of Hachnosas Orchim is this? The Beis Av gives a very true insight which people today often fail to appreciate: Hachnosas Orchim means to do kindness with people who need a kindness. Sometimes giving a person to eat and to drink and to sleep is performing kindness. But sometimes kindness has to be performed by chopping off a person's head.

Sisera was the commander of the army of Canaan, which had oppressed the Jews for twenty years with his army of 900 iron chariots. The recipient of the kindness to which the Medrash is referring is not Sisera. The Jewish People were the recipients of Yael's kindness. One must not be shortsighted. There was an act of Hachnosas Orchim and Chessed over here. It was directed, however, not at Sisera, but at the Jewish People. The way this kindness was accomplished was by cutting off someone's head. To Sisera it was not a kindness. But it was a kindness to the Jewish People. Sometimes to be kind and compassionate requires what appears to be an act of cruelty. Sometimes the biggest act of cruelty is in fact the biggest act of kindness. The biggest act of murder can be the biggest life-saving act. Waging a war can sometimes be an act of saving life rather than an act of causing loss of life. [Imagine if someone had had the opportunity to kill Hitler y"svz.]

This is what the Medrash tells us. The true master of kindness (ba'al chessed) can look beyond his nose, beyond the here and now, and analyze the true act of kindness that is required. There is a concept that is popular in psychology called "tough love". Sometimes acting tough is ultimately a manifestation of love if that is what the situation requires.

Dedicated by Melany and Mordecai Solomon in honor of Ruth and Rabbi Sidney Solomon and Ida and Max Katz, on the birth of their grandson Meir Yehuda.

Glossary

Hachnosas Orchim -- Welcoming Guests

Chessed -- Kindness

Sources and Personalities

Shal"oh -- Acronym for Shnei Luchos HaBris: Rav Yeshayahu Hurwitz (1560- 1630); Poland, Prague, Frankfurt, and Jerusalem.

Maharsha"l -- Moreinu HaRav Shlomo Luria (1510-1573); Poland.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

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