

Shemos-Shal Naalecha- Remove Your Shoes On Holy Ground
By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Shemos Chapter 3 we read of Moshe Rabbeinu's first communication with Hashem. In verse 5 Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu to remove his shoes from his feet because the ground he is standing on is holy. On a similar note, the last Mishna Brachos tells us that one must remove his/her shoe before going up the *har habayis*, the Temple Mount. We also find that Yehoshua was asked to remove his shoes when the angel spoke to him before conquering Yericho.[See Yehoshua 25:15.] Why does a holy place require removal of shoes?

Rabbeinu Bachaya explains first gives a simple explanation that since the place is holy, Moshe Rabbeinu should not feel light headed and by taking off his shoes he will be further reminded that the place is holy. He also points out that the Torah does not use the expression *shalef* or *chaletz* to command removal of the shoes as we find in the case of Yivum and Chalitzah in Devarim 25:5-10 and in transfer of property in Rus 4:7. From that we see that this removal of the shoes is of a different nature than that of what we usually find when shoes are removed. Rabbeinu Bachaya explains in this case that the removal of the earthiness of the material world. The earthiness of the material world sticks to the body as a shoe sticks to a foot. But it is just as easy to remove the earthiness from ourselves as it is to remove the shoe from our foot as well. Interestingly, Yehoshua is told to remove his shoes in the singular *naalcha*, as opposed to *naalecha* that we find by Moshe. Rabbeinu Bachaya explains that this could be an allusion to the fact that Moshe reached higher levels which needed a greater removal. On a more Kabbalistic level, the shoes of Moshe are referred to in the plural because they are referring to the two fires of the Torah, the black fire and the white fire. These two fires black and white may be compared to *din* and *rachamim*, justice and mercy. Hashem was preparing Moshe for the giving of the Torah on this spot and the removal of the shoes would indicate deference to being in the king's palace. Perhaps this is also alluded to in the Halacha we find in the Tur and Shulchan Aruch chapter 340 that when one sees a sefer Torah burning, *chas veshalom*, one should tear his clothes twice. While the halachic reason given is that one tear is for the parchment

and the other for the writing, these Kabbalistic reasons explained by Rabbeinu Bachaya may also apply here as well.

The Kli Yakar mentions these thoughts from Rabbeinu Bachaya and other commentators before him which connect removal of shoes to removing oneself from the material world. He also touches on some of the differences expression found here and that are found in Yehoshua 5:15.. He then adds from Chazal that Moshe's face was like the sun and Yehoshua's face was like the moon. Just as the moon is light on one side and dark on the other, so too Yehoshua had the holy shine from one side only. Moshe Rabbeinu, however, was completely purified and shone like the sun to the extent that all of his physicality had the shine. Moshe Rabbeinu achieved this by being completely removed from the world for forty days and for forty nights and being nurtured by the Shechinah. His body, mind and soul were completely purified. The Torah states that the *makom*, place Moshe was standing on was holy to indicate that Moshe was already potentially on this high level and had to be warned not to come any closer to the Shechinah. Moshe could not see the Shechinah and live in this world at the same time so he had to be warned not to come closer. This may also explain why over here when Hashem Called to Moshe, his name was stated twice. Once was for his material part and once for his mind, both of which had to be warned to not to come too close to the Shechinah.

The Chofetz Chaim understands from this command to remove the shoes the following. One can come close to Hashem anytime and anywhere. However, one has to make sure that there is no barrier between himself and Hashem. Sins are the primary barrier. Removing ones shoes means removing the barriers between oneself and the place one is standing. In essence, every place is holy because Hashem puts his holiness there. We, however, have to remove the shoes or barriers that separate. This is a facet of our avodas Hashem that has to be continuously be worked on.