

"Take off your shoes from your feet, for the place wherein you stand is holy ground." (3:5)

This is the first reference in the *Torah* to the consecration of sacred ground. Hashem instructed Moshe to remove his shoes when treading upon this sacred soil. The custom to walk barefoot in the *Bais Hamikdash* originated from this *pasuk*. Indeed, even today the *Kohanim* remove their shoes when they approach the *Duchan* to bless the people. Although shoes have become an accepted convention to cover a part of the body, they were essentially designed for protection. *Horav Moshe Swift, z.l.*, suggests that Hashem's imperative to Moshe has a profound meaning for us. One whose feet are protected can walk blindly, not heeding where he treads. Direction is not limited for the one who is externally protected. If one takes off his "shoes," however, he must be forever cautious and alert to danger.

The call came to Moshe, "*Take off your shoes, because you stand on holy ground.*" You must remove your shoes in a holy place. You cannot walk blindly in Hashem's house. You cannot act in Hashem's house as you would in your own home. Your mode of dress, your manner of speech, your whole demeanor must be dignified in Hashem's house. You must walk warily, keeping your eyes open, your tongue guarded, and your thoughts concentrated. Wipe off the mud and filth when you enter Hashem's Sanctuary. Only after this type of preparation, did Hashem address Moshe.

We may extend this idea with regard to one's relationship with Hashem's devotees, individuals whose lives are dedicated to His holy service. One who has merited the mantle of *Torah* scholarship should be perceived in a different light. Our entire approach to interaction with them must reflect the most sublime form of reverence. Our attitude must be one of "remove your shoes", reflecting dignity, affability and refinement. One who has consecrated his life's endeavor in this manner becomes an embodiment of sanctity.