

**Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yisro... he guided the sheep far into the wilderness... an angel of Hashem appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amid the bush... but the bush was not consumed... Hashem saw that he turned aside to see. And G-d called to him... He said, “Do not come closer to here, remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground.” (3:1-5)**

Hashem appeared to Moshe *Rabbeinu* in the wilderness, from amidst a burning bush. It was at this point that the Almighty appointed him to be *Klal Yisrael's* leader. Moshe resisted until Hashem ultimately “convinced” him to accept. The place where the encounter with the bush took place was *Har Sinai*, which would later become known as *Har Hashem*, the Mountain of G-d. Moshe was overwhelmed with the vision of a bush that continued to burn without being consumed by the fire. The scene was an allegory to *Klal Yisrael*, with the burning bush representing the Jews in the Egyptian exile. The bush, symbolic of the Jewish People, would never be consumed, because Hashem would never permit His nation to be destroyed.

The Almighty told Moshe that he was standing on hallowed ground. *Targum Yonasan* explains the reason for the sanctity of the ground upon which Moshe tread. One day, *Klal Yisrael* would accept the Torah at this very place. The problem with this exegesis is: Why could Moshe not go further? If the reason was that the Torah would be given there, did Moshe not ascend *Har Sinai* to obtain the Torah from Hashem? Clearly, this ground could not be any holier at this moment than it would be later at *Kabollas HaTorah*. Furthermore, why was Moshe instructed to remove his shoes as he neared the burning bush? At that point, he was not in proximity of the bush.

*Ramban* senses this question, and writes that, although Moshe was still standing at a distance from the bush, the entire area had become consecrated, as the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, descended upon the area, just as the entire *Har Sinai* became sanctified during the Giving of the Torah. Thus, it was prohibited to wear shoes, in the same manner that the *Kohanim* served barefoot in the *Bais Hamikdash*.

The **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, explains the words, “For the place upon which you stand is holy ground.” The *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, would have us believe that studying Torah and performing *mitzvos* need a specific opportune time and place. The place and situation in which we presently find ourselves is “never” opportune. “If” the place and situation were to be altered, there would be no hindrances to prevent us from achieving our goals. To this the Torah counters: The place in which you are presently situated is the place in which you can develop. You do not have to go elsewhere. This is one of the ploys of the evil inclination, who is constantly looking for ways to throw us off base, to change our positive course of observance and service to Hashem.

A Jew must believe that in whatever circumstances he finds himself, it is so designated by Hashem, despite the trials and tribulations presented by the situation in which, he finds himself. We say *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh, Hashem Tzakos, melo kol ha'aretz kevodo*, "Holy, Holy, Holy is Hashem, of Hosts, the entire land is filled with His Glory." Hashem is everywhere, under all conditions. He is with us during our periods of ups – and downs. He never forsakes us. The only one who can prevent us from seeing Him is - ourselves.

Hashem told Moshe, "Do not come close to here." It is not necessary to come nearer in order to serve Me. Wherever you are is hallowed ground. Hashem is to be found everywhere. This is why Moshe was instructed to remove his shoes. Since Hashem is everywhere, and one may serve Him wherever he may be, he should remove any *mechitzos*, barriers, that separate him from Hashem. The shoes are a metaphor for the partition between the person and the ground. Whatever comes between man and Hashem is an unnecessary and unwanted division, which only serves to disrupt the smooth flow of his Service to the Almighty.

The *Bnei Yissachar* quotes *Maharam Chagiz*, who cites the *Chachmei haRemez*, Torah Scholars who focus on the esoteric and Kabbalistic explanations, who, in turn, render an intriguing explanation for the necessity of shoes. When Adam sinned, Hashem cursed the earth. Therefore, we create a separation between ourselves and the ground. Hence, we need shoes. *Har Sinai*, which was sanctified via the medium of Hashem's Presence, no longer required a separation between man and the ground. Moshe could remove his shoes. The *Bais Hamikdash* was a venue steeped in holiness. The *Kohanim* did not wear shoes there. On *Yom Kippur*, a day replete with *kedushah*, holiness, we are prohibited to wear shoes. The curse of the earth has been temporarily removed. Shoes detract from the communion of man with *kedushah*. This is one more lesson that things are not always what they seem.