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# PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayitzei ✍️ Rabbi Moshe Katz

## Spirituality in Unlikely Places

**P**arshas Vayitzei relates Yaakov's Avinu's prophetic vision. He was shown a ladder placed from above down towards earth and extending up to heaven. (Following Rav Hirsh's translation)

The Medrash comments that the word *sulam*, ladder, has the same gematria, numerical value, as the word *Sinai*. Rav Hirsch explains that the ladder shown Yaakov symbolizes precisely what took place at *Har Sinai*. By bringing the Torah down to earth, Hashem gave us the ability to elevate even the most mundane (earthly) aspects of our lives and infuse them with spirituality.

*Like the ladder shown to Yaakov, the Torah enables us to unite heaven and earth.*

Chazal express this idea with the pasuk, "*Bechol dra'checha da'ayhu*", "*Know Hashem in all your ways*". (Mishlei, 3:6) All that we do in life should be used as a means to connect with Hashem.

We often think that our lives can be divided into three categories. *Mitzvos*, things that we're obligated to do, *aveiros*, things that are prohibited and *divrei reshus*, the everyday things that we may do if we choose but that have no spiritual significance.

Rav Hutner ZTL protested strongly against this categorization. He stressed that there is no "*neutral territory*" in our service of Hashem. He would express it in his unique style...

*There is no Switzerland in avodas Hashem!*

Everything that we do should be an opportunity to connect to Hashem.

There is a striking example of infusing the mundane with spirituality. The Torah tells us in *Parshas Bereishis* that "*Chanoch walked with Hashem*." When we hear those words, an image of a certain type of person comes to mind. The Medrash however, tells us something very surprising.

*"Chanoch was a shoemaker!*

*And with every single stitch that he made, he achieved total unity with Hashem."*

A shoemaker?

And how would we understand this? We would probably assume that while sewing a shoe, Chanoch would have deep *kabalistic* thoughts or,

at the very least, recite *mishnayos* by heart. Today we might say that he would be listening to "some of the Torah world's greatest thinkers" on his MP3 player!

Rav Desler, however, quotes Rav Yisroel Salanter as saying that it can not mean any of the above.

*If someone paid Chanoch to make a pair of shoes, the Halacha would not permit him to divert his attention to other matters, especially to deep thoughts!*

So how did Chanoch achieve total unity with Hashem according to Rav Yisroel?

*By simply concentrating on every stitch with the intention of producing the best shoe possible.*

*Hoping to give the maximum benefit and pleasure to whoever would wear it! He became united with Hashem on the deepest level due to his desire to emulate Hashem Who constantly showers His creatures with kindness!*

What a powerful lesson!

... It would seem that we can even elevate our most mundane acts after the fact, and *retroactively* use them as tools to connect to Hashem. This idea is illustrated by an amazing story about Rav Mordechai Gifter ZTL.

He was called upon to officiate at a wedding and was not comfortable being given the title "*Gaon*" (great luminary). In an attempt to avoid letting it "*get to his head*", Rav Gifter, perhaps the first "*born and bred in America*" Torah giant, was heard muttering to himself as he walked up to the *chuppah*...

*"Gaon. Gaon... GONE!"*

*And that was a spiritual home run!*

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# HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

## Shoes

*Rabbi Yisroel Langer*

The Mesilas Yesharim writes that Hashem created this world to enable man to serve his Creator. When a person utilizes something in this world for the sake of serving Hashem, this brings fulfillment to the object and to the world, thereby elevating them as they accomplish their lofty missions. The Mesilas Yesharim gives an example of an incident in this week's parsha, when Yaakov Avinu rested his head on several stones during his trip to Charan. The medrash states that the stones fought because each one wanted to be THE stone upon which Yaakov rested his head. Each stone wanted to have the merit of helping the Tzaddik serve Hashem, thereby accomplishing its mission in this world. Hashem therefore performed a miracle and made all the stones connect into one.

In His great and infinite kindness, Hashem gave us an instruction manual that guides us in even the most mundane aspects of our daily lives. The Torah's laws of daily living give us boundless opportunities for elevating and sanctifying ourselves and the world around us. For example, even the mundane act of putting on and removing one's shoes becomes meaningful if done in accordance with halacha.

### Right Before Left

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 2:4) states that one should put on his right shoe before putting on his left shoe. The significance of the right side is learned from the fact that the Kohein is commanded to sprinkle blood on to the metzarah's **right** thumb. The Shulchan Aruch Harav (2:4) extends this halacha to all clothing. Therefore, when putting on gloves or socks, the right must go first. Even when putting on a shirt, one must place his right arm into the sleeve before the left. When one bathes, the right arm should be washed prior to the left, and the same "right before left rule" applies to the feet as well. (If one is washing their head, this should be done first, because the head is considered the king of the other body parts.) (M.B. 2S.K.7) When removing one's shoes, the order is reversed since honor is afforded to the right by removing the left shoe first. (see Levush 2:5)

### Tying and Untying Shoes

When it comes to tying one's shoes, one must tie the left before the right. (O.C. 2:4). With regard to untying, the Maharalach (Chidushei Hagoas on the Tur) says the order should be reversed and the right should be untied before the left. However, the halacha the poskim (Az Nidburu Volume 5 siman 26) say that untying shoes is part of "removing" shoes and therefore the left should be untied and removed first.

There is a machlokes among the poskim if the halacha that the left shoe must be tied first is limited to only leather shoes, or if it applies to all shoes and garments. The Shulchan Aruch Harav holds that it applies to all shoes and garments, while the Malbim is of the opinion that it is only applicable to leather shoes. \*(see note below)

### Women

Hagoan R' Tzvi Pesach Frank z"tl (quoted in Rivivos Efrayim volume 1 siman 5) and Hagoan R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo 2:20) say that since the whole source of tying the left shoe first is learned from tefillin, and women do not wear tefillin, women therefore need not tie their left shoe first. However, many other poskim do not differentiate between men and women, and require everyone to tie their left shoe first. The D'var Yehoshua (volume

2 siman 111) explains that once we see from tefillin that the Torah places greater importance to the left with regard to tying, it is therefore important for everyone. (See Rivivos Efrayim ibid suggesting that this question may be dependant upon the two reasons of the Levush mentioned in the note below.)

### Lefties

Given that a lefty ties the tefillin shel yad on his right arm rather than his left, the halachos for tying are different for lefties as well. A lefty must tie his right shoe first, then his left. The poskim disagree whether a "lefty" means left handed or left footed. (Left footed is one who takes his first step with his left foot, or one who prefers to kick with his left foot rather than his right.) See M.B. 2:6 and Tevuas Shur. Although left handed people are usually left footed anyway, one who is left handed but right footed need not prioritize tying with a specific foot, as long as he is consistent. (Halichos Shlomo) (Note: Only the halachos of tying are different for a lefty, but with regards to putting on and removing shoes, the halacha is the same as with a righty.)

### Removing shoes for a Mitzvah

When removing shoes for the purpose of a mitzvah such as before birchas kohanim, or removing one's weekday shoes before Shabbos, some poskim (Hagoan R' Avraham Kook zt"l) hold that the right shoe should be removed first. Other poskim (Dvar Yehoshua) say that one should not deviate from his usual practice of removing the left shoe first.

### Children

When putting shoes on children the above halachos all apply. For example, if the child is a righty, the child's right shoe should be put on first and the left shoe should be tied prior to the right.

\*(**Note:** Although the Malbim does not discuss non-leather shoes, it is evident from the sources that he refers to that they would not be classified as shoes and would therefore not be subject to the "left before right rule"- Siach Halacha.

This disagreement between the Shulchan Aruch Harav and the Malbim is based on two explanations of the Levush (2:4) as to why the left knot is tied first: 1) The first reason of the Levush is that we see the Torah gives precedence to the left in connection with tying by requiring the tefillin shel yad to be tied on the left (weaker) arm. 2) The Levush suggests a second reason as well. When the king of Sodom offered to make Avraham Avinu wealthy, Avraham replied that he would not take even a string or a shoe strap. As a reward, Hashem gave Avraham's descendants "strings" of tzitzis, and the "straps" of tefillin. Because we merited the mitzvah of tefillin based on Avraham's comment regarding shoe straps, we tie our shoes in the same order we put on our tefillin. Just as we tie our tefillin shel yad on the left arm first, and then move towards the right to tie the tefillin shel rosh to the head, we similarly tie our left shoe first before tying the right.

The Malbim's opinion that the halacha of tying the left before the right is limited to leather shoes follows the second reason of the Levush, that the whole source of the halacha is learned from a "shoestraps." The Shulchan Aruch Harav, however, follows the first reason of the Levush, which applies more broadly. Although the Mishnah Berura (siman 2 s.k 6) paskins like the Malbim, the Aruch Hashulchan (2:7) and many other poskim hold like the Shulchan Aruch Harav and require all shoes and garments to have the left tied before the right.)

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