

# THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT SHEMOT

5-6 JANUARY | 11 TEVET

## Take Your Shoes Off!



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This week we begin a whole new Book of the Torah! In this week's parasha, we have the famous story of Moshe (Moses) encountering God at the burning bush. Who tells him: "Remove your shoes from your feet, because the site upon which you stand is sacred ground" (Shemot 3:5).

Nowadays, we pray in shul with our shoes on, but in this situation, Moshe stands barefoot before God. We see a similar situation in Sefer Yehoshua (Joshua, 5:15), when an angel appears to Yehoshua and tells him to take off his shoes as he is standing in a holy spot, and with

the kohanim (priests) in the *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple) who had to serve barefoot – even outside in the cold weather!

Why did Moshe have to take off his shoes? It seems that there must be a deeper lesson we can learn from this action.

The Torah commentators Malbim, Kli Yakar and Rabbeinu Bachye speak about shoes representing the earth, or the material world. They protect our feet, allowing us to tread the soil - to walk, hike, run and more. But in a place of spirituality, they become inappropriate. By taking them off, God was requesting of Moshe to forget about his physical existence, and to enter a conversation with Him. The burning bush, too, represented God telling Moshe to look deeper than just the physical world, recognising that He is in charge of it all.

Rav Shraga Pollack (1877-1911) delves further into this idea. He writes that when a person is wearing shoes, they can walk wherever they wish. But when someone is barefoot, suddenly they must think about every step they take. They cannot walk freely anymore but must look in front of themselves to protect their feet.

This is the image of *kedusha* (holiness) that we learn from the Book of Shemot. We learn from Moshe taking off his shoes that the most beautiful life is one where we do not simply run without looking, but instead assess our actions. We treat each action as if it is precious, and decide accordingly where, and how, we 'walk'.

A life of *kedusha* is a life of mindfulness. Let's learn to feel the impact of our lives and actions as sensitively as if we were barefoot.

## Word Wheels

Which word can you make using ALL the letters in each these wheels, related to the Book of Shemot? How many other words can you make from the wheel?

