



BADERECH

RABBI JUDAH MISCHEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMP HASC
AUTHOR OF BADERECH SERIES

Shovavim: Remove Your Shoes

When Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, zt'l, the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, was visiting Vienna on matters relating to the Jewish community, he unexpectedly requested to be taken to daven at the kever of the Tchortkover Rebbe, Reb Yisrael Friedman, zy'a. Those travelling with the Rosh Yeshivah were taken by surprise. While the heilige Tchortkover, a grandson of the Rhizner Rebbe, was beloved as a great *tzadik* and *talmid chacham*, Rav Segal was a traditional student of Mir, davening at *kivrei tzadikim* was not part of his typical repertoire. Furthermore, the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah was known for his constant *hasmada*, singular focus on Torah study and Mussar. Exacting with his time, the Rosh Yeshivah was careful and deliberate with every moment of his day. Of what specific interest was davening by the Tchortkover's *kever*?

The Manchester Rosh Yeshiva explained that years earlier, he had heard a *ma'aseh*, a story about the Tchortkover Rebbe by which he was moved and inspired:

One afternoon, the Tchortkover Rebbe was taking a walk with his holy cousin, Reb Avraham Yaakov, the Sadigerer Rebbe. While the

two righteous men strolled through the park discussing lofty ideas in Torah and Avodah, they sat down to rest on a bench. When a non-Jewish woman sat right down next to them, the Sadigerer Rebbe immediately began to stand up, but the Tchortkover Rebbe placed his hand on his cousin's knee and flashed him a look to remain seated. After some time, the Tchortkover Rebbe glanced at his watch and feigned surprise, exclaiming audibly in German, "Oy, would you look at the time... it's getting late! Dear cousin, we have to go."

The Rosh Yeshivah said that being in Vienna reminded him of the extraordinary sensitivity of the Rebbe, and desired to daven by his *kever* in order to merit such *midos tovos* in his interactions with others.

Our sedra describes Moshe's sojourn into the desert to tend the sheep belonging to his father in law, Yisro. While shepherding, he takes note of the extraordinary sight of the Burning Bush:

וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי סָר לְרֹאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹקִים מִתּוֹךְ
הַסִּנְיָה... וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-תִּקְרֹב הֵלֶם שֶׁלֹּא-נִעְלִיד מֵעַל וְגַלִּיד
כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדִמֶּת-קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:

"When Hashem saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush; And He said, 'Do not come closer. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.'" (Shemos, 3:5)

Rebbe Shlomo Ephraim of Lunshitz, the *K'li Yakar*, was the Rav of Prague and

successor to the great Maharal. He explains Hashem's request for Moshe to remove his sandals before the *Sneh Bo'er*. Shoes serve as a separation, a protection and buffer between our feet and that which we walk upon. While walking barefoot, we feel even the smallest pebble on the ground and the slightest presence of debris. At the *Sneh Bo'er* Hashem is summoning Moshe to become "Moshe Rabbeinu", to assume his responsibility and leadership. Asking Moshe to remove that which 'separates' him from feeling every bump and bristle was a way to further instruct Moshe in identifying with and being sensitive to the needs and feelings of the people in his charge.

"*Shovavim Ta't*" is a *roshei teivos*, an acronym for the *parshios* from Shemos through Tetzaveh, and the season in which they are read. According to mystical tradition, the season of *Shovavim* is a time of intensive spiritual inner working and opportunity for *tikun*, specifically related to matters pertaining to sexuality and other errors affecting the Sefirah of Yesod. The word *Shovavim* literally means 'wayward', as in...

שׁוֹבְבִים בָּנִים שׁוֹבְבִים, "Return, wayward sons." (*Yirmiyahu*, 3:22)

During these weeks where the Torah traces the transformative process of our Nation from exile and slavery to freedom and creating a dwelling place for the Divine Presence in the Mishkan, we are encouraged to focus on our own struggle for freedom from the *yeitzer ha-ra*. We are empowered to rectify our 'waywardness', to live with purpose and *kedushah*, and make our lives a more sensitive dwelling place for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

As we strive for deeper connectivity with Hashem and within our true selves, it is



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critical to remain aware of everyone around us.

Rav Avraham Genechovsky zt'l, the Tchebiner Rosh Yeshivah was a great *gaon* in Torah and *midos*. Once traveling on a bus, when a woman came and sat next to him. The physical proximity was uncomfortable and less than ideal. Rav Genechovsky turned to his seatmate and with a tone of concern. "I just want to let you know that I have '*kru-spidin*'...it isn't contagious, but I felt I should inform you." Understanding that he was sick, the woman quickly gathered herself, wished the Rav a *refuah sheleimah*, stood up and moved to another seat.

Later, the *talmid* accompanying him asked his Rebbi if not speaking the truth was really permissible in such a situation. Rav Genechovsky smiled: "I said the truth! *Kruspidin* is the Aramaic word used for *tzitzis*. But most importantly, I did not hurt the feelings of the woman who sat down next to me!"

In our pursuit of personal holiness, let us 'remove our shoes' to feel *where we really are*. While we are reaching for higher spiritual standards and intensive inner experience in our *avodah* this season, may we also 'go barefoot' before the 'Divine Presence' of other people. ■