

Take Off Your Shoes

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

When God appears at the burning bush, what is the first thing Moses is told to do? Take off his shoes.

One explanation offered by the Rabbis is that shoes separate us from the earth. Moses must feel each burr and stone, for he will need to learn to share the sufferings of Israel

Much of our technology arranges life so we need not experience the world. Even outside of our climate controlled homes, everything from sunglasses to coats enables us to be in the world, but not experience it in ways that would discomfort us. Shoes, even sandals, make us slightly taller than we are in bare feet. Perhaps God is teaching Moses that he need not be other than he is, not pretend to be even an inch taller, for God is choosing the person in all his authenticity.

Entering the Temple one had to remove one's shoes, and the prophet Amos speaks of the poor being sold "for a pair of sandals" (Amos 2:6). So bare footedness also represents humility, sincerity, and probity. In their first moments together, as God chooses Moses, we learn that Moses began humbly, in touch with the land and people's sufferings.

And for future generations, Moses' first moments are warning against the tendency to over-accessorize.