

Putting On Shoes

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 onto the metzora'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. S.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). The Levush (2:4) provides two explanations as to why the left knot is tied first: 1) The first reason 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) A second reason is for 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.

With regard to untying, the Maharalach (Chidushei Hagoas on the Tur) says the order is to be reversed and the right should be untied before the left. However, l'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. (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 perhaps based on the reasons behind this halacha. 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 (s.k 6) does cite the Malbim, the Aruch Hashulchan (2:7), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (3:4) and other poskim hold like the Shulchan Aruch Harav and require all shoes and garments to have the left tied before the right. Rav Chaim Kanievsky is quoted as ruling that this applies to Velcro straps as well (Dirshu #14).

WOMEN

Hagoan R' Tzvi Pesach Frank z"tl (quoted in Rivivos Efrayim volume 1 siman 5) and Hagoan R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l (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, also cited by the Rivivos Efrayim ibid) explains that since we see from tefillin that the Torah places greater importance to the left with regard to tying, it is therefore important for everyone, regardless of whether they are obligated to wear tefillin. (See Rivivos Efrayim ibid who suggests that this question may be

dependent upon the two reasons of the Levush mentioned above.)

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 (Luach E”Y in the name of Hagoan R’ Avraham Kook zt”l in Orach Mishpat 25) 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. Some extend this idea to removal of shoes before Yom Kippur, but Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l explained that there is no mitzvah of removing shoes, only an avoidance of a prohibition. (see Ishei Yisroel Ch. 1 note 29)

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. (see Shaarei Teshuvah 2:3)

WASHING HANDS AFTER TOUCHING SHOES

Shulchan Aruch (OC 4:18) writes that one should wash their hands after removing their shoes before reciting devarim shebkidusha. However, this is only necessary when they were touched while being removed (M.A. 19). This would include anytime one touches their shoes, such as while putting them on or off, etc. Although some say the reason is due to the dirty nature of shoes, even if a certain pair of shoes happens to be clean, one should still wash their hands after touching (see M.A. 128:26 with the commentaries). There is one exception mentioned in the Poskim. According to the the Yaavetz (Mor Uketzia ibid) and Maharasham (Daas Torah), new shoes that are tried on in the store and have never been worn outside at all, are not included in this halacha. Therefore, if they are clean, there is no need to wash one’s hands after touching.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l rules that touching just the shoelaces, does not necessitate washing (Halichos Shlomo 2:18, Ishei Yisroel letter 2). Poskim deliberate if touching the top of the shoe, the part that does not touch the ground, is problematic. In such a case, one should be stringent and wash their hands.

SHEHECHEYANU ON NEW SHOES

The Rema (OC 223:6) writes that shoes are defined as non-important clothing, and therefore when purchasing new shoes, a shehecheyanu is not recited. Even if a person would be excited about acquiring new shoes, the Rema writes that no beracha is said. The Acharonim (Ar”H 8, M.B. 23) explain that since shoes are changed often, it does not warrant a shehecheyanu. Dayan Fuerst shlita references the sefer Shehecheyanu (Ch. 3 note 67) who cites a number of Poskim (Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlita and Vezos Haberacha pg. 168-9, Rivivos Efrayim 6:101) who rule that nowadays, many people buy expensive shoes that do not get replaced quickly. If in this circumstance the new shoes bring simcha, a shehecheyanu may be recited. Rav Auerbach zt”l (Halichos Shlomo 23:15) ruled that even in such a scenario, the custom is not to recite a shehecheyanu on new shoes.

The Rema (ibid) also records a minhag to say to one who is wearing a new item of clothing “tevaleh utechadesh” meaning you should be zocheh to wear it out and get a new one. He adds that one should not say this regarding shoes, or any item produced from animal skin. The reason is that we show sensitivity to animals by not wishing that more animals will have to be used for additional shoes. However, Dayan Fuerst pointed out that most Acharonim explain that this is only regarding this “beracha”. When it comes to shehecheyanu, one may still be happy about the new purchase and may express so with a shehecheyanu (Pri Megadim MZ 22:1, Kaf HaChaim 223:48, Vezos Haberacha ibid.)



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