

## Message from the Haftara

*Rabbi Katriel (Kenneth) Brander  
President and Rosh HalYeshiva  
Ohr Torah Stone Institutions*

### One Shoe On, One Shoe Off

#### FIRST DAY PESACH

The Haggada of Pesach night tells a story of absolute Divine agency. God acts; Israel receives. So deliberately does the text place redemption in God's hands alone that Moshe's name appears only once, in the quote of a pasuk.

For those of us living in a reality where miracles require human hands - soldiers, engineers, intelligence officers, first responders - this raises an urgent question: Is the Pesach model of redemption rooted in passivity still the paradigm?

The haftara of the first day of Pesach answers clearly: No. It introduces a different model, one of active redemption, in which those who enter the Land of Israel become major partners in the process.

The scene in Yehoshua ch.5 marks a pivotal threshold. The Israelites have crossed the Jordan and entered the Land of Israel. For forty years, the mitzva of circumcision had been suspended during the hardships of desert wandering; now it is performed for the first time, on Canaanite soil. The manna at this

point also ceases. The people begin to eat from the produce of the land - no more bread descending ready-made from heaven.

These moments signal the fulfillment of the fifth and final expression of redemption: "And I will bring you to the land that I promised to give to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov; to you I will give it as a possession" (Sh'mot 6:8). The people are no longer wanderers. They are established in their own land, celebrating Pesach for the first time on their own soil, now called upon to assume responsibility for their destiny.

This shift from Divine dependency to national responsibility is captured in a striking textual detail. When Yehoshua encounters a mysterious figure - the angelic commander of God's hosts - near Jericho, the angel says: "Remove the shoe from your foot, for the place where you stand is holy" (Yehoshua 5:15). The echo of Moshe's experience at the burning bush is unmistakable: "Remove the shoes from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Sh'mot 3:5).

But there is a subtle, telling difference. Moshe is commanded in the plural: NAALECHA - remove both your shoes. Yehoshua is instructed in the singular: NAALKHA - remove only one.

One shoe off. One shoe still on. This is not a textual accident. It encodes a fundamentally different model of leadership and of redemption itself.

Moshe's removal of both shoes reflects total consecration. His leadership demanded complete separation from ordinary life - from family rhythms, from the everyday. The people he led, newly freed from slavery, needed to be carried. They received manna, water from the rock and walked through the splitting of the sea. They were passive recipients of miracle upon miracle. And that dependence, for all its necessity, came at a cost: a people accustomed to being saved cannot easily learn to take initiative. Moshe's leadership, defined by having both shoes off, was appropriate - but it could only take the nation so far.

Yehoshua's one shoe on, one shoe off leadership represents a different model. The removed shoe signals attentiveness to divine mission, a recognition of standing on holy ground. But the shoe that remains on his foot affirms something equally critical: continued engagement in the world. Leadership, in this model, does not replace the people's responsibility - it calls it forth. Where Moshe's leadership asked Israel to trust, Yehoshua's demands that they step forward. This is the covenant of the land: not dependence, but human-Divine partnership.

We live in the era of Yehoshua. The manna no longer falls, yet the miracles have not disappeared - they have merely taken new forms. In the Land of Israel today, missiles are launched toward civilian centers and intercepted in mid-flight by systems of extraordinary precision. The Iron Dome is not manna: it depends on human ingenuity, courage, funding, political will, and constant vigilance. And yet, it is difficult not to recognize, within that human effort, something more. It is a one-shoe-on, one-shoe-off miracle - human action and divine protection intertwined.

The haftara of the first day of Pesach is not only a memory of a moment from thousands of years ago. It is a charge for our own time. The final redemption will unfold when we follow Yehoshua's model: turning to God for guidance, recognizing the miracles' extraordinary within the ordinary, and at the same time refusing to relinquish our responsibility to act. The holy ground beneath our feet demands that we do both. 