

I'd like to thank Rabbi Charles P. Sherman for some of the ideas in this Dvar Torah.

On July 19, 2005 the Northwestern University champion women's lacrosse team visited President Bush at the White House. This certainly would not have been very noteworthy if there hadn't been a major controversy. Several of the young women were wearing flip-flops. And there was a major flap over those flip-flops.

Some people thought it was not a big deal. Others said it was disrespectful to the President and to his office. Some said it was okay to be that casual because President Bush was such a laid back guy. But others noted that he himself wore leather shoes.

Believe it or not, this week's portion teaches us about proper footwear at the White House. Well, sort of. Let me explain.

First is there anyone here that doesn't know what a flip-flop is? I brought show-and-tell just in case.

As you know Judaism has a lot to say about what we wear. There are two whole Torah portions that describe the clothes of the High Priest. They no longer wear these clothes because there is no Temple but we do dress the Torah with bells, pomegranates and breast plates modeled after the Priests' clothes.

Another example of the importance of clothing in Judaism is Esther's uncle Mordecai who was honored with the King *Ahashverosh's* robes because he saved the King's life.

In this week's portion we read that God protected the clothing worn by the Israelites in the desert. It was so blessed that it didn't wear out for the whole 40 years. And Midrash says that the children's clothes grew right along with them.

Not only did the Israelites' clothes not wear out but their feet didn't swell during the entire time in the desert.

Now focusing in on shoes; when Moshe stood before the burning bush, God told him to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. We are also commanded to remove our shoes during our *shiva* mourning period. Not only does our religion care about clothes, it also cares about shoes.

The name of our portion this week and its second word is *eikev*. We find this same word when our forefather, Yaakov is born. *Bereshit*, chapter 25, verse 26 tells us *v'yado ochezet b'eikev esav*. When he was born, Yaakov was holding on to the heel of his brother, *Esav's* foot.

Almost always, the word, *eikev* means heel. But in our portion it's translated as 'if,' 'since,' or 'because' so the first verse of our portion says *v'haya eikev tishm'oon et ha-mishpatim ha-eleh,* - "if or because or since you follow these ordinances...*Adonai*, your God will keep the covenant with you and the kindness which he swore to your fathers."

*Rashi* tells us this means that we need to follow the minor commandments which we usually trample on with our heels. In other words we tend to ignore the minor laws and pay more attention to the major ones. God is promising to maintain a covenant with the Jewish people if we follow all the commandments the big and the small.

This of course brings us back to the flip-flops at the White House. It may seem like shoes are not a big deal and comfort is more important than show. But the Torah is telling us there are no little deals. Attention to the smallest detail is always a big deal.

But even more than just observing basic honor and respect in small ways, we also know that small actions can have very big consequences.

Five years ago Orbitz.com, a travel web site conducted a survey. It found that 61% of people who responded admitted taking toiletries from hotels, not just the ones in their room but extra ones from hotel housekeeping carts. 18% took towels, 14% took ashtrays. While each item is not worth very much by itself, all of them together cost hotels millions of dollars a year.

While it's the big events in the news that grab our attention, it is the smaller more consistent crimes that are just as damaging. This past Tuesday night there was a National Night Out Against Crime gathering in downtown Macon. City leaders, along with those from CrimeStoppers and City Watch announced an effort to eradicate graffiti downtown. Then, Macon-Bibb County firefighters used a pressure washer to remove graffiti on a nearby building.

This is exactly how New York's Mayor Rudy Giuliani started his zero-tolerance policy on crime. His police officers went after the people who painted graffiti in trains and subways. By starting with something small, he made the statement that he really cared about the city's esthetic. And the more people saw a cleaner city, the more they could feel comfortable and safe in it.

Ekev teaches us that even what we put on our feet is important. It's part of how we show honor to people and places.

How we look at the smaller things in life also reflects how we look at the bigger ones. Our souls need to have nourishment to flourish. And every time we dishonor a person or place by making a sarcastic comment, telling a piece of casual gossip, stretching the truth, taking something that doesn't belong to us, we are creating minor infractions which taken together create major problems.

Let's give our soul the positive nourishment that it needs. Love, attention, honor, respect, acceptance of others and, of course, of ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom.