



What is Wrong with Wearing High Heels?

High Heels and Anguished Feet

I've always detested high heels. First of all, they look unnatural, ugly and conceited with their narrow twistedness and raised, gaudy, batons underscoring the lowest part of our being. Untrained feet like mine can't even fit into such devices. I recall how my German grandmother, several decades ago, warned me against high heels, by showing how her feet had been misshapen by being unnaturally twisted into the fashionable high heels required to fit into the aristocracy of her time. Witnessing her anguished feet made an awful impression on me, although her warning had been totally unnecessary. In high school my peers were divided into two distinct groups. The fancy girls with high heels and nail polish that frequented the discotheques, and the flower girls like me, with untamed locks, flowing tunics and bare feet. Since childhood when going shoe shopping style, fashion and even color was always secondary to comfortable shoes that were to serve as the foundation of our every movement. When they designed Crocs, it seemed to anyone that knew me that these comfortable, wide shoes were invented especially for me!

Shoe Designers Awaken Their Consumer's Lower Passions

High heels have their comeback in fashion at various time periods throughout the ages. The shoe designers invest much time and money in sophisticated techniques of revealing the thinking processes and lower passions of their potential consumers. The high-heeled shoe is an example of one such 'innovation.' Rather than being concerned with the spiritual etiquette and positive effect of their designer shoes, the shoe designers' purpose is primarily to stimulate the yetzer hara (negative impulse) of the person wearing their shoes. In their quest that their shoes become popular products in high demand on the market, the designers couldn't care less about whether they will negatively impact the way their consumers stand and walk. A high level of awareness is required of the average person in order to understand how the shoe influences his personality. However, the 'awareness' of the yetzer hara knows no bounds. "There is nothing new under the sun." These matters have been known by our Rabbis since ancient time, and they are described by our holy prophets and their Rabbinic commentaries. In portraying the spiritual and ethical decline prior to the destruction of the Temple, our Rabbis describe the arrogant, immodest body language of the daughters of Tzion, with special emphasis on their way of walking:

ספר ישעיה פרק ג פסוק טז

...יַעַן כִּי גָבְהוּ בָנוֹת צִיּוֹן וַתִּלְכְּנָה נְטוּוֹת \ (נְטוּיּוֹת) גֶּרוֹן וּמִשְׁקָרוֹת עֵינֵיהֶם הָלוֹךְ וְטָפוֹף תִּלְכְּנָה וּבִרְגָלֵיהֶם תִּעֲכֹסְנָה:

"Hashem says because the daughters of Tzion are so haughty and walk with outstretched necks and winking eyes, walking and raising themselves as they walk; and making a tinkling (spout 'venom') with their feet" (Yesha'yahu 3:16).

Haughty High Heels

Wearing high heels emphasizes the human aspect of haughtiness by making women appear like they are raising themselves as they walk. Rashi explains, "With their feet they spout venom" to indicate that when they would pass in the street near Jewish youths, they would stamp their feet and hint to them of the affection of the adulteresses, in order to arouse their temptation, like the venom of a serpent. The Talmud goes even further in describing the effort of the Jewish girls in order to entice the yetzer hara of the Jewish boys: Regarding forbidden sexual relations, it is

written: "Because the daughters of Tzion are haughty." This indicates a tall woman walking alongside a short one so that the tall woman would stand out. "And walk with outstretched necks," indicates that they would walk with upright stature and carry themselves in an immodest way. "Walking and raising themselves as they go," indicates that they would walk in small steps, heel to toe, so onlookers would notice them. "Making a tinkling [*te'akasna*] with their feet," Rabbi Yitzchak said: This teaches that they would bring myrrh and balsam and place them in their shoes and would walk in the marketplaces of Jerusalem. Once they approached a place where young Jewish men were congregated, they would stamp their feet on the ground and splash the perfume toward them and instill the evil inclination into them like venom of a viper (*Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 9:2*).

Shoe fashion design has the power to make a significant difference in the way a woman stands and walks. Moreover, a noisy clicking of the heels on the ground express a personality that desires to attract attention. The inner message of walking in this way while clicking the heels loudly is, "even with the heel, the organ furthest away and least important I have the ability to demonstrate my importance" (Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, *Aleinu Leshabe'ach*).

The Heel Represents the Totality of a Person

Parashat Ekev is all about the heel, although the word for 'heel' – עֵקֶב/*ekev* in the context of our Parasha is translated as "it will be." This is because the heel is the end part of our body, therefore it also denotes the future to come. Thus, Ibn Ezra explains that the heel symbolizes the final reward. Similarly, "Just as in the holy tongue the beginning of everything is called the רֹאשׁ/*rosh* – 'head,' so is the end of every matter is called the עֵקֶב/*ekev* – 'heel.' In the same manner as the head is the beginning of a person while the heel is his end and lowermost part" (Ramban, *Devarim* 7:12). It is interesting to note that the word for 'shoe' in Hebrew נֶעֱל/*na'al* also means a 'lock.' The shoe is called so because it locks something that has special significance, alluding to the independent importance of our feet. Perhaps the feet and especially the last part of the foot – the heel – represents the totality of a person. If a person's heel is expressing the Divine will, then we can be sure that the rest of the person is G-d fearing. The shoe that encases our foot and heel therefore resumes major importance as it is like the final lock that can latch in the rest of our being to its inherent connection with the Divine spark of our soul. Since the shoe connects us to the ground, enabling us to fulfill our purpose in the physical world, it makes sense that in Kabbalah our entire body is also called a 'shoe' compared to the neshama (Rav Chaim of Volozhin, *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:5).

"All's Well That Ends Well"

ספר דברים פרק ז' פסוק יב וְהָיָה עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמָעוּן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וּשְׁמַר הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיךָ לָךְ אֶת הַבְּרִית וְאֶת הַחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם:

"It will be, because you will heed these ordinances and keep them and perform, that Hashem, your G-d, will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers" (*Devarim* 7:12).

Although the heel assumes major importance, since it's the lowest part of our body, we may easily take it lightly. Rashi explains that עֵקֶב/*ekev* refers to the heel.' Therefore, Hashem is promising us a covenant of kindness if we only heed the minor commandments that people [usually] trample with their heels [i.e., they are treated as being of minor importance]. This Rashi supports the concept that the heel is our most vital part, despite its seemingly lower status than the rest of a person's body. If our spiritual work reaches all the way down to our heel then we can be assured that the rest of us is in a good place. The end purpose and goal of living in this material world is to

connect our very lowest part with the highest spiritual awareness of our head. In this way we make Hashem a dwelling place below. This explains the importance of the heel, as we know from the popular proverb: "All's well that ends well." It is interesting to note, that the foot encompasses the end nerve points of all the organs in our entire body. Thus, we can heal our entire being through our feet as known in the wisdom of reflexology. The back of the heel is specifically connected with our spine, and reflexology of the heel can ease lower back pain and alleviate discomfort associated with standing for extended periods of time. The middle of the heel is associated with the sciatic nerve – the longest, widest nerve in the human body that originates in the lower back, while the sides of the heel help alleviate pain in the tailbone or extreme bottom of the spine. The fact that the heel affects such vital part of our body furthermore testifies to its importance. Due to the significance of the foot and the heel it is vital that we treat them with love and dignity as is becoming for a Bat Melech (daughter of the King). We should ensure that our shoes have thick enough soles to protect our feet from thorns, prickles and nails. Moreover, we must ensure that our shoes are comfortable and fit our feet well without causing any pain, even when we stand or walk for extended periods of time. In the rural area – with its mountain slopes and rocky soil – that we call home, high heels are completely incompatible. Yet wherever a person may live, have you ever heard of anyone who claims that high heels are comfortable?