

Take Off Your Shoes

Topic

Torah, Sacred Moments

Grade Level(s)

3rd – 12th

Big Ideas

Kedushah is something that might not be easy to define but can have a powerful effect on those who experience it.

How one experiences a place can influence how one feels the *kedushah* of the place.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Compare how it feels to walk on different surfaces with different foot coverings (or no foot coverings at all)
2. Consider Moses's experience at the *sneh*
3. Evaluate what it means for a place to be *kadosh* today.

Materials / Technology Needed

- Different surfaces for learners to walk on.
Some options include:
 - Sand
 - Artificial Turf
 - Carpet
 - Tile
 - Soft Mats
- Extra socks for learners who are not wearing socks.
- Copies of *Shemot* 3:1 – 5 with guiding questions for each learner (included at the end of the activity)
- [Poll Everywhere](#) (optional)

Relevant Vocabulary

קָדוֹשׁ (Kadosh)	Holy
קְדוּשָׁה (Kedushah)	Holiness
שְׁמוֹת (Shemot)	The Book of Exodus
סֵנֶה (Sneh)	[See background for explanation]
אַדְמַת־קֹדֶשׁ (Admat Kodesh)	Holy Ground
הִנְיִי (Hineini)	Here I am! [Usually connotes readiness to listen and do]
כֹּהֵן / כֹּהֲנִים (Kohain/Kohanim)	Preist(s)
מִקְדָּשׁ (Mikdash)	The Holy Temple
חֲבֵרוּתָא (Havruta)	Learning Partner
פְּסוּקִים / פְּסוּקָה (Pasuk/Pesukim)	Verse(s)
פְּשָׁט (Peshat)	The simple, straightforward meaning of a text
בַּיִת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ (Beit Hamikdash)	The Holy Temple in Jerusalem
תַּנְ"ךְ (Tanakh)	The Bible

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Background for Teachers

The beginning of the life of Moses was filled with many big events. He was born during a time when Pharaoh demanded that all boys born to Hebrew mothers be thrown into the Nile. He was saved when his family placed him safely in the Nile, where he was found and taken in by Pharaoh's daughter. After being raised in Pharaoh's home, he defended a Hebrew slave; killed an Egyptian taskmaster; tried to break up a fight between Hebrew slaves; and fled for his life to Midian, where he defended Reuel's daughters from shepherds and married Tzipporah, Reuel's oldest daughter (*Shemot* 2:1 – 21).

Many years later, Moses seemed to have settled into the quiet life of a shepherd; and he was tending his flock in the wilderness when he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There, a messenger of God appeared in a *sneh* that was burning but not being consumed by the flames. Moses turned away to look at the miraculous scene before him, and the messenger called to Moses and told him to take off his shoes because he stood on "*admat kodesh*"—holy ground.

While the events at the *sneh* seem fairly straightforward, they raise many questions as well. What does it mean to be *kadosh*? How can a place be imbued with *kedushah*? Given that today people tend to dress up when they enter special places, what is the significance of Moses removing his shoes?

One element to consider when thinking about Moses removing his shoes is that he is able to feel the *admat kodesh* beneath his feet. He is able to experience the place in a different way by standing directly upon it. The nineteenth century German commentator Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains:

Taking off one's shoes expresses giving oneself up entirely to the meaning of a place, to let your personality get its standing and take up its position entirely and directly on it without any intermediary. So the *kohanim* in the *Mikdash* had always to function barefooted, and nothing was allowed to be *hotzetz*, to intervene between their feet and the ground... (commentary on *Shemot* 3:5)

The *Sneh*

The word *sneh* appears five times in the entire Tanakh, all in Moses's interaction in the wilderness. As such, we can not be completely certain what exactly the *sneh* was; but the consensus is that it was a bush, the genus of which is unknown. Thus, the *sneh* that was not consumed by fire is often called the "Burning Bush." It is worth considering just using the word *sneh* to discuss the event as a way to reinforce the Hebrew term.

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Prepare in Advance

Make sure to have a space large enough to accommodate the different surfaces.

Set up the surfaces.

Review the text from *Shemot* 3:1 – 5.

Description of Activities

1. Ask learners to walk on each of the surfaces.
 - a. Learners should have shoes on.
 - b. If appropriate, divide learners into groups and have them rotate among the different surfaces.
 - c. Learners notice how it feels to walk on each surface with shoes on. This could be something that learners reflect on internally, or it could be something that learners record on a sheet of paper.
2. Ask learners to remove their shoes. Learners walk on the different surfaces in their stocking feet and record their observations about how it feels to walk on each surface.
3. Ask learners to remove their socks. Learners walk on the different surfaces in their bare feet and record their observations about how it feels to walk on each surface.
4. Reconvene the group and reflect on the experience of walking on the different surfaces in various forms of foot dress. As a technology option, use Poll Everywhere to pose questions and collect responses.
 - a. What felt different about the different surfaces?
 - b. How was it different being in shoes, in socks, and barefoot? When did surfaces feel most different? When did they feel most similar?
 - c. What might be beneficial about walking around in shoes?
 - d. What might be beneficial about walking around in bare feet?
5. Divide learners into *havruta*—learning pairs. Hand out the text and guiding questions from *Shemot* 3:1 – 5.
 - a. Learners read the text out loud to each other in *havruta*. Depending on learners' abilities, learners can read a *pasuk* in Hebrew first and then read the *pasuk* in English. They then move on to the next *pasuk*.
 - b. Learners discuss the text with each other, using the included questions to help guide their discussion. They can also write down their answers to the questions if it is helpful.
 - c. Make sure to walk around and help learners to comprehend the *peshat* of the narrative and to think about its deeper meaning.
6. If necessary, review the narrative of *Shemot* 3:1 – 5 as a group. Otherwise skip to the following group discussion.

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7. Discuss as a group:
- a. God tells Moses that the place on which Moses is standing is “*admat kodesh*”—holy ground. What makes a place *kadosh*?
 - i. Is the *kedushah* of a place innate? Does something else make the place *kadosh*?
 1. If something else makes a place *kadosh*, what might do so? How does the transformation take place?
 - ii. Can a place be *kadosh* for one person and not for another? How? Why or why not?
 - b. What places can you think of that are *kadosh*? What makes them *kadosh*?
 - i. Note that places could include a wide variety of ideas, including:
 1. Synagogue sanctuary
 2. Library of religious books
 3. Cemetery
 4. Family Retreat
 5. Sports Field
 6. Garden
 - ii. How do you approach these locations differently? How do you dress differently at these places? What does one’s way of dressing demonstrate about one’s approach to a place?
8. Individually or in small groups, learners create montages that show places they think are holy. Montages should include music that demonstrates the *kedushah* of the places represented.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Learners describe what it feels like to walk in bare feet.
- Learners create or find images of places that are special to them.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Learners create a Hebrew banner of [Shemot 3:5](#). Learners bold the words אֲדָמַת־קֹדֶשׁ. Post the banner for all to see.
- The phrase *admat kodesh* is used only one other time in Tanakh. Learners compare and contrast the use of the phrase in [Zechariah 2:16](#) to how it is used in *Shemot*.

Shemot 3:1 – 5	שמות ג: א - ה
<p>¹ Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He drove the flock to the desert and he came to the mountain of God, <u>Horev</u>.</p>	<p>^א וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחֲרֵי הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים חֹרֵב:</p>
<p>² A messenger of God appeared to him in a blazing fire in the <i>sneh</i>. He looked and, behold, the <i>sneh</i> was burning with fire and the <i>sneh</i> was not consumed.</p>	<p>^ב וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ יְיָ אֵלָיו בְּלַבַּת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסֵּנֶה בֹּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ וְהַסֵּנֶה אֵינְנוֹ אֲכָל:</p>
<p>³ Moses said, “I will turn away and I will look at this great sight, why the <i>sneh</i> will not burn.”</p>	<p>^ג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרֶה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הַמְרָאָה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא־יִבְעַר הַסֵּנֶה:</p>
<p>⁴ God saw that he turned away to look, and God called to him from inside the <i>sneh</i>. He (God) said, “Moses, Moses.” He (Moses) said, “<i>Hineini</i>.”</p>	<p>^ד וַיֵּרָא יְיָ כִּי סָר לִרְאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִינִי:</p>
<p>⁵ He said, “Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for this place on which you stand is holy ground.”</p>	<p>^ה וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים קִרְבֵּךְ הֵלֶם שְׁלִי־נִעְלִיךְ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדַמְתִּי־קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:</p>

Do you think that Moses knew that he was approaching the mountain of God or do you think that is a description for the reader? Why?

Why would Moses look away from the *sneh*?

How can one look away in order to see something?

Why might God need to say Moses’s name twice?

When Moses replies, “*Hineini*,” he is indicating a readiness to listen. (*Hineini* comes from *hinei* and *ni*, meaning, “Here I am.”) What do you think he is expecting? Why is he ready?

God tells Moses to remove his sandals. Why? How might Moses’s experience be different with bare feet? How might feeling the ground beneath his feet change his experience?