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Shoes Off - Barefooted Reflections

Nemah, Poojanand Among Hindus it is an uncontested tradition to remove one's shoes before going inside a monastery or a place of worship. Christians do not feel the need to go barefoot in churches, although Moses did so on request when the Supreme Being manifested Himself before him. But Buddhists do remove their shoes or slippers as do Muslims before sitting for sizda.

This deeply rooted custom is now taken for granted. People, not knowing the philosophy behind the tradition, get little spiritual benefit from it. A prime reason for removing shoes is that they are made of leather which is considered impure as it is derived from dead animals. Violence and suffering is often the history of leather-made shoes. So, taking off shoes should always remind one and all not to kill and to get rid of all sinful actions - even those that give the least suffering.

Another popular reason for removing shoes is that the soles absorb impurities of the road. Temples and other places of prayers are considered sacred, and shoes, being impure, are not allowed to be brought inside. Therefore, even non-leather shoes or slippers are not allowed in sacred places. Wooden kharaon also are prohibited. Barefootedness is a deeply-rooted pass to enter into the kingdom of divinities.

The inner significance of being barefooted also provides deep, inner reasons to take off one's shoes. Whether you tread land that is soft or rough, shoes play the role of separation by protecting the feet. If someone wishes to really know whether the ground is soft or hard, he has to come in touch with it. So the removal of shoes expresses the eagerness for direct contact, an attitude of being a naked iceberg in the direct sunshine ready to melt and lose our personal identity. Removal of shoes is pan of surrender and humility which comprise the gateway to wisdom and the realm of God.

Another aspect of taking off shoes goes even deeper. Indoors, shoes have no importance. The history of shoes began when men wanted to travel far beyond their limits. Man has trodden unknown lands on shoes. Shoes mean long journey - all sorts of exhaustive trips either good or bad. The non-stop search of man is going on from age to age. Man's desire is endless and so is his endeavor to fulfill it.

One must internally and externally stop all activities to get hold of cosmic consciousness and behold the peaceful nature of Omnipresence - the Unknown who extends Himself beyond time and space. Removing shoes thus means to cease adventuring, to pause in complete relaxation, to feel the emptiness and nakedness of life, a total freedom, a total liberation.

Thousands of people are seen going barefooted in the temple, but unfortunately they keep their mind full of past, present and future trips. Their journey does not end, because they keep thinking of putting on their shoes immediately after coming out of the temple. Their trips are endless. Van Gogh once depicted old shoes to speak of the long, tiresome journey of man. Cast off shoes once and for all and end all external journeys; the destination is not far away but within. If one can absorb the whole understanding of putting off shoes, there is no doubt that he is ready to experience the non-dimensional truth of the universal mind and cosmic consciousness. Such is the great philosophy of taking off our shoes at the temple's door.

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