

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 174

Shoftim | Principles for Growth and Empowerment



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת שופטים | אנגלית

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Parshat Shoftim

Guarding One's Eyes

Natan sat in his usual place in the Beit Midrash, reflecting on the past year.

"No doubt about it, the year passed quickly. It feels like only moments ago that I stood solemnly during the Neilah prayer on Yom Kippur last year."

Natan nostalgically recalled the emotions he experienced during that Neilah prayer. Feelings of spiritual love and awe stirred within him, and a profound shame before the Creator filled his entire being.

The feeling made him yearn intensely, his heart to pound vigorously, and to feel entirely ready to dedicate his entire being to G-d's holy name.

Natan, caught up in a storm of emotions, closed his eyes and thought: "What sweetness and delight. Please, Master of the

Universe, grant me to experience closeness to Your light, the infinite light that sustains and creates everything."

Then Natan recalled from deep within the recesses of his memory, an insight he once heard - "One cannot taste the Divine light without first sanctifying one's eyes."

In Natan's heart a resolve and commitment were crystalized, "This year, I will strengthen myself in guarding my eyes - not to look at what is forbidden."

Memories of the previous year, and his efforts then flooded Natan's heart:

It was the day after Yom Kippur, and he began building the Sukkah.

Since he lacked some building materials, he traveled to Tel Aviv to a large and bustling shopping center. Already on his way there, his internal struggle began.

Parshat Shoftim - Do Not Believe in Yourself

His evil inclination did not intend to give up, not at all.

Although he walked down the street with his gaze averted, making great efforts to preserve the sanctity of sight, an inner force seemed to have made him raise his head repeatedly and look all around.

Natan did not give up, or be discouraged. He returned home and decided to start a short daily study regimen from the book "Taharat HaKodesh" by Rabbi Aharon Roth.

However, the stronger he seemed to have become, spiritually, the stronger his evil inclination seemed to be against him.

A fierce battle ensued between the two of them, with each side delivering powerful spiritual blows to the other.

Natan, who had experienced repeated failures, and usually

remained optimistic and upbeat, suddenly lost faith in himself, "I can't, this is much stronger than me".

The terrible infection of despair had landed upon Natan and had taken root.

Natan despaired and gave up. The great and holy fire of the soul that had burned in his heart, seemed to have died down.

These memories faded, and Natan returned to the present, finding himself sitting alone in the Beit Midrash with tears of self-pity streaming from his eyes.

"The fire that had burned in my heart has died down, is there any chance that I will succeed to rekindle it?"

The voice of the cantor was heard. The daily Mincha prayer had begun.

Do Not Believe in Yourself

Between Mincha and Maariv, a lesson in Halacha usually takes place in the Beit Midrash, but that particular day, the

Rabbi did not arrive, and the congregation looked for someone to deliver the lesson in his place.

Parshat Shoftim - Do Not Believe in Yourself

On the side sat a young scholar with his eyes fixed on a book, and the synagogue assistant approached him and asked him to give over a lesson.

The young scholar offered to deliver a lesson in Pirkei Avot, and opened with the Mishnah
(Avot 2:4):

"Hillel says: Do not separate yourself from the community; and do not believe in yourself until the day of your death; and do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place."

The young scholar expanded on the second clause of the Mishnah: From the moment a person is born, his growth, both physical and spiritual, continues unabated. But while one's physical growth happens naturally, spiritual growth requires much toil and effort.

When a Jew begins to work on his spirituality and starts walking upon the path that leads ever upward, he discovers that a central part of this journey is the struggle against desires and bad

traits. It is from struggle to struggle and from test to test, that one grows spiritually.

When G-d sees one's fruitful efforts, they grant him the opportunity to rise in level by "standing firm in trials."

Behind every great Jew, including the righteous and wise, there is a long trail of struggles, battles, falls, and successes, which span the full gamut of moments of daily life, whether gray and mundane or joyous and pompous.

Standing firm with one's thoughts, emotions, and their innermost heart despite all these challenges is the secret to success.

Hillel the Elder in our Mishnah warns of the following:

Even if you have achieved great things, and reached high and lofty levels, you must still not entirely believe in yourself.

You must not think you are already protected from the evil inclination. Instead, you must remain alert as long as you live -

Parshat Shoftim - Do Not Believe in Yourself

"Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death."¹

The young scholar continued:

If, Heaven forbid, one does stand before a spiritual pitfall, yet trusts themselves and their powers and abilities, they must know that this could not be farther from the truth.

Every person with some bit of wisdom understands that the opposing evil forces have been given exactly the same amount of strength.

And being that these forces are balanced, how can a person rely on himself?

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

1. Rabbi Sholom Schwadron, once related ('Kol Chotzev' - page 556):

The son of the Gaon of Butchatch, of blessed memory, told the following story about his father:

My father was very meticulous about the prohibition of wine made by non-Jews.

He used to make wine himself, handling the grapes and wine in a room without windows, to avoid even the eye contact of a non-Jew upon the wine.

If he had to travel with wine jugs, he covered them with several coverings to prevent a non-Jew from touching them as an extra precaution.

Once, I asked my father, "Why do you take such exceptional precaution regarding wine made by non-Jews? And he answered me: It was revealed to me that my purpose in this world is to correct and rectify the proper observance and adherence to this prohibition. My soul had already been in this world and returned to rectify this exact matter.

The son continued: When my father lay on his deathbed, in his last moments, and his condition deteriorated quickly, we summoned a doctor.

The doctor saw the dire situation and instructed to quickly go to the pharmacy and bring a specific medicine.

The messenger hurried and returned with the medicine in hand.

They poured the medicine into a spoon and put it before my father's mouth.

But as soon as the spoon's contents began to pour into his mouth, the Gaon recoiled. He spat out the medicine, raised his voice with his last strength, and said: 'Oy, Wine made by non-Jews!' and passed away.

We later sent someone to the pharmacy, and the pharmacist admitted that indeed, the medicine contained twenty percent wine.

It is to such an extent, that you mustn't believe in yourself until the day of your death!

Parshat Shoftim - The Downfall of Yochanan the High Priest

As the Talmud declares on this very statement of Hillel (Berachot 29a):

"We say: Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death - since Yochanan

the High Priest served as the High Priest for eighty years but in the end, became a Sadducee".

Let us focus now a bit on these words of the Talmud.

The Downfall of Yochanan the High Priest

The Second Temple stood for a total of 420 years, but despite the short time, entire volumes would not suffice to describe everything that happened to the world in general and to the Jewish people in particular during those years.

Those were exceedingly tumultuous years, nations and cultures rose and fell, rose up from the earth and then withered and disappeared.

The Talmud (Yoma 9a) tells us that one of the strange things that happened during those years was that every High Priest appointed to the position died within the year (with the exception of four high priests).

In the words of the Talmud:

Rabbah bar Bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan,

what is the meaning of the verse: "Fear of G-d prolongs days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened" (Proverbs 10:27)?

'Fear of G-d prolongs days' - refers to the First Temple, which stood for 410 years, and 18 High Priests served in it (an average of each serving for about 32 years).

'But the years of the wicked will be shortened' - refers to the Second Temple, which stood for 420 years but was serviced by more than 300 High Priests successively.

If we exclude from this number the years of service of Shimon the Righteous (40), Yochanan the High Priest (80), Ishmael ben Fabi (10), and Rabbi Eleazar ben Harsum (11) which total 141 years, it turns out that the remaining 279 years were serviced by more than

Parshat Shoftim - The Downfall of Yochanan the High Priest

300 High Priests, thus each one did not even survive the year.

The reason none completed their year was that they were wicked, in fulfillment of the verse 'But the years of the wicked will be shortened'.

The Talmud notes four priests who were an exception to this tragic and unfortunate phenomenon.

About these above-mentioned four high priests who were holy and exalted Divine servants it is said: 'Fear of G-d prolongs days'.

The longest living high priest among these four, was Yochanan the High Priest. The great fear of G-d that was ever present in his heart blessed and preserved him for a long life, and he served as the High Priest for eighty years.

In addition to his immense fear, holiness, and prophetic spirit, he was additionally granted control over the world's governance.

But as we said before, the opposing forces are given strength proportionate to the powers of holiness.

As Yochanan the High Priest's spiritual strength grew, so did the strength of his evil inclination. Hidden and unknown, fierce and challenging battles took place inside Yochanan the High Priest against his evil inclination.

Yochanan the High Priest found himself repeatedly struggling with dark and evil inclinations, and after reaching the ripe old age of one hundred years, he was overpowered by his evil inclination and became a wicked Sadducee.²

The young scholar concluded his words - here we must learn in this Mishnah to always keep 'a hand on the pulse' and to properly review our actions and behavior.

The voice of the cantor was soon heard, and the Maariv prayer had begun.

...*~* *Wellsprings of Wisdom* *~*...

2. **Rabbi** Yitzchak Huberman, the tzaddik of Ra'anana, wrote the following ('Ben La'ashri Bracha Meshuleshet', Part 3 - 'Sippurei Kodesh', tale 86):

In the city of Zurawicz, in the province of Mogilev in Russia, there was a famous genius who contained in his memory the entire Talmud and all of its commentaries.

Parshat Shoftim - The Downfall of Yochanan the High Priest

One day, he had a sudden change of heart, and he withdrew from his study of Torah, and instead began to delve into heretical books until he became a heretic himself.

Despite the many rebukes that his father, a deeply G-d-fearing man, gave him, he continued on his wayward path, and his words had no effect on his son.

One night, he told his father:

“Father, I have thought a lot and concluded that there are three categories of people in the world: wise, average, and foolish.

I discovered that all of the fools in the world live in Russia, and the greatest fools among them live in the province of Mogilev, and the most foolish of the foolish live in the city of Zurawicz. Our house is the pinnacle of foolishness, and you, dear father, are the most foolish of all. Therefore, I decided to leave this country and go to study the great wisdoms and sciences in Germany.

When he arrived in Germany, he was recommended to the University of Berlin.

He enrolled there, and within a short time, mastered all the material that was taught there - in all fields of study, and because his mind was incredibly sharp, and his character pleasant, all the professors loved him dearly.

He spent five years there, during which time he wrote two treatises.

One dealt with all the illnesses that may occur to each organ, their causes, prevention, and treatment.

The second was on mathematics and engineering.

He showed them to the leading scholars of Germany and France, who marveled at his broad intellect and admitted that even their understanding was not sufficient to comprehend all of the wisdom contained in these books.

He was still single, and received many marriage proposals, and many wanted him as a son-in-law, but he declined them all, saying that since he had left his father in anger and didn't receive his father's blessing, he resolved not to get married until he visited his father and showed him his great success, and how great his wisdom had become, in attempt to appease his father.

So he did, taking his two printed works with him and bidding farewell to his admirers, and set out at once for his hometown.

At that time, the Baal HaTanya was released from his imprisonment in Petersburg, and the news of his immense wisdom spread.

It occurred to the genius from Berlin to divert his path and visit the Baal HaTanya to seek his opinion regarding his books.

Upon arriving in Liozna, he entered the study hall, holding his two works under his arm, and paced back and forth nervously in the study hall.

All who saw him were surprised by his western appearance, but since he spoke only a fluent German, they could not understand his words.

It so happened that Rabbi Mordechai Liepler, a renowned disciple of the Baal HaTanya, was then in the study hall, and he understood German well because he

Parshat Shoftim - The Downfall of Yochanan the High Priest

lived in Petersburg, and his trade was with high-ranking officials, most of whom were Germans. The congregants told him about this strange guest, and he went over and asked him who he was and what he sought.

He replied simply that he wanted to meet the Baal HaTanya.

Rabbi Mordechai went in and told the Baal HaTanya, who allowed him to enter. Immediately upon entering with his two works into the chambers of the Baal HaTanya, he said:

“I heard that the Baal HaTanya was asked to perform very difficult calculations in Petersburg which his honor answered correctly.

Therefore, I came to ask you for your opinion on these books of mine, and with that, he presented his book on mathematics.

The Baal HaTanya took it and looked at the first page for a short while, then the second, third, and fourth pages. On the fifth page, he made a mark on one line, and then quickly leafed through the rest of the book, returning it to him and pointing out that on the fifth page, where he had marked, there was an error, and due to this mistaken premise, the entire book that followed was flawed.

The young man was greatly shaken and shocked, and immediately presented his second book on medical science.

The Baal HaTanya also looked at it briefly, and quickly leafed through the book, returned it to him, and then asked him simply which organ is in the least danger when amputated.

He replied that it was the little toe on the foot. The Baal HaTanya explained to him that actually there are fine nerves that release vapors from the body, and their junction is in the little toe, and if cut, they endanger the person far more than many larger organs that are cut.

Recognizing the Baal HaTanya's great wisdom, the young man was deeply moved and, taking his books with him, returned to the study hall.

Once again, he paced back and forth, deep in thought.

Rabbi Mordechai approached him again and asked him what he was experiencing, to which he replied that no one could have possibly helped him except the great Baal HaTanya.

After thinking deeply for about an hour, he took one of his books and tore it in half, placing one half in one stove and the other half in the other stove, and a few minutes later he did the same with his second book.

Meanwhile, the Baal HaTanya sent for him, inviting him to come inside, and offered to study with him at fixed times if he would remain in Liozna.

The young man immediately agreed and studied with the Baal HaTanya privately for an entire year.

Even the Baal HaTanya's son, the Mittler Rebbe, Rabbi Dovber, was not allowed to be present during their study sessions, despite his great desire to learn as well.

Success Through Stubbornness

Natan waited until the congregation dispersed, and approached the young scholar and said:

"The lesson was beautiful and enlightening, thank you very much, but I feel that what you mentioned in the lesson was above me.

I am so far from success, in fact I am truly an absolute failure, a big round zero.

With my meager inner strength, how can I possibly contend against the evil inclination's machinations?"

"What despair do you speak of?" - said the young scholar - "Why do you speak like this?"

"See, I was committed to guarding my eyes, yet time and again the evil inclination beats me, until I have become like a sieve full of holes. How can I not despair?"

"Let's sit for a moment," the young visiting scholar offered.

He took out a book titled 'Imrei Asher' of Rabbi Asher Freund, and opened it to page 26, and began to read:

"It is impossible to draw close to the Al-mighty except through persistent stubbornness to overcome despair.

With each spiritual stumble and fall - which are inevitable - one must rise up again and not remain downfallen.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

The Baal HaTanya once explained to him privately, that this young man was the reincarnation of Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordia, who had already returned to the world on three separate occasions, yet each time had corrupted himself, but now that he had come to him, The Baal HaTanya would not let him go astray again. As a sign, he said that in exactly seven weeks from that day, something would transpire.

And so it was, seven weeks later, the young man suddenly passed away.

After his passing, the Baal HaTanya studied these same teachings that he had learned with the young man, with his son Rabbi Dovber.

Eventually, the Mittlerer Rebbe of Lubavitch, organized and published them under the title "Derech Chaim", and indeed the book mentions many times the spiritual rectification of Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordia...

Parshat Shoftim - Success Through Stubbornness

One must tirelessly fight against the illusions of the evil inclination, which tries to convince him that he is already a lost cause.

One must learn this very lesson from the opponent that oppresses him, as King David revealed to us: 'From my enemies You give me wisdom' (Psalms 119:98) - from the enemy, the evil powers, who never had tired and never despaired, persistently harassing Yochanan the High Priest, who served as High Priest inside the Holy of Holies for eighty complete years, there is much to learn.

Despite being a righteous man throughout his very long service, the evil powers never gave up, attacking him repeatedly until he eventually succumbed and became a Sadducee.

From this, we must take a lesson in serving G-d: we must learn from the stubbornness of the evil powers how much a person, with stubbornness, can achieve a state of perfection, forcing upon himself a reality of holiness, insisting on his connection to holiness and to never being disconnected from it, as it is

written: 'That none be banished from Him' (II Samuel 14:14)."

"Do you comprehend?" - said the young scholar. "The secret to holiness is stubbornness.

When a person does not despair, but starts anew each time, in the end, he is assured success.

Eventually, he will be able 'to force the reality of holiness upon himself and not be rejected'.

"So, even if you slipped and failed to guard your eyes, you must not despair. You must start anew each time, for in the end, you are assured to achieve great and exalted levels."

Natan's eyes wandered around the room, then he looked directly at the young scholar and said: "Thank G-d, I have learned something extraordinary today."

Natan returned home and decided stubbornly: "I am starting anew".

The evil inclination rose up as well, and planned its next moves, with cunning and guile.

Parshat Shoftim - Despair Following Failure

Despair Following Failure

The blow the evil inclination meted out this time was very painful, and Natan succumbed once again in lack of sanctity of vision.

With his little remaining strength, Natan entered his home and collapsed on a chair, his arms hanging limply at his sides.

His mind was void of thoughts, and his heart was devoid of feelings.

He did not know how much time had passed, but eventually, he found himself dialing the young scholar, asking him to come over.

The young scholar came at once.

"What happened, Natan? Is everything alright?"

"I failed again, and surely disappointed G-d greatly, I don't really have a chance."

The young scholar looked at him sympathetically and said: "Let's leave that discussion for later, but for now, what do you think about us studying the weekly Parsha?" "The weekly Parsha? I don't even remember what the Parsha of the week is." The young scholar replied: "Parshat Shoftim," and opened a volume of 'Imrei Noam' by Rabbi Yoram Abargel and began to read (Shoftim - Maamar 4)...

Man is a Tree of the Field

In our Parsha, it is said: "For man is a tree of the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19) - meaning that a person is compared to a tree.

Indeed, there are many similarities between mankind and trees:

The success of a tree's growth, in producing good and high-quality fruits, depends on two crucial

components: The first component - the seed planted must be of a high-quality and superior species, and the higher the quality and the more superior the seed, the better its chances are to take root in the ground and produce high-quality fruits.

The second component - For the tree to grow successfully, a

Parshat Shoftim - Man is a Tree of the Field

person must put in effort and invest in nurturing the tree, watering it, and weeding out the wild plants around it.

However, if one does not do this, then even if the seed is of a superior species, it will not be able to provide its full benefit, since it lacks proper investment.

The same is true with man:

A person's spiritual level depends on two essential and critical components: The first component - the seed from which he was created must be of a holy and pure origin.

This does not actually depend on the person himself but on the holiness and modesty of his parents at the time of his conception.

The more the parents conduct themselves with sanctity, holiness, and modesty at this time, the higher the soul garments that are drawn to him from Heaven will be, and the greater the spiritual strengths extended to him from Heaven will be.

In addition, there is another element:

To reach spiritual heights, a person needs another component, which depends on the person himself.

He must invest and strive with all his strength and energy to serve G-d, study the Torah, fulfill the commandments, do good deeds, refine and improve his traits, and sanctify his body and soul.

Without a person's own effort and diligence, it will be of minor significance that his soul came from a high origin.

Without one's own toil, the immense strengths of their soul will remain concealed within and not come to fruition.

Conversely, even that individual who did not merit, through no fault of his own, to have a soul from a high source, can succeed in elevating and raising his soul to very high levels nonetheless, if he strives with all his might in studying of the Torah, serving the Creator, and refining his character traits.

Indeed, the Baal Shem Tov said about one of his students:

Parshat Shoftim - Man is a Tree of the Field

'This disciple of mine received the lowest soul of the generation, but through his efforts in serving G-d, managed to elevate it to the level of the soul of the great Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.'³

On another note, an additional similarity between mankind and trees comes to mind:

For a tree to take root in the ground and establish roots, it must be planted in one place permanently.

However, if a plantling or a tree is uprooted and replanted in a different location many times, it will not be able to take root properly, and consequently, will

not grow properly and certainly will not be able to bear worthy fruit.

So too it is with mankind:

For a person to succeed in the service of G-d, he must establish for himself a spiritual master and guide, whose guidance he will follow completely.

He must also set himself fixed Torah study schedules and not change his study place or routines at all times.

Only by having permanence, will he be able to 'take root' in his Torah studies and take great strides toward success.

However, the evil inclination works toward the opposite effect:

— *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~* —

3. Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag, of blessed memory, once shared ('Vayelaket Yosef' - page 37):

Once, when the great Rabbi Yecheil Michel of Zlotchov was in the presence of the holy Baal Shem Tov, the Baal Shem Tov said to him:

'Rabbi Yecheil, do you know who your father is?

Your father, Rabbi Yitzchak, was born

with a very lowly soul, a soul that almost had no lower counterpart in the generation. However through his immense labor and effort in Divine service, he attained the level of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.'

Righteous people said that the effort through which Rabbi Yitzchak achieved this greatness was 'the work of gratitude,' he had a unique way of deeply thanking the Al-mighty for everything that pertained to him.

Parshat Shoftim - Educating a Child Properly

When it sees a person settled in a certain Beit Midrash, deeply immersed in Torah study, it approaches him, disturbing his peace of mind and troubling him with all kinds of doubts:

"Who said this Beit Midrash is good for you? Maybe you will succeed more in another Beit Midrash?

Who said this study schedule or this method is the most suitable for you? Perhaps another method is better for you?

Who said this Torah book you are studying corresponds to the root of your soul? Maybe another book is better for you?

Educating a Child Properly

The young scholar lifted his eyes from the book momentarily and, seeing that Natan was following the wonderful ideas he had read, continued on:

"There is yet another similarity between mankind and trees:

The main praise of a tree is that it bears fruit, from which more trees grow, which will also bear

Who says that the Al-mighty desires your Torah study at all?'

We must know clearly that all these thoughts come from the evil inclination, which seeks to uproot the person's soul from its spiritual growth trajectory so that it will not take root anywhere, and consequently, not bear the sweet fruits of the Torah.

Therefore, one should not be tempted or confused by these thoughts in any way, but should rather continue on the proper path he started, and with G-d's help, in due time, he will see great blessing in his efforts.

fruit, and so on - as our sages taught (Ta'anit 5b), the best blessing to offer a tree is: 'May your offspring be like you,' meaning: Just as you bear sweet and blessed fruits, so too will all the future plantings from your fruits bear sweet fruits.

Similarly, with man:

A person's purpose on earth is not only to be himself

G-d-fearing and righteous, but he additionally has the duty to raise further 'plantings' - upstanding children - who will also walk in the way of G-d and His Torah.

These children, in turn, will themselves plant more offspring who will follow this same path, filling the world with creations that proclaim G-d's name in the world and bring satisfaction to their Creator.

Therefore, it is our sacred duty as parents to invest all our strength and effort into the education of our children in the way of the Torah.

The continuity of the Jewish people depends solely on the young children, for if, Heaven forbid, there are no children who follow the way of their parents, what benefit is there in the parents' Divine service?

If our children 'are not around,' and are not engaged in these same worthy activities as their parents, we have gained nothing.

We find in the Jerusalem Talmud (Sanhedrin 10:2), that King

Ahaz the wicked said as a parable referring to the Torah Study of children: 'If there are no kids, there are no goats. If there are no goats, there are no flocks. If there are no flocks, there is no shepherd. If there is no shepherd, there is no world.'

Likewise, if there are no young ones who study Torah, there are no elders. If there are no elders, there are no wise men. If there are no wise men, there are no prophets. If there are no prophets, there is no dwelling of the Divine Spirit. If there is no Divine Spirit, there are no synagogues and study houses, and it is as if, G-d forbid, the Holy One, blessed be He, does not dwell among Israel.'

Therefore, every parent has the sacred duty to know at all times where they are, with whom they associate, and who their friends are.

Just as a guard on duty must not fall asleep, so too every parent must constantly be alert to everything that happens with their children throughout the day, knowing what they are doing and where they are.

The parents' efforts in properly educating their children will then be rewarded with Divine assistance and success.

Every parent should know that to implant foundations of faith and holiness deep into their children's hearts, they must doubly dedicate themselves to their education, investing great efforts and time in learning, praying, and blessing with them, so that even when they grow up, they will not stray from the proper path.

If parents are not able to do this themselves, they must hire a

good, G-d-fearing teacher to do it for them.

The more a parent dedicates themselves to their children's education, the more sweet fruits of satisfaction they will derive from these same children in the future.

A father who goes to the prayers or a Torah lesson must not 'forget' his children at home.⁴

Similarly, if a father brings his children to the synagogue, he must not let his children wander outside, and sit and pray or listen to a Torah lesson by himself.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

4. It was a cold Friday evening.

The head of 'Yeshivat Porat Yosef' , Rabbi Yehuda Tzadka, was walking to accept Shabbat at the Western Wall.

As he passed through the Mamilla neighborhood, he noticed children wearing kippahs, who were playing soccer in the street without any supervision.

Someone else in his place might not have noticed, but the Rabbi saw and his heart filled with sorrow and pain, seeing Jewish children running around outside during prayer time, with no adult supervision.

He stopped and asked each child: "Where is your father?"

They each answered, 'Father is now in the synagogue, praying.'

Immediately, he turned to the nearby synagogue and asked the gabbai to announce to the congregation that he would come to them immediately following Shabbat and give a sermon on an urgent matter.

When he arrived on Saturday night, the synagogue was nearly empty.

The congregants, who lived nearby, simply did not come.

But Rabbi Tzadka did not give up. Together with the gabbai, he went door to door, inviting the congregation to his sermon.

Parshat Shoftim - Educating a Child Properly

Instead, he must keep his children close to him, seating them next to him, opening the siddur before them, and encouraging them to pray and participate in the Torah lesson with patience, gentleness, and joy.

How can a father engage in matters of great importance, while his children are left at home or on the street to play and fool around, often engaging in improper behavior?

The holiness of one's household depends on one's children. If they do not get used to the proper ways and customs, how will they acquire them later in life?

Thus, every Jewish parent has the sacred duty to keep their children close, involving them in every mitzvah and holy custom they perform, so that the children absorb

the holy customs from a young age and get accustomed to them.

This way, it will be deeply embedded in their hearts, and they will never abandon it, as the verse says: "Educate a child according to their way, and even when he is old, he will not turn away from it" (Proverbs 22:6)."

Natan looked at the young scholar with a weary and tired gaze and asked: "But how does all this have to do with me? I do not have children. My question is about maintaining spiritual strength and fortitude despite challenges and failures. How is this subject connected to me?"

The young scholar quickly reassured him:

"I was just getting to the relevant point," and continued reading from 'Imrei Noam'.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

He then got up and spoke with great emotion before the congregation, and asked with a pained heart, how it is possible to neglect one's children, being that they are the most precious treasure entrusted to us from Heaven.

His fiery rebuke struck the hearts of the listeners, filling them with guilt and

remorse until they resolved to improve their ways from then on.

The impact of his sermon was discernible even a generation later, and those neglected children from Mamilla study in 'kolels' and engage in Torah study with devotion to this day. ('Vezot Leyehuda', Part 2 - page 650).

Cycle of Human Renewal

There is another similarity between mankind and trees:

Trees are not always lushly green and full of fruits; they also go through a period of shedding, during which all their leaves fall off, and they are left bare without any fruits.

However, even then, the trees do not despair, for they know full well that this shedding period will soon pass, and after it, the spring season will come once again, and they will renew themselves, bloom again, and be laden with delicious fruits once more.

The same is true with mankind:

Just as there are times of ascent for a person, so too there are times of descent.

Every person is likely to experience periods of spiritual shedding throughout his life, when one may lose the desire and joy in studying Torah and serving G-d.

Suddenly, it may become difficult for him to concentrate in

prayer, and he may fail with undesirable traits of anger, hatred, envy, competition, and even worse.

However, even then, one must not despair, but instead act with strategic restraint and patience, and attempt to begin again a new period of spiritual blooming.

One must not sink into the murky swamp of despair and failure but rather rise like a lion, stand tall on their feet, and start anew.

Regarding this, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov declared (Likutei Moharan, 2, 78):

'There is no despair in the world at all.'

His disciple, Rabbi Natan, testified that when Rabbi Nachman said the words 'there is no despair,' he said them, 'with great intention and with a deep and awesome concentration, to teach and hint to everyone in all generations, that there is not any reason to despair at all in the world'.

Trees That Must Not Be Chopped

"**Do** you understand," the young scholar turned to Natan, "every Jew has their unique evil inclination against which they must fight and overcome."

As with every battle, sometimes one side prevails, and sometimes the other. However, the ultimate victor is the one who manages to persevere and not give up. Therefore, you must not despair; you must gather all your strength and continue fighting. Eventually, you will succeed and overcome."

Natan turned to the young scholar and said:

"I really appreciate all this good advice and wonderful encouragement, but I want some actionable and practical advice so that I can in some way illuminate my soul with holy light."

The young scholar looked at him and said:

"I can think of precisely such a way."

He opened the Talmud and read (Taanit 7a):

"Rabbi Yirmiyah said to Rabbi Zeira: Let the master come and study with me."

He answered him: My heart is weak, and I cannot. Let the master say instead a matter of Aggadah.

He responded and taught: Thus said Rabbi Yochanan, what is the intention of the verse: 'For man is a tree of the field' (Deuteronomy 20:19)? Can man be called a tree of the field?

Rather, there are conflicting verses, in one it is written: 'From it [the tree in the city you have placed under siege] you may eat, but you shall not cut it down' (ibid.), and yet in the next verse is written: 'You may destroy and cut down' (ibid. 20).

Rather, there is a distinction between different types of trees under siege, and while the barren trees may be chopped down, the fruit-bearing trees may not.

In the same manner, there is a distinction between the different types of people:

If one is a worthy scholar - 'from him you may eat and

Parshat Shoftim - Man is Truly a Tree of the Field

you may not cut him down,' meaning you should learn from him.

But If not - 'you may destroy and cut him down,' meaning you must not learn from him."

The young scholar continued: "When the Lubavitcher Rebbe mentioned these words of the Talmud, he raised several questions, some of which I will share with you.

Man is Truly a Tree of the Field

The Lubavitcher Rebbe asked the following:⁵

When examining Rabbi Yochanan's question, 'Is man indeed a tree of the field?' The wonder arises: there are many similarities between a person and a tree, and even in the Mishnah (Avot 3:17), an analogy is made between a person and a tree.⁶ So what does Rabbi Yochanan intend with the question: 'Is man indeed a tree of the field?'

Rather, we must say that according to Rabbi Yochanan, the language of the verse: 'For man is a tree of the field' (Deuteronomy 20:19) implies a full equivalence between man and a tree, not just a few similarities.

Therefore, he questioned and asked: 'Is man indeed a tree of the field,' implying a full equivalence between man and the tree.

But if this was Rabbi Yochanan's question, we need to understand what his answer was.

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

5. Torat Menachem (vol. 33, page 77).

6. In the words of the Mishnah:

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah says anyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, to what is he compared?

To a tree whose branches are many but roots are few, and the wind comes and uproots it and turns it over.

But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom, to what is he compared?

To a tree whose branches are few but roots are many, and even if all the winds in the world come and blow against it, they cannot move it from its place.

Parshat Shoftim - Man is a Microcosm

In his answer, he did not explain why man is truly and fully equivalent to a tree but rather brought up an entirely other matter in which man is similar to a barren or a fruit-bearing tree.

How does this additional analogy explain the full equivalence between mankind and trees?

Moreover: In this answer, Rabbi Yochanan compared man to a tree only in relation to a scholar. How can it express the precise parallel of mankind to trees?

To answer these questions, the Lubavitcher Rebbe began with an introduction.

Man is a Microcosm

As is known, man is called a 'microcosm,'⁷ meaning that all the aspects present in the larger world exist within a person as well.

Just as the world is divided into four categories: inanimate, vegetative, animate, and human, so too, a person is divided into these same four categories.

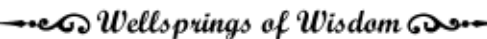
This is true not only regarding one's body but also of his soul (see Likutei Torah, Chukat 58a).

The inanimate part of the soul is the 'letters' that one uses in their thought, speech, and action.

In letters, there is no growth; one letter or word does not give birth or take on the meaning of another letter or word; they remain as they are, with no growth or change.

The vegetative part of the soul is the emotions, which grow and expand in breadth.

For example, a child has limited emotions and is therefore easily hurt and offended, whereas an adult has more mature emotions. Even with an adult, there is constant growth, change, and development of one's emotions, first starting as a



7. **To** quote Midrash Rabbi Tanchuma (Pekudei, 3):
“**To** teach you that the Tabernacle is

equivalent to the entire world and to man, who is a microcosm (עולם קטן) of the world.”

Parshat Shoftim - Man is a Microcosm

spark of feeling and then expanding and ever-growing.

The animate part of the soul is one's intellect, as is written: "Wisdom animates those who own it" (Ecclesiastes 7:12).

The human aspect of the soul corresponds to 'Keter', which is the higher and initial source of intellect.⁸

Based on these divisions, we can now understand the question of the Talmud: 'Is man indeed a tree of the field?'

Indeed, there is an aspect of 'tree of the field' within a person,

namely the vegetative, which is the emotions, but is this the only or highest aspect of a person? Isn't the primary and highest attribute of a person their intellect?

The Talmud's question in other words:

When the Torah says that man is a tree of the field, it seems to imply that it is referring primarily to the vegetative aspect of the soul, the emotions.

Hence, the Talmud wonders: 'Is man indeed a tree of the field?' - Isn't the primary

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

8. We quote the words of the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Torat Menachem, vol. 8, page 197):

“The inanimate category in a person are the ‘letters’ of thought and speech, which not only lack vitality but also do not grow from small to large, for a single letter will never grow and become two letters.

Similarly, in the types of letters, there are large, medium, and small letters, and small letters will never become medium or large letters.

Above this is the vegetative category in a person, which is the attribute of emotions, which grows from small to large.

Above this is the animate category in a person, which is the intellect, as it is written: "And wisdom will enliven" (Ecclesiastes 7:12). That is, while emotions are feelings, they do not represent life itself, for emotions do not penetrate a person entirely, whereas intellect, being the highest of the internal powers, penetrates a person entirely.

Thus only intellect is ‘alive’ and is called animate.

Finally, even above this is the ‘human’ category in a person, which refers to the essence of the soul that is even beyond intellect.

Parshat Shoftim - The Emotions of 'Adam'

attribute of a person their intellect?

Before offering the answer, let us raise another question.

The Emotions of 'Adam'

When looking at the verse: "For Adam (man) is a tree of the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19), we see that the verse uses the title 'Adam' for 'man'.

In other words:

Are emotions truly the pinnacle of a person's achievement and perfection, warranting the use of the esteemed title 'Adam'?

The Zohar explains⁹ that there are four titles for a person: Adam, Gever, Enosh, and Ish, the most elevated and significant of these being the title 'Adam.'

The Lubavitcher Rebbe answered these questions extensively and profoundly, embedding his explanation in the words of the Talmud.

The question begs to be asked, why does the verse use the highest title, 'Adam,' to describe the mere vegetative aspect - emotions of a person?

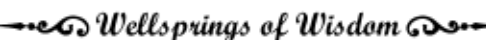
We will attempt to condense his words briefly, and those wishing to delve deeper should study the source directly.

The Birth of Emotions is the Goal

A primary role of the intellect is to influence one's heart, as it is written: "Know this day, and take it to your heart" (Deuteronomy 4:39) - the ultimate purpose of knowledge is to guide a person's heart, meaning that his heart

should follow the knowledge he acquired of the Torah.

However, if the intellect is in one place and the heart is in yet another, he is not considered upright, and one must not learn from such a person.



9. Parshat Tazria (page 48a).

Parshat Shoftim - The Birth of Emotions is the Goal

A person whose intellect influences his emotions is called by the Torah 'a fruit-bearing tree,' whereas one who has not achieved this, although knowledgeable in the Torah, is called by the Torah 'a barren tree.'

To elaborate further:

In addition to what we discussed until now - that a person's body as well as their soul is divided into the four categories of inanimate, vegetative, animate, and human - the powers of intellect itself is divided as well into these four categories which all exist and express the intellect differently.

The difference between the titles 'Ish' and 'Adam' is within the faculties of intellect itself:

'Ish' denotes a lower type of intellect, the part that pertains to emotions,¹⁰ and 'Adam' refers to the essence of intellect, which is above having any relationship to emotions.¹¹

The lower form of intellect, called 'Ish,' which relates to emotions, is subject to fluctuations - the emotions of the heart affect this form of intellect, and can cause a diminution of its light,

Thus, when the heart is closed, the intellect cannot influence the emotions.

— *Wellsprings of Wisdom* —

10. Intellect related to emotions can influence and refine the emotions but cannot completely change them, since they relate to them as they are.

This intellect is attained at the age of Bar Mitzvah, and therefore, before the age of thirteen, one is not called a man (even though he has emotions), because this intellect that is related to emotions has not yet been completed within him (Torat Menachem, *ibid.*).

11. This higher level of intellect, or essential

intellect, is also called 'broad intellect,' and it has the power to change the nature of one's emotions, which is its ultimate purpose.

The title 'Adam' applies specifically to this essence of the intellect, and for this reason, the title 'Adam' applies only to the Jewish people, because the 'intellectual soul' of the Jew is completely different from the 'intellectual soul' of the nations, and although it is a mortal and human intellect, it is attuned spiritually, and has appreciation for the Divine (*ibid.*).

Parshat Shoftim - The Birth of Emotions is the Goal

However, the essence of intellect - being above the entire realm of emotions - is not subject to such fluctuations and shines continuously, even in an unopened heart.

Some attempt to influence the heart using the lower intellect called 'Ish,' and they may succeed. However, the Torah here reveals to us that if you want the proper way to become 'a tree of the field,' that is, to extend the intellect into emotions effectively, resulting in a 'fruit-bearing tree,' one must connect to the higher level of intellect, the essence of intellect, the 'Adam' within each person, which is above emotions, and link this 'essential intellect' with 'the tree of the field,' the emotions of the heart, and specifically through doing so, you will merit to become a fruit-bearing tree.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe continues:

The way for one to connect to their essence of intellect is through studying the inner dimensions of the Torah.

This Torah study is so powerful that it inevitably influences anyone who engages in it, as our sages said: 'The inner light within it brings them back to the right path' (Eicha Rabbah, Introduction 2).

Moreover, studying the inner dimension of the Torah, Chassidut, purifies a person, bringing him out of his natural undesirable tendencies and limitations.

Not only does the inner aspect of the Torah refine and elevate one's emotions, but it also transforms their very nature.

The young scholar closed the book and turned to Natan:

"Here you have it.

What we just read, is the practical piece of advice you and for.

Set aside fixed times each and every day to study Chassidic teachings as revealed by the Baal Shem Tov and his followers.

With G-d's help, the light within these teachings will assist you in sanctifying yourself and guarding your eyes."

Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. Man is compared to a tree, just as a tree has a trunk, branches, fruits, and roots, so does a person have these elements.

Man is compared to a tree in five unique ways:

Purpose: Each person has their purpose in life.

Just as a tree's purpose is to produce good fruits and propagate its species, so too a person's role is to raise children and educate them in the Torah and mitzvot.

Proper upbringing requires effort, care, and continuous investment to yield the best results.

Without effort, even a talented child would not grow properly. Regardless of how lofty the soul a person has received, without toil and work, he will not achieve anything. Conversely, even those with lower souls can reach holiness and righteousness through effort and diligence.

2. Roots: Just as a tree with good seeds produces good fruits, so too

a person, created with sanctity at conception by holy and modest parents, has much higher and more successful potential.

3. Permanence: A tree that is uprooted and replanted frequently will not survive in the long term. Similarly, a person needs stability. One should not wander from one spiritual place to another, thinking they will succeed better elsewhere. Instead, they should remain in one place, with a fixed study schedule, not changing Torah books or methods frequently.

Start something and see it through to the end, and only then move on to the next thing.

4. Renewal: Everyone goes through periods of ups and downs, moments of despair and joy, just as a tree has times of shedding its leaves before renewing itself.

A person must remember that everything is temporary, and even difficult times will pass. Never despair; success will eventually come.

Parshat Shoftim - Summary and Practical Conclusions

5. **Humility:** For a tree to produce the best fruits, it needs a lot of fertilizer.

Similarly, a person must learn to accept and be patient with the humiliations that life brings, as each disgrace erases many of one's sins.

A person should be happy for the opportunity for atonement which thus elevates him even further.

6. The easiest way to become a person who is 'a fruit-bearing tree' is through the study of the inner dimensions of the Torah.

This aspect of the Torah is so great that it inevitably influences anyone who studies it, as our sages said: 'The light within it (referring to the inner dimensions of the Torah) brings one back to the right path.'

Additionally, studying the inner dimension of the Torah purifies a person, allowing him to transcend his natural tendencies and inherent traits.

Not only does the inner aspect of the Torah improve and refine one's character traits, but it also transforms the very nature of these traits.

Shabbat Shalom !



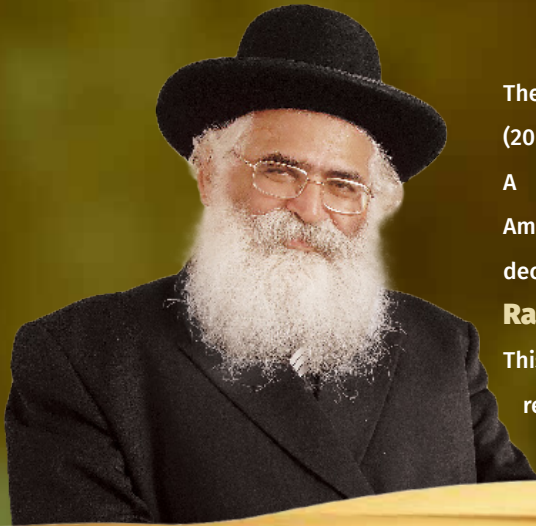
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Shoftim**

4th of Elul, 5784



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	7:01 pm	7:59 pm	8:29 pm
Miami	7:16 pm	8:07 pm	8:45 pm
Los Angeles	6:54 pm	7:48 pm	8:22 pm
Montreal	7:04 pm	8:05 pm	8:32 pm
Toronto	7:25 pm	8:25 pm	8:53 pm
London	7:16 pm	8:23 pm	8:44 pm
Jerusalem	6:41 pm	7:29 pm	8:16 pm
Tel Aviv	6:38 pm	7:27 pm	8:12 pm
Haifa	6:37 pm	7:26 pm	8:12 pm
Be'er Sheva	6:37 pm	7:26 pm	8:12 pm

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