

PENINEI MEHKERE ERES

פניני מחקרי ארץ

HaRav HaGaon Rachamim Moshe Shayo Shlit"a

פרשת שופטים תשפ"ו

כי תצור אל עיר ימים רבים להלחם עליה לתפשח לא תשחית את עצה
לנדה עליו גרזן כי ממנו תאכל ואתו לא תכרת, כי האדם עץ השדה לבא
מפניך במצור. רק עץ אשר תדע כי לא עץ מאכל הוא אתו תשחית וכרת

"When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it and capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them, for you may eat from them — do not cut them down. Is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you? Only a tree that you know is not a fruit tree may you destroy and cut down." (20:19)

Our *Chachamim* ask in *Masechet Ta'anit* (7a): is a person really a tree of the field? Rather, the verse can be understood as follows: since it states "for you may eat from it (i.e. it is edible) — do not cut it down," and it states "only a tree that you know is not a fruit tree — that you may destroy and cut down," it teaches it us how to treat a person. How does this apply to a person? If a Torah scholar is worthy, "eat from him and do not cut him down"; but if he is unworthy — to the point that people say of him, "see how corrupt are his ways, how repulsive are his deeds" — then "you shall cut him down," for Hashem has no desire for such a person to remain in the world.

Not only is man compared to a tree of the field, but the tree of the field is also compared to man. Therefore, just as it is forbidden to take a person's life, it is forbidden to destroy a fruit tree. The *Gemara* in *Masechet Bava Kama* (91b) relates that Shivchat, the son of Ribbi Chanina, died at a young age because he cut down a fig tree that was producing fruit. Measure for measure, he was taken from the world before he had brought forth his own fruits — for cutting down a fruit tree carries genuine spiritual danger.

In *Masechet Abot* (3:17), our *Chachamim* teach: "One whose wisdom exceeds his deeds — to what is he compared? To a tree with numerous branches but few roots: when a wind comes, it will easily and uproot it and overturn it. But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom — to what is he compared? To a tree with few branches but numerous roots: even if all the winds of the world were to blow against it, they could not budge it from its place. As it is written (Yirmiyah 17:8): והיה כעץ שתול על מים ועל יובל ישלח שרשיו ולא יראה כי יבא חום, והיה עלהו 'He shall be like a tree planted by water, spreading its roots toward the stream; it shall not fear when heat comes, its leaves shall remain fresh, and in a year of drought it shall not worry, nor cease from bearing fruit.'"

The *Tanna* compares a person's deeds to the roots of a tree, and his

Torah wisdom to the branches. Earlier, in *mishnah* 9, Ribbi Chanina ben Dosa states: "One whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom — his wisdom endures. One whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin — his wisdom does not endure. He used to say: one whose deeds exceed his wisdom — his wisdom endures. One whose wisdom exceeds his deeds — his wisdom does not endure." It emerges that a person's deeds flow from his fear of Hashem — and thus the roots of a person are the *yirat Hashem* within him.

The deeper explanation is this: the branches of a tree are visible to all and cannot be concealed, while the roots are hidden underground. So too, wisdom is located in the head, which is visible; indeed, "a person's wisdom illuminates his face." But fear of Hashem resides in the heart, which is hidden from view. Therefore, when a person conceals his good deeds, this is an indication of the depth of his *yirat Shamayim*. Wisdom without fear of Hashem cannot endure, just as a tree cannot survive without roots. The more deeply a person plants *yirat Hashem* in his heart, the stronger his wisdom becomes, just as the roots strengthen and nourish the tree. And the deeper the roots, the greater the tree—and the greater his wisdom.

This is what David *HaMelech* declares in *Tehillim* (37:31): "תורת אלקיו בלבו, לא תמעד אשוריו" *"The Torah of his G-d is in his heart — his steps shall not falter."* When the Torah a person learns is rooted in his heart — when his Torah rests on the foundation of *yirat Shamayim* that dwells within him — then his steps will not falter, for a tree whose roots are deep and strong cannot be toppled, even if all the winds of the world were to rage against it.

The *Ramchal* opens his holy work *Mesillat Yesharim* with the following words: "The foundation of *chassidut* and the root of wholehearted *avodah* is that a person must understand - with clarity and conviction - what his obligation is in his world." One who wishes to traverse the *Mesillat Yesharim* — the path of the just - must first reflect upon the foundation of *chassidut* and the root of *avodah*. What is the difference between a *yesod* and a *shoresh* — a foundation and a root? A *yesod* is the foundation of a building, while a *shoresh* is the root of a tree. The distinction is that a foundation is fixed and does not grow, and therefore the building erected upon it is inherently limited. A root, by contrast, grows and deepens — and the further it penetrates the soil, the more the tree above it can grow and flourish.

It is for this reason that the *Ramchal* compares *chassidut* to a building standing on a foundation, and *avodah* to a tree growing from its roots. For *chassidut* is, by its nature, bounded — as we find in *Masechet Abot*, "an ignorant person cannot be truly pious". True

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chassidut is built upon halacha, and *chassidut* that runs counter to halacha is nothing more than folly masquerading as piety. *Avodah*, however — the service of Hashem, exemplified by prayer which stands in place of the *korbanot* — is, at its very essence, the effort to draw close to Hashem. The more deeply a person implants his roots, the greater he can grow, and the closer to Hashem he becomes.

If one wishes a tree to grow properly rather than wild, one must know how to cultivate it: in its early stages it must be supported so that it grows straight, the thorns around it must be cleared away, it must be watered, fertilized, and exposed to sunlight. So too with a person, who is compared to a tree of the field. If one wishes a child to grow into a Talmid Chacham, one must straighten his path, place him in good company, and surround him with warmth and love. He will then be empowered to grow into a great tree, one that bears good fruit, and whose shade and fruits bring benefit and joy to all he encounters.

Indeed, it is with this imperative that David HaMelech, by *ruach hakodesh*, opens the book of *Tehillim* — the foundational text of the service of Hashem: "אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים לא ישב, כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה וילילה, והיה כעץ שתול על פלגי מים אשר פריו יתן, בעתו ועלהו לא יבול וכל אשר יעשה יצליח." *"Praiseworthy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the path of sinners, nor sat in the company of scoffers; but whose desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in His Torah he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, whose leaf does not wither — and all that he does shall prosper."* David HaMelech compares a person to a fruit-bearing tree, whose leaves do not wither and whose every endeavor succeeds. And all this is achieved when a person distances himself from bad company and makes the Torah of Hashem his desire. This is the secret to spiritual success.

The *Gemara* in *Masechet Chullin* (77b) asks: what is the remedy for a tree that sheds its fruit prematurely? The *Gemara* answers that it should be painted red and weighed down with stones, so as to weaken its vigor. Rabbi Yosef Chaim, *zt"l*, explains in *Ben Yehoyada* that this is a *maschal*, a parable, for a person, who is called "a tree of the field." The phenomenon of shedding its fruit alludes to speaking *lashon hara*, for which one loses the merits of his Torah and *mitzvot*. We find the source for this allusion in *Chovot HaLevavot* (*Sha'ar HaKeniah*, chapter 7): a story is told of a *chassid* who was humiliated by someone in the *bet kneset*. When the man returned home, the *chassid* sent him a gift — a basket of figs — saying: this is in exchange for the gift I received from you, which is your Torah and *mitzvot*. So too, one who speaks *lashon hara* about another — all his merits

pass over to the one he spoke against.

And what is his remedy? The *Gemara* says that his cure is to paint the tree red—that is, to beautify and improve himself through Torah study. As *Chazal* state in *Masechet Arachin* (15b): "What is the remedy for one who speaks *lashon hara*? If he is a Torah scholar, let him occupy himself with Torah, as it is stated (*Mishle* 11:21),

"מרפא לשון עץ חיים" *"The cure for the tongue is the tree of life."* Through occupying himself with Torah, which is called the *Etz Chaim*, the Tree of Life, his tongue will be healed, and he will no longer speak *lashon hara*.

And he should also be loaded with stones—these are his *tefillot*, which are called "stones." As it is stated in the *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Tikkun* 21), "אבנים, שלימות תבנה" *"you shall build with whole stones"*—referring to the need for our *tefillot* to be complete. This is the remedy for a person to avoid "shedding his fruit" in the future.

The *Gemara* in *Masechet Ta'anit* (5b)

relates a parable of a man who was walking through the desert, hungry, exhausted, and thirsty, when he came upon a tree whose fruits were sweet, whose shade was pleasing, and which rested on a stream of water. He ate from its fruits, drank from its waters, and rested in its shade. When he was ready to leave, he said: "Tree, tree — with what shall I bless you? If I say your fruits should be sweet, they are already sweet; that your shade should be pleasing, it is already pleasing; that a stream should flow beneath you, it already flows. Rather, may it be His will that all the saplings planted from you be just like you."

So it is with a person. One must strive to have "sweet fruits" — these are his good deeds; "pleasing shade" — that his company is worthy and he is found among upright people; and "a stream flowing beneath him" — that he teaches others Torah and the ways of righteousness. If he becomes all that is in his power to become, then he will merit to receive the blessing that all the saplings planted from him should be just like him.



This weeks Divrei Torah is dedicated in loving memory of

Rivka Bat Mazal ע"ה

May her Neshama Have a tremendous Aliya, Amen!

נלב"ע כד' אב תש"ף

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.