

You Have To Be A Mentch

This week's parsha, Shoftim, tells us that we are not allowed to cut down fruit bearing trees, "for the Adam (man) is the tree of the field." The Sifri says, "This teaches us that the life of a person, is only from the tree." This is difficult to understand, because surely the life of a person is sustained by other foods that don't grow on trees as well. Why does it say specifically trees?

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains the verse, "Bread feeds the heart of man." That bread satisfies a person more than meat.

Why does food satisfy a person? And why is bread more satisfying than meat?

He explains that everything in the world is divided into four kingdoms, the lowest is domem, inanimate objects, like rocks, sand and water, all metals and minerals. Above that is tzomeach, things that grow, like plants and trees. Above that is chai, living things like animals and fish. And the highest is medaber, people who have conversation, which means that they think about things and discuss them.

The rule is that the higher a thing is in its spiritual source, the lower it falls down here into the physical world. So although chai and tzomeach are lower than us in the physical, in their source they are higher. And of course, the source of tzomeach is higher than chai.

Being higher in their source, means that when we eat them, we connect to their source, and that is why they are satisfying, because they are higher. Since plants are from a higher source than animals, we are more satisfied from bread, which is from wheat, a plant, than from meat.

If you will ask: What about domem, inanimate objects? I would surmise, that they are more important than plants to our existence, like water and salt, without which, we could not survive. Yet with the exception of water which we drink, we don't make a meal of domem, and we certainly don't eat

them. They are added to a meal, and that is how we connect to their source. But being that we don't eat them as a meal, they are not part of the discussion.

Now that we know that tzomeach is most satisfying, being that the most prominent of all plants are trees, it makes sense that the Sifri says, that "the life of a person, is only from the tree." Trees are symbolic of all that grows, all tzomeach.

The Talmud says, "What is the meaning of the verse, 'for the Adam (man) is the tree of the field,' is then a man a tree of the field? Rather, because it says (about fruit-bearing trees), 'for from it you will eat and you should not cut it down,' and it says (about non-fruit-bearing trees), 'It you could destroy and cut down.' How does this work? If he is a proper talmid chacham (Torah scholar), you should eat (learn) from him, and you shouldn't cut him down, if not, destroy him and cut him down (turn away from him)."

What is a "proper" talmid chacham? One whose Torah effects his actions, he doesn't only study, he has a refined character due to his study.

From this is understood, that not only does a person get fed from a tree, but the actual person is like a tree. The Talmud asks, in what way? And answers, that in a certain way, a person is like a tree.

This brings up a few questions.

Why does the Talmud ask, "Is then a man a tree of the field?" There are many ways a person is compared to a tree, even the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos compares a man to a tree. It seems from the Talmud's question, that the whole of the person is like a tree. However, the answer it gives, is that in one more detail a man is like a tree. In which way is this answer, more the whole of the person, than all the other comparisons?

The answer of the Talmud just focuses on a talmid chacham, which is only one segment of the population. But from the Talmud's question, "Is then

a man a tree of the field?" It seems that it is referring to every person. How does the answer explain, how every person is like a tree?

And finally, is there a connection between the Sifri's answer and the Talmud's?

A person is called a "small world." Meaning, that everything that is found in the world, is also found in a person in some way. Just as the world is divided into domem, tzomeach, chai and medaber, a person is as well.

In a person, tzomeach, refers to his or her emotional makeup, which grows as he or she matures, and it is always growing.

The main distinction between medaber, people, and everything else, is that we have intellect, the ability to think about things. And that is the question of the Talmud, "Is then a man a tree of the field?" In other words, is this what a person is all about, a tree, tzomeach, his emotional makeup? Isn't a person about his or her cognitive abilities?

The question becomes stronger, when you think about the word used to say "man" in our verse. In Hebrew there are four ways to say man, adam, ish, enosh and gever. Adam refers to the intellect of a person, while ish refers to his emotional makeup. So the Talmud's question becomes, "Is then an adam a tree of the field?" Is that what an adam is all about, his emotional makeup, I thought that adam refers to his intellect?

The Talmud answers, that the whole point of one's intellect, is that it affects his emotions, so that they become in line with his intellect. Then he has reached the pinnacle of an adam. There is no point in the intellect, if doesn't affect the way the person acts. If he is a genius, but not a mentch, he missed the point and he has not reached the pinnacle of an adam.

About knowing Hashem it says, "And you should know today, and you should bring it to your heart." In other words, the whole point of "you should understand today," is that "you should bring it to

your heart," the seat of the emotions. Knowing is not enough, it has to change you as a person.

The Talmud uses a parable to explain this, if he is a "proper" talmid chacham, it is not enough to be a talmid chacham, to have the knowledge, but he has to be proper, his knowledge has to affect him as a person, if not, turn away from him.

This parable clearly describes the whole of the person, that your intellect has to affect your emotional makeup. Then you're a mentch, an adam.

The "small world" is similar to the "big world." Just as in the big world, although tzomeach looks lower, and it needs us to raise it up. However, once we eat it, we are affected by its source, which is higher. So too, in the small world, emotions seem lower than intellect, however, in its source, emotions are higher. Once we raise our emotions through our intellect, then the source of the emotions affect our intellect, raising it ever higher.

Although there are many ways that a person is like a tree, this particular parable defines the essence of every man, that his intellect has to effect his emotions.

This is also the connection between the Sifri and the Talmud. The answer is the same, ultimately tzomeach is most effective, the Sifri is explaining how it is in the big world, and the Talmud is explaining how it is in the small world, the person.

Let's go a bit deeper.

Since being a person is defined as having intellect, our small world is found in our intellect, that means that our intellect itself has all four parts, domem tzomeach, chai and medaber within intellect. The ish of the intellect, is the lower part of the intellect, that has an affect on the emotions, and the adam of the intellect, is the essence of intellect, higher than any connection to the emotions.

The Talmud's question is, "Is then an adam a tree of the field?" It is true that the intellect has to have

an affect on the emotions, but does it have to be the essence, the adam of the intellect, that affect the emotions? Wouldn't it be enough for the lower part of the intellect, the ish, to have an affect on the emotions?

The Talmud answers, that if it doesn't have fruit, you can cut it down. This doesn't only refer to the branches of the tree that have the fruit, but also to the trunk and the roots of the tree that don't have any fruit growing from them. You could ask, why would you cut down the trunk, just because its branches don't produce any fruit? But that is a silly question. Obviously, in order for the branches to have fruit, there must be the trunk and the roots. The fact that there is no fruits growing on the branches, is because the roots and the trunk are also not doing their job, so you can cut them down.

The same is true about the essence or the adam of the intellect. Although it doesn't affect the emotions directly, its purpose is ultimately for the emotions, and if it doesn't affect the emotions, it is not fulfilling its main purpose.

You may ask : Why is it not enough for the lower part of the intellect to work on the emotions? What do I gain by using the higher part of the intellect to influence the emotions?

First, since the lower part of the intellect has an affect on the emotions, it is likely to be affected by the emotions as well. If for some reason the heart is in a dark and cold place, blocking all of the emotions, it could as well block the light of the intellect. If that happens, the lower part of the intellect will not be able to have any effect on the emotions. On the other hand, the adam of the intellect, is above the emotions, and can't be affected by them. Therefore, it will always be able to have an affect on the emotions.

Second, even if the lower part of the intellect is not affected by the emotions and is able to work on them and refine them, it won't be able to change them completely, they will remain in their nature, just more refined. This is because the lower part of the intellect is not above the emotions, it can only

work with what they already are, moving them into a positive direction. On the other hand, the adam of the intellect, is above the emotions, and therefore it can always affect them, and even change their nature completely. This is actually the main purpose of the essence of the intellect, to change the nature of the emotions.

May we have a strong influence on our emotional makeup, that they become in line with our intellect, then we will be trees that can be eaten from. This will help us have a good influence our surroundings, which will help us bring Moshiach closer. May he come soon.

The King And The Nassi

In this week's parsha, Shoftim, we are given the mitzvah to appoint a king, "You should surely appoint over yourself a king." The Rashba writes, that "The king is like the community, because the community and all of Israel are dependent on him." Similarly the Midrash Tanchuma says, "The head of the generation is the entire generation. Rashi also says something like this, that "The nassi (the leader, the king) is like the entire generation, because the nassi is everything." The Rambam says about the king, "That his heart is the heart of the entire congregation of Israel."

The king is like the heart of the Jewish people, because just as all of the organs in the body are dependent on the heart, all of Israel are dependent on the king.

It is true that the heart pumps the blood, bringing vital oxygen and nutrients to every organ of the body, but it is the brain that directs the entire body, including the heart. So why is the king called the heart and not the brain of the Jewish people?

In the Torah, when it says the word nassi, depending on the context, it either means the king, or the head of a tribe. In the Mishnah or Talmud, nassi always refers to the head of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish people. And it

always uses the conventional word melech, to say king.

By making this differentiation between melech and nassi, our sages are teaching us, that they have different positions and different qualities. And even when a king is called a nassi, it is referring to the nassi qualities found in the king.

What are the differences between a nassi and a melech? The differences are similar to those of the brain and the heart.

A king's job is to take care of the needs of the nation, just as the heart serves the entire body. As king, he doesn't have any purpose other than serving the nation, just as the heart has no other function than to provide the needs of the organs of the body.

Therefore, he is attached to the people in two ways. First, he is involved in the needs of the nation, and second he gets whatever he wants from the people. Getting his wants from the people, also demonstrates the weak position of the king, as he is totally reliant on the people. Similarly the heart serves the needs of the body, and as the Zohar says, "The heart is tender and weak," because it has no function of its own. This is why the king is called the heart of the entire congregation of Israel.

The nassi is the head of the Jewish people, the brain. The nassi's job is to be an impartial arbiter of Torah law, he directs the entire nation in Hashem's ways. Just as the brain directs the entire body. Different than the king, the nassi is not totally reliant on the people. Yes, he gets a salary from the people, but he is getting paid to work, just like any person who holds a public office. Similarly the brain directs the entire body, but it also has a function of its own, to think and impartially scrutinize ideas. It gets nourished from the heart just like any other organ does.

Now we can understand why a king is not called the brain, that is the job of the nassi.

Some of the laws pertaining to the king and the nassi.

- A nassi may forgo his honor, a king may not.
- A king must rise out of respect when the Sanhedrin or Torah scholars enter before him.
- A king doesn't make laws (other than those necessary for the immediate needs of the nation), but he enforces the laws handed down by the Sanhedrin.
- A king isn't given the position of Head of the Sanhedrin.

However, two kings of Israel have both titles, nassi and melech. The first was Moshe, our first redeemer. He was a king, as it says, "And there was a king in Yeshurun (AKA Israel)," which refers to Moshe. He took care of the Jewish nation in the desert, just as a king was meant to. He was also the nassi, head of the Sanhedrin, the primary teacher of Torah to the Jewish people.

The second will be Moshiach, our final redeemer, who will be our king and nassi, he will teach us new insights in Torah that will take us to spiritual heights, beyond anything we could imagine.

In Kabbalistic and Chassidic teaching, the cognitive abilities are connected to the brain and the emotions are connected to the heart.

The brain is above the body, it is not intermingled with the organs of the body. This is because, to be impartial when thinking, you need to be separate or above feelings, if you want to come to the a true conclusion. Because your feelings will skew your thinking. The same is true about a nassi, he is above the nation, he needs to be able to determine the true Torah law, and he can't let his feelings get in the way.

On the other hand, the heart is inside the body, among other organs, because emotions are connected to your feelings. The same is true about a king, he needs to be among the nation, he needs

to be able to feel for them, so he can properly serve them.

Each of us is king and nassi over ourselves, our families and our surroundings. It is very important to know when to be a nassi and when to be a king. When you are learning Torah or you have a question in halacha, you need to be the nassi, to follow what is true and right. But when it comes to your welfare and the welfare of your family and friends, you need to be the king. You need to feel for them, and provide for them accordingly. Of course within the boundaries of halacha.

May our efforts to lead a Torah based life, hasten the coming of Moshiach, who will be our king and our Nassi. May it happen soon.

My Mother's Perspective

This week's Haftora is the fourth Haftora of consoling. First, Nachamu Nachamu, the consoling through prophets, but that is not enough, we want the real thing, and so now Hashem himself is doing the consoling.

The Haftora begins, "It is I, it is I, Who consoles you." The Midrash on this verse says, "It is the way of a father to be compassionate..., and it is the way of a mother to console..., Hashem says, 'I will do (both) that of the father and that of the mother.'" In other words, the double expression of "It is I, it is I," means, that Hashem will be compassionate and He will also console us.

What is the difference between compassion (rachamim), and consoling (nechama)? How will these two be expressed when Moshiach will come?

Both compassion and consoling are dealing with a painful situation. The difference is, that compassion is dealing with the pain, fixing the problem so that it ceases to exist. With consoling, the issue remains, however, you are comforted, finding a way to cope with the pain.

The same is when Moshiach will come. First, there will be consoling, as we will intellectually understand that the suffering wasn't in vain. But then the revelation will increase, bringing the resurrection of the dead, and we won't need consoling anymore. For starters, we will be reunited with our loved ones, and even more, we will begin to see the world from Hashem's perspective. We will see how everything we went through was good. In other words, the pain and suffering will not only cease to exist, it will be as if it was never there to begin with.

This is the difference between our perspective, seeing things from below, and Hashem's perspective, seeing things from above. From above everything is perfect, from below things can be perceived as flawed. For example, gazing out at a beautiful expanse, you are taken by the breathtaking scene, it is perfect and you don't want to leave. However, when you take a walk through the beautiful expanse, you begin to see flaws.

Now, if you think about it, these flaws are part of what makes the expanse so beautiful. Then, perhaps they are not flaws at all, just perceived flaws, which are truly perfection.

When Moshiach comes we will see how everything is truly perfect. But you don't have to wait for Moshiach to come to take on this perspective. The more you learn about Hashem, the more you become in tune with His view of things. This is why great Tzadikim remain happy through poverty and suffering. They are so aligned with Hashem, they don't perceive the bad at all, from their perspective everything is perfect.

We too can take advantage of this way of thinking. When going through a difficult time, when Hashem hands you difficulties, you could see it as flaws and bad, or you can choose to see it from Hashem's perspective, that this too is perfect and good.

This is a lesson I learned from my mother. Growing up with my older brother Shalom, a special needs boy, she never treated him as anything less than perfect. It was not easy and is still not easy, but she

sees him as the gift from Hashem that he is, and understands that Hashem wanted her to mother him, in the way that only she can.

May Hashem send Moshiach already, we are ready for the consoling, the compassion and the perfection. May it happen soon.

Dedicated to my beautiful and wonderful mother, whose birthday was this week. May she be blessed with many happy years to come.

You Are Royalty

In this week's Parsha, Shoftim, we read about the Mitzvah of appointing a king.

One of the laws a king must follow is that he have two copies of the Torah scroll made for him. One to be placed in his treasury, and the other should accompany him constantly "and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear Hashem his G-d, to keep all the words of this Torah..."

Isn't one Torah enough, why did a king need two? What point is there in having one Torah kept in his treasury?

To be a king means to wield great power. Whereas every Jew is obligated to write a Torah, a king must write two. This act is an extra measure and different from other laws pertaining to kings, as it doesn't make sense. The king goes through this experience merely for its humbling effect. This Torah is put in his treasury or lit. Beis gnazav, his hidden place, a place the king goes to when important decisions need to be made. Going to war, taxes, major projects, etc. Seeing his Torah there (and possibly the Torahs of the kings before him) is a strong reminder, that while the great power to make these decisions are in his hands, he should be humbled and bend to Hashem's will when making them.

We are all consider kings and queens, as Hashem empowers us to make decisions that affect our

"kingdoms" big or small. Yourself, your family, your wealth, your treatment of others, etc. You May be learning from the outside Torah, yet you must write it in the deepest recesses of your being. So that when making important decisions you will bend to Hashem's will.

Royalty fails in arrogance and succeeds in humility. A Jew is royalty, in dress, in speech, in thoughts and action.

Now, in month of Elul, the King of kings, is open to all of us. Get close to Hashem now, go out to greet Him. He, in turn, will grant you a happy and sweet New Year.

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Closer To Hashem Closer To Your Spouse

The month of Elul always begins around parshas Shoftim. Which speaks of appointing judges, appointing a king and cities of refuge.

As there are no coincidences, we must ask: What lesson can we learn here?

Now is the time to get closer to Hashem. Not physically, but mentally and spiritually.

Shoftim means judges. Now is the time to take an account of the past year. To judge yourself and see if you have used your abilities to the fullest to fulfill Hashem's will. Knowing where you stand is a great motivator. This is dealing with the past.

"Appoint a king over yourself." Excepting Hashem as your King will move you to want to do His will, strengthening your commitment to Him. This is dealing with the future.

The month of Elul is a "sanctuary city" in time. The idea of a sanctuary city is a place to go for atonement. It's an open opportunity to get closer to Hashem as His arms are open to forgive us.

Hashem, our King, is in the field. He is smiling and he grants good to us all. All we need to do is go out and meet him. This is a great opportunity, don't waste it.

On a personal level. Many of us are in relationships that just seem to be on auto pilot. We don't even realize that our significant other is hurt by this. We think all is fine.

If you think everything is fine then you need to follow the next steps.

Ask yourself. When was the last time you sat together and talked a about what is important? Take an account of your relationship. This is dealing with the past.

Recognize the other in the relationship. Ask. What is his/her needs? If you can't figure out on your own, ask the him/her to tell you or to write it down. Strengthen your commitment to each other. This is dealing with the future.

Finally, don't be afraid to go down this road, because bettering your relationship is something you both want. Your significant other will be more than glad to work with you to better your relationship.

Just imagine coming to shul this Rosh Hashana, knowing that you are one with Hashem and one with your spouse. What a way to start the year.