

# SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



## Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 24

*Shoftim, Sicha 3*

### The Talmud:

Rabbi Yochanan said as follows: What is the meaning of that which is written: "For man is a tree of the field" (Devarim 20:19)? And is man actually a tree of the field?

Rather, it is because it is written earlier in the same verse: "You may eat of them but you may not cut them down," and it is written in the next verse: "Them you may destroy and cut down" (Ibid 20:20). This indicates that there are certain trees which may be cut down, while others may not be destroyed. How so? If a Torah scholar is worthy: "You may eat of them but you may not cut them down," but if he is not worthy: "He you may destroy and cut down." (*Taanis 7a*)

### The Question:

The Talmud's question, "is man actually a tree of the field," assumes that the verse means to say that a tree of the field is synonymous with the essence of humankind, and not just that a tree is a

metaphor for one aspect of human beings. If the Talmud did understand the verse as a limited metaphor, then there would be no question, it is easy to find several metaphorical equations between people and trees. But if this is true, then how does the Talmud's answer satisfy the question? The answer compares trees to the fittingness of teachers of Torah, how does that express the essential bond between people and trees?

### The Explanation:

A tree is unique in that even though it can grow to towering heights, it remains rooted to its source of life in the earth. Its connection to its birthplace is continuous. An animal, on the other hand, roams the earth, it is not bound to one place.

The human being contains elements of all life forms. In its intellect, it resembles an animal. Just like an animal is rootless and can migrate to another location, so, too, the intellect is not bound to a single conclusion and can take an opposing perspective. The mind is free to roam, like the animal. But human emotion resembles a tree. A tree

begins life as a mere sapling, then attains great height and strength, yet always remains rooted to its birthplace. Only with tremendous difficulty can a tree be uprooted and planted elsewhere. So, too, we are born with immature emotion, but with time our emotions grow to attain maturity, depth, and strength. Yet for all its growth, our emotional composition remains remarkably consistent, rooted to who we are. A kind person remains essentially kind, she only grows in her capacity to exercise her kindness wisely.

Intellect is not a reflection of who we truly are, it can travel widely, but does not tell us our essence. Our emotions, however, are deeply bound with our essence.

This is why the Talmud understands the verse to be saying that humankind is a tree of the field. Because the essence of who we are is best reflected in the tree's expansive growth and rootedness.

Thus the lesson drawn from the tree is what kind of scholar it is proper to receive from. If a scholar is a mere intellectual, but not one whose essential emotions are matured and aligned with her spiritual understanding, he is an improper teacher.

Only someone who has mastered their "tree-like" self, their emotional equilibrium, can be a proper teacher.

### **Emotion of the Nation:**

This understanding of emotion also explains our relationship with the founding fathers of the Jewish nation. We are said to inherit the primary emotional attributes of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov — love, severity, and compassion, but not their intellectual accomplishments. The essence of a person is their emotional makeup, not their intellect. Therefore, what is passed on in inheritance to us is their essential emotions.

### **The Lesson:**

Torah is the source of a Jew's life. Therefore, even when we go out into the world to work with the material reality, we must remain openly connected to the source of our life, the Torah. As for the students, they must know that intellectual accomplishment is not the ultimate objective, for the intellect is subject to change. Rather, the student must ensure that his learning affects his emotions, for only is the Torah etched in the soul of a person.

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