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Make like a tree

Our character is often best revealed by how we respond to the world around us. Intelligence, talent, and skill are valuable traits, but they do not necessarily make us kind, generous, or truly refined. True fulfillment is not defined by what we achieve for ourselves, but by our ability to rise above self-interest and make meaningful contributions to others. This concept can be illustrated by observing fruit-bearing trees, which provide nourishment to others at their own expense. In contrast, barren trees, though impressive in stature and capable of offering shade, contribute little of their own substance.

Fruit-bearing trees, deeply rooted and continuously giving, serve as a powerful metaphor for how we should live our lives. These trees teach us the importance of staying connected to our roots while generously sharing with the world. They remind us that real greatness is not about self-preservation or mere existence but about offering what we have to others, even if it costs us something.

Just as a fruit tree does not hold back its produce, we too are called to give of ourselves freely. The tree's generosity is not an act of sacrifice from weakness but a natural and essential expression of its purpose. The tree remains deeply rooted, drawing sustenance from the earth while nourishing others. This balance of receiving and giving reflects a profound truth about our own lives: we are meant to draw from our roots—our values, traditions, and inner resources—and transform that into something that benefits the wider world.

As Jews, we are unique in that we have the freedom to choose how we use our gifts. Some may possess great intelligence or talent, yet they focus only on personal achievements or self-promotion. While impressive, this self-centered approach resembles the barren tree—grand in appearance but lacking in true substance. In contrast, those who are like fruit trees are consistently giving, using their talents, time, and energy to nurture others, even when it costs them. This selfless contribution is what defines true greatness.

When seeking guidance or inspiration, it is essential to look to those who not only possess talent and intelligence but also live lives of service. True leaders are like fruit trees; they stay connected to their roots, constantly drawing strength and wisdom from their core values. They do not simply stand tall and command respect—they bear fruit that sustains those around them. These leaders do not just offer shade in the form of temporary comfort; they make sacrifices, offer guidance, and invest in others, often at their own expense.

Great leaders recognize that their talents and resources are not meant solely for their personal gain. They see their gifts as tools to uplift and empower those around them. Just as the fruit tree's produce is not for itself, these leaders understand that their achievements are most valuable when shared. By choosing leaders who embody the qualities of the fruit tree—rootedness, generosity, and selfless giving—we align ourselves with values that truly matter.

In a world that often emphasizes personal success and outward accomplishments, it's easy to lose sight of the importance of staying grounded and living a life of generosity. But just as a tree cannot bear fruit without its roots, we cannot thrive without being deeply connected to our values, faith, and community. Our roots give us strength, purpose, and the capacity to give to others without depleting ourselves.

Living like a fruit tree means embracing a life of purpose and generosity. It means continually drawing strength from our roots while sharing what we have with those around us. By adopting this model, we not only find personal fulfillment but also become sources of nourishment and inspiration for others.

Ultimately, being like the fruit tree is not just a lifestyle choice; it is a calling. It is a call to move beyond self-absorption, to connect deeply with our roots, and to live lives of continuous giving. In doing so, we not only enrich the world but also reach our highest potential.