

# Shoftim: Emotions — A Tree of the Field

 Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson  
From the Sichos in English Collection

In the Torah portion *Shoftim* we are commanded to treat trees with respect, for “Man is a tree of the field.”<sup>1</sup> What is the resemblance between the loftiest creature and lowly vegetation?

The special quality of plants and trees lies in their attachment to the earth, the source from whence they derive their existence and nourishment. This is particularly true with regard to trees. Other plant life, such as grain, vegetables, etc., do not exist in such a continually attached state, for they soon wither and die. The fact that trees are able to withstand winter’s frosts and summer’s heat indicates that they have a particularly strong attachment to the earth, an attachment that enables them to endure difficult times and continue to bear fruit.

Man is a microcosm;<sup>2</sup> just as the world as a whole is composed of inanimate matter, vegetable matter, animals and men, so too are these qualities to be found within each and every individual.

A person’s emotive traits are likened to vegetation,<sup>3</sup> for they embody growth and development. And although intelligence grows as well, intellect also has an “animal” aspect in that it constantly undergoes movement and change, similar to an animal’s ability to roam. Further, man’s emotive traits tend to be self-limiting — a kind person is inevitably gentle, a severe person will almost always deal with others in a stern manner. For this reason too, the emotive traits are likened to vegetation.

Comprehension, however, understands things as they truly are, not as the person wishes them to be. The conclusions drawn from a concept will vary according to the concept itself, leading sometimes to kindness and sometimes to severity.

Just as in the macrocosm, vegetation is unique in its constant unification with its source, so too within man, the emotive powers are always attached to a person’s essence. This also explains why emotional traits and tendencies are so powerful, and why it is so very difficult for a kind person to become severe, etc.

By likening man to “a tree in the field,” the Torah is in effect telling us that the true test of an individual is not so much his intellectual qualities but his emotional ones; it is they that take the measure of the man.<sup>4</sup>

It follows that man’s labor and toil with regard to self-improvement is to be directed more towards refining his emotional traits than towards refining his mind;<sup>5</sup> perfecting and polishing one’s emotive character has the greatest impact on a person’s essence.

In fact, refining one’s emotive traits is deemed to be so important that intellectual comprehension is not considered complete if it does not affect one’s emotions — “Know this day and take [this knowledge] unto your heart.”<sup>6</sup>

Just as this is so with regard to each individual, so too regarding the Jewish people as a whole:

All Jews are descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and as such are constantly attached to them and their qualities. The main qualities of the Patriarchs lay not so much in matters of intellect as in emotion,<sup>7</sup> for Avraham epitomized kindness and love, Yitzchak severity and fear, Yaakov mercy and beauty — the three traits that encompass the emotional spectrum.<sup>8</sup>

These sterling qualities — the “trees of the field” — are the birthright of each and every Jew. They must merely be revealed, refined and developed to the greatest possible extent.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. XXIV, pp. 115-119.

## FOOTNOTES

1. *Devarim* 20:19.
2. *Tanchuma, Pikudei* 3. See also *Avos d'Reb Nasan* ch. 31:3.
3. *Torah Or* 4a.
4. See *Hemshech Te'erav III* , p. 1221.
5. See *Ma'amarim* titled *Al Ta'atzar* p. 6ff, *Ain HaKadosh Baruch Hu Ba* 5685; *VaYisa Aharon* 5694.
6. *Devarim* 4:39.
7. See *Torah Or* , beginning of Torah portion *Va'eira*. See also *Tanya* ch. 18.
8. See *Tanya* ch. 3; *Torah Or* 1b.

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