

INTRODUCTION TO DERECH CHAIM, PART 2

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

Last week we ended with the question of why Torah is represented by a tree, and derech erez (proper worldly conduct) by a path.

A tree is a plant which is firmly and deeply rooted in the ground, resistant to uprooting even by strong winds. The Torah parallels this, being strongly rooted in the Divine reality, and all the forces of the world are incapable of detaching it from its source. Despite all the decrees and persecutions over many generations of history, no one has been successful at uprooting the Torah.

The Torah is referred to as an "etz CHAIM," (in the previously cited Midrash, as well as in the verse in Psalms Ch. "Etz Chaim hee lamachazikim bah...") a living tree. For the Torah -- the manifestation of the will of G-d -- is inherently eternal, and not something which ceases or dissipates over time, the way material things do. Something with no cessation is called "chaim", living, such as an underground spring ("mayim chaim"), since it flows unceasingly. This is in contrast to man, who is "chai", merely alive, and when the life which is given to him ceases, he dies, since he has no self-generative powers. G-d is called "Elokim Chaim", since He is the reality of self-generating, eternal life. The Torah, too, has self- generative powers, and therefore has no dissipation or cessation.

These two words, "Etz Chaim", communicate that the Torah can't be uprooted by external forces (etz), and that it is immune from internal dissipation or cessation (chaim).

What does "Derech Eretz" have to do with a path? A "derech" implies a starting point, a desired end point, and each connected step along the the way leading one to that end point. If one deviates from moving towards the desired goal, if one's steps are not connected to each other, following the necessary route to bring him to where he is going, then that person is off the path.

(The search for a "derech" in Judaism is rooted in this concept. One has to behave in an integrated way, where each of one's activities, one's steps, are related to bringing one to a desired end. A person is said to have "no derech" when his actions are fragmented, disconnected, one time seeming to lead to one set of goals, another time leading to a different set of goals.)

Reproofs of discipline are restrictive to the materialistic side of man, steering him away from being controlled by his animal drives, a manifestation of his physical nature, rooted in his being composed of "matter." (Quantam mechanics has shown that it is inherent in the nature of matter that it is in a state of constant deterioration, leading to its ultimate disintegration.) Discipline is the path leading

one to proper worldly behavior. It is this discipline, enabling man to control the physical and materialistic drives of his body that distances him from the deterioration and ultimate death inherent in everything which is material. . Following the path dictated by physicality, which leads to death, is a crooked path in comparison with a disciplined path which enables man to transcend the control of his physical dimension. "Derech eretz," a disciplined way of behavior, is the path leading to life and eternity, a true "Derch Chaim".

(Tr. Brachot 5a) Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai teaches "G-d gave the Jewish people three presents, and each of them was only given accompanied with "yisurim" (difficulty). The three presents are Torah, the Land of Israel, and The World to Come. 1) Torah, as it is written (Psalms 94:12) 'Forward strides the man who is disciplined by G-d (and who is taught His Torah)'. 2) The Land of Israel as it is written (Deut. 8:5,7) 'You should know with your heart that as a man disciplines his son, G-d disciplines you', followed by 'For G-d brings you into a good land (Israel)'. 3) The World to Come, as it is written (Prov. 6:23) 'For a Mitzvah is a lamp, and Torah is light, and reproofs of discipline are the way of life.'"

The reason why these things were given specifically accompanied with discipline is that each of these things is sanctified and elevated. The Land of Israel is holy and special, having in it more wisdom and spirituality than any other land, as evidenced by the fact that "the atmosphere in Israel makes one wise" (Tr. Baba Batra 158b), as well as the occurrence of prophecy taking place only in Israel. Torah as purely Divine wisdom, is not rooted in the physical (while human intellectual disciplines are). And the World to Come is particularly sanctified and elevated, having no eating, drinking, nor any physical activity whatsoever.

(There is a progression from something which is essentially a material thing, the land of Israel, which has a spiritual dimension; to the Torah, which requires a material world for its performance and is studied by human beings, yet it is in essence a spiritual reality; through Olam HaBah, which has no material dimension whatsoever, being purely transcendent and spiritual.)

It is for this reason that these three are all called "matanot," gifts. A gift is something given to a person to which he doesn't have access on his own, and which doesn't emanate from within him. Rather it is given to him from a completely independent source. Since man exists in a physical body, and these three things are Divine and holy, transcending the physical, there is no way they can develop from within man. They must be GIVEN to man from an outside source, by G-d. And it requires discipline and limits in relation to the physical dimension of man to enable man to assimilate these holy and divine presents. (The Maharal elaborates on this point in Netiv HaYesurim Ch.2. This gives us an insight into the difficulty constantly encountered by people trying to make Aliya. For Eretz Yisrael to properly absorb a Jew, and for a Jew to properly absorb the special nature of Eretz Yisrael, the person's relationship to Israel can't be built on a purely materialistic pursuit. People coming to Israel to raise their standard of living [!! :-)] usually don't make it. This despite the fact that Jews were always at the forefront of building healthy and strong economies in nearly every society in which they found themselves. It appears that the Jewish relationship with Israel is not purely an

economic and physical one. Even the early settlers who drained swamps, fought malaria, and built the land up on a physical and agricultural level, did so with tremendous "yisurim," discipline and physical suffering. It can certainly be said that they transcended their physical natures in their quest to acquire a portion in the Land of Israel.)

The class is taught by [Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky](#), Dean of [Darche Noam Institutions](#), Yeshivat Darche Noam/Shapell's and Midreshet Rachel for Women.
