

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

It's the trees; it's always been the trees. Nature speaks to each of us in a language that is unique to our souls. Seeing its wonders, each one of us perceives it differently. I love walking in snow-filled mountains and can do so for hours, but most of all I adore gazing and feeling the grandeur of the trees.

Last week found me in the middle of a Swiss forest. The snow was deep, not a bit of earth could be seen. All around me were these huge tall pine trees, each one wearing a cloak of heavy snow. There was a stream running below, and all about were the huge mountains with their awesome white presence. I was in a state of sheer tranquillity - no noise, no distractions, just the soft sound of the water and the sight of those trees. I began to daydream and became almost intoxicated with one of the stately pines that stood by the stream.

It was huge, and its branches stood wide and proud. The whole of the tree was laden with the snow, which it bore with great dignity.

"How old you must be, my friend," thought I (I know, it's a queer fellow who talks to trees, but there you are). *"How many wonders and changes you must have witnessed in the many years since you were nothing but a small acorn. Tell me, dear friend, how do you survive?"*

The tree stood as if hearing nothing, and then, in answer, it shrugged itself with the wind and allowed some of the snow to fall from its branches.

"Oh," says I, *"that's it. You let some of the weight fall away, and that allows you to continue. But, if that's the case, what happens to those around you? That falling snow from your branches can damage others, you know."*

The tree sighs, as if to say that it is all too aware of life's dangers.

My mind floats further, for that tree is so much like us. It survives because it has deep roots of shared responsibility. Its branches are like our young, gaining strength from the trunk that is its parents, growing further yet seeking to remain nourished from its home. Sometimes the young branches carry huge amounts of weighty snow, but the youngster can shrug it all off as long as it remains attached to its roots.

Yes, there are times when things go wrong. All is not perfect in the forest community. Branches become diseased and fall away and the loss leaves a gaping wound in the parent, but it can heal. If

not, then it too will die. Slewning off one's problems must be done with care; otherwise everyone around your vicinity will suffer.

But what if the original roots are not solid, not grown with shared respect and love? Well, then the tree of life becomes stunted or crooked, and its branches find carrying life's burden all the more difficult.

The strong proud tree is the one that grows with its roots deep, with all its parts sharing in equal care. This is the tree that will survive; this is the one whose branches will prosper. Life throws much turbulence our way, many ill winds rip at our trunks, but we can flourish when we share the burdens with equal responsibilities.

Many trees in our Jewish forest find themselves attacked from the outside. The environment spews out many poisons, and our young are so vulnerable. But the worst disease of all is the one that corrupts our roots - the first joint efforts of growth taken by each set of newly married young. It is then that so much of the future begins, and that is where strength will be shown. If we have a strong beginning of mutual understanding then the snows of future storms will be shrugged off from our bows, and they will melt into the sweet waters of the streams that flow around us. And those streams will go further. They will join the river and certainly flow to the sea - a sea that contains all of life's woes and is watched over with care by Hashem. I walked further, bemused by my conversation with my new friend Reb Tree, and as I walked I thought about another facet to all this.

Where does the little acorn get the chutzpa to start to sprout? Why does it bother? After all, it's going to be such a dangerous place, that forest, full of so much snow. But then again, the acorn knows that it has a long history, for there have been so many acorns before it, and they too wondered if it was all worthwhile. They looked at the heritage that came before them and knew that it was a special unique opportunity, one that could bring great light to the world.

There are times when the Jewish family may well wonder if it is all worthwhile. Look at all the problems we face, all the pollutants we must weather. Should we bother to try? Do we have the strength? Then we look to our past, to the wonders that Hashem has shown us, and we know, we just know, that we can grow and be strong. We each live in the merit of the miracles that Hashem has shown our ancestors, and in these miracles we can find understanding and perseverance.

In this kapitel we see David extolling those groundbreaking miracles. We should always be mindful of them and nourish our souls with their merit. When we internalize these wonders, then we realize that anything is possible. Our roots have grown in soil enriched with Hashem's mercies, and with His Torah we can overcome any storm.

Haazinu ami Torasi..., "Give ear, my people, to my Torah; incline your ear to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable, I will utter riddles concerning days of old." The Torah is so very deep and wondrous. There is so much we can't fathom; rather, Hashem tells us His will through stories and parables so we can grasp a bit with our limited understanding. Even then we are faced with

many riddles, questions that tease our minds, but no matter, for when what is today becomes the "days of old," then all will be understood.

Lo nechached mibeneihem..., "We will not withhold from their children, even to the last generation we will relate the praises of Hashem His might and His wonders that He has done." When our children know from whence they come, then they will act in the proper manner. Jewish identity is rooted in the acceptance that we are the children of Yaakov, a people who saw great deeds and accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Too often, we don't realize how much this self-knowledge can mean to our young. When things are difficult we should be able to look back and know that our ancestors saw great things, and that this merit is ours as well.

Veyasimu beElokim kislam..., "And they will put their hope in Hashem and not forget the deeds of the Alm-ghty, and His commandments they will keep." The trees may be buffeted by ill winds, but only trees with weak roots will topple. The Torah Yid has nourished his roots with Hashem's commandments and therefore will withstand any eventuality.

The kapitel goes on to describe what has happened in our past, both the times we heeded Hashem's word, and tragically, the bitter times when we didn't. The children of Israel are tied to Hashem with events that have been the making of our very essence. We have seen what happens when we loosen those bonds, and what strength we have when we remain true.

Yes, those trees whisper so very much to one's heart. They reach up to the very heavens while they carry the snows of this world. They never give up or despair, and neither should we, for our snows are the stuff of that heaven.

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