

A MOST BEAUTIFUL ORCHARD

by Rabbi Label Lam

If you will go in My statutes and My commandments you will keep and you will perform them I will give your rain their time and the earth will give its produce and the tree of the field its fruit... (Vayikra 26:3-4)

That you should toil in Torah study (Rashi)

If you do not listen to me and you do not do all these commandments...(Vayikra 26:14) To toil in Torah study (Rashi)

The Torah pulls no punches. Why should we? Toiling in Torah or not makes us or breaks us. How does it work? What's the dynamic?

Rabbi Yaakov said: One who walks on the road while reviewing (a Torah lesson) and he interrupts his review and exclaims, "How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!" -Scripture considers it as if he bears guilt for his soul. (Mishne Avos 3:9)

What's the great crime involved with taking the time to admire the great works of The Creator? The Chovos HaLevavos devotes a large segment of his classic work on the need to research the workings of the world to appreciate the kindness and the genius of The Creator. The Rambam says that's the way to come to appropriate fear and love of The Almighty. So?

Bride and groom were shmoozing on the phone when the groom sensed his bride was no longer there listening. He became alarmed, wondering what had happened to her. After many minutes she returned to the "dangling conversation" apologetically. Assuring her "husband to be" that she was safe, she explained that she had been staring at the diamond in her engagement ring and that she had become so bedazzling by its beauty that she just let the phone go.

The groom expressed his deep disappointment. She couldn't imagine what she had done so wrong. This was the ring that he had given her. She assumed he would be flattered. He explained, "The ring I gave you to remind you of me and as a symbol of my love for you when I am not there. When I am here talking with you how can you allow the ring to distract you?" It's much like mother who responded to an admiring compliment, "What a cute baby!" - "If you think the baby's cute, you should see the pictures!"

The Mishne describes someone who interrupts the process of his learning Torah to declare his admiration for a tree or a plowed field. In the process of Torah learning we are actually listening to and actively engaged in a conversation with The Almighty. The stunning quality of the creation is like

that diamond that serves to awaken within us a sense of love and awe. We understand that beauty is a stimulant not a substitute for the essential relationship.

A question continually reoccurred as we took a breathtaking ride upstate New York and through to Montreal a few weeks ago. The trees and the plowed fields inspired us all along the way. Why does the Mishne focus on these two items the "tree" and the "plowed field"? What extra message is implied by these two specific items?

A tree stands as a marvelous example of what The Creator can do. After all "only G-d can make a tree"! From that little computer chip-like seed exits such luscious results all called magically from that dark earth. Surprise! Inside each fruit are the architectural plans for many more trees. It's a wondrous piece of work.

A plowed field represents what a man can make of himself. The Maharal says that humanity was called "Adam from "earth" to point out the purity of his potential. If cleared and plowed systematically a plot of land can be enormously productive. If left to chaotic forces however, through benign neglect, the mind of a man becomes more and more crowded with weeds.

What's wrong with this picture? One gazes upon a tree and then a plowed field. Think! Think potential! What if we wed what The Almighty has to offer with the best of what a man can be? How can one fail to envision an orchard?

Such is the subtle reminder to the one having disconnected his self from the process to become a spectator rather than a player to get back to business. Through the toil of sowing seeds of wisdom within the yet pure soil, the earth of even the human heart can be transformed into a most beautiful orchard.

Text Copyright © 2003 Rabbi Label Lam and **Project Genesis, Inc.**
