

TU B'SHVAT: THE FAMILY TREE

PARENT CHILD LEARNING – FEBRUARY 2017

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE TREE ABOUT OUR LIVES?

The Torah teaches us "Man is a tree of the field". What is common between a person and trees?

Look at the tree. It has a sturdy stem, and branches spreading in all directions. It's hard to believe, but it all started from one small seed. There is so much **potential** in that small seed: with just a small investment in the seed, you get a strong tree, branches, and fruit. A child is like a seed; an adult is a tree. When you look at the ground, look for the roots of the tree: Where are they? Do they exist? Yes, they exist. Without them, the tree would not last! A light wind would make it fall.

When we are connected to strong roots, then we can be stable. Roots give a tree strength even when there is a lot of wind. Without the roots, even a small breeze or any sort of outside pressure could knock the tree down, but as long as the tree is connected to its roots and gets proper nourishment, the tree will be strong and keep growing.

Not only does the tree have roots, but it also has many branches. The tree keeps growing, adding branches and leaves. In the same way, we have to make sure we are connected to our roots, our family history, our Avot (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov,) and Imahot (Sara, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah), while we also have to keep growing and extending our branches, by doing good deeds, Mitzvot, and acting nicely to others.

(BeitChabad.com; "כי האדם עץ השדה")

WHAT TWO THINGS ABOUT THE TREE CAN BE COMPARED TO PEOPLE? HOW?

THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE TREE

Explaining the above Passuk- "Man is like a tree in the field"- Rabbi Samson Rephael Hirsch explains that the qualities and attributes of a tree are expressed through its fruits. In the same way, parents combine their strengths in order to create their children, who hopefully express the best qualities of the parents.

WHAT'S SOMETHING YOUR PARENTS DO WELL? WHAT'S SOMETHING YOU DO WELL?

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DETAILS, DETAILS

"Avraham passed through the land, until the place of Sh'chem."

Is this detail necessary? Why is this important to us?

The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman) says that in all of the parshiyot about Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, we see the concept of "**Ma'aseh Avot Siman L'Banim**"- everything that happened to our forefathers is a sign for their children and descendants. Therefore, the Torah tells us a lot of details in their stories that you might think are extra or don't have a purpose, but really they are there to teach us about the future. The future generations will go through similar challenges and struggles, and they will be able to learn from the past and know what to do in their situations.

WHAT DOES THIS TEACH US ABOUT CONNECTING TO OUR ANCESTORS?
HOW CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTING TO OUR ROOTS?

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STORY: TOO TIRED OF APPLE PICKING!

The old man watched with a satisfied smile as the cars drove in one by one to the far side of the apple orchard. He loved this time of year when the apples were hanging red and heavy on their branches, waiting to be picked, eaten and enjoyed, and when the folks came from miles around for their yearly outing.

He saw a green SUV, and watched as parents, kids, packages, bags, and a baby stroller came tumbling out. One of the kids, a girl of around 11, caught his eye, not because of her enthusiasm but rather, her extreme lack of it.

"Apple picking. Apple picking. Every year, boring apple picking," Nancy huffed. "What's wrong with the apples we buy in the store? They're perfectly good. Why do we have to make this big trip every year for a few dumb apples?"

"Nancy, can you grab this bag please? Be careful, it has a thermos in it," said her mom.

Mrs. Krieger felt bad that her daughter was feeling so impatient and having such a rough time of it today. She had such fond memories of apple picking in this very same orchard back when she was a girl and hoped to share it with her kids. But Nancy wanted no part of it.

It was taking *forever* for her parents to get everything organized, so Nancy started wandering around the orchard a little. She just wanted to finish fast and go home to join her friends, who were at the new ice cream shop that had just opened. Free ice cream as much as you can eat, all day, and here she was, stuck surrounded by these ridiculous apples. As she was walking, suddenly she came upon a sight that looked strange to her. She went over to take a closer look.

The old man, the orchard owner, was bending down over a flat of tiny apple-tree seedlings, picking up each one lovingly and placing it gently into neatly spaced holes already dug into the ground. Nancy snorted out loud as she watched him tamp the dirt around each sapling, like they were his babies or something. The man looked up at her and smiled.

"Beautiful, aren't they?" he said.

"Maybe," replied Nancy. "But how long will it be until they're big enough to make apples?"

"Oh to really produce? About 20 years, maybe more."

"*Twenty* years! Then what are you bothering for? Don't get offended mister, but let's face it, at your age," she paused as she took in his wrinkled face, "it doesn't really look like you'll be around to enjoy them, you know?"

The man smiled warmly again. "Right you are about that, young lady. Nothing lasts forever, does it. Even so, all these apples here that everyone is picking and enjoying were planted by my father and grandfather. They cared enough back then to plant for the future. And look - with a little patience, the future came quick enough, didn't it. I hope these here saplings will provide lots of good fruit for my kids and grandkids, and whoever else might want to come and enjoy them."

Nancy was speechless. Nothing in her eleven years of life had prepared her (not counting the care and love of her parents, which she hadn't yet realized was a gift and not a given) for such a patient and unselfish outlook on life.

"Here, how'd *you* like to plant one, young lady?" the man said as he offered her one of the saplings. "Maybe one day you'll come back here and *your* kids can pick apples from 'your' tree."

Nancy took it and felt surprisingly good as she placed it into the ground.

"Oh Nancy, there you are," said her mom, walking over. "I know you're in a rush to get home, so we'll try to hurry thing as much as we can."

"No mom, it's okay," smiled the girl as she glanced at the old man, still patiently planting for the future, "I'm really happy we're spending this time together. There's no rush, after all. Don't all good things and good *times*, take time - to bear fruit?"

(Aish.com; "Family Trees: A TuB'shvat Story for Kids")

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A FAMILY TREE:

What will mine look like? How many branches will stem out from the roots and trunk that I will plant with my future family one day? And how many branches will stem off those? Even more importantly, how will we make sure that the little tree that we plant will grow into a trunk strong enough to support all of those branches?

In Florida, a hurricane or two a year is not such a crazy thing. When I was little, I used to wonder how any trees were able to make it through those violent storms, when the winds are strong enough to pull the roof off of our house. One summer a long time ago, our neighborhood did a "beautification project" and upgraded the landscaping around town. A few months later, a hurricane came through and uprooted over half of the newly planted trees. There was one type that didn't lose a single branch, though, and I asked my teacher to explain.

"Those trees have stronger roots than the other trees... they spread out wide and deep. When the wind comes, the trees with the smaller roots have less ground to hold onto, but these trees are different. These trees stay planted firmly on top of their roots. Not only that, but the wind's pushing and pulling actually makes the roots grow even faster, and it helps them become bigger and taller than the rest."

It's all about the roots. My family tree is small. With so few roots, what kind of tree will I be able to plant? Will it be strong enough to hold up in the rushing wind of life? But those questions really apply only when you look at the surface level. If you dig a little deeper into the ground, and uncover the roots that go back generations, it becomes an entirely different story. The roots get stronger, wider, and deeper as you peel back the layers that time has added. You find Holocaust survivors, Torah scholars, Jewish leaders. Further back and you find sages, Kohanim in the Beit Hamikdash, and the Jews who left Egypt with Moses. You'll find Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. *Those* are my ancestors, those are my family members, and those will be the roots of my tree. We all are part of Hashem's forest, with the very strongest of foundations, and no matter how hard the wind will blow, that unity is something that can *never* be uprooted.

(Adapted from Chabag.org: "Planting a Family Tree")

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some things we learned about the roots of the tree?
2. What do you think these parts of the tree have to do with a person, and with their family?



3. What do the branches and fruit symbolize? What are some ways we can create more "branches" or "fruits" in our lives?
4. What type of tree is the strongest? Can you think of a way we can make our "life-tree" the strongest possible?
5. **Who is part of your family tree?**

ACTIVITY:

The roots of the tree are what makes it strong and most durable- Now, we're going to demonstrate the importance of our roots, our ancestors, that make us who we are today.

(Materials: Oak Tag, Construction Paper, glue/scissors, green tissue paper and/or streamers, and any other type of crafts materials that you want- be creative! Also include foam sheets or foam shapes that can be used for the names of family members. You may also ask everyone to come with a family picture to put on somewhere.)