



**MIND AND HEART**

**H**OW DO WE THINK OF OURSELVES? AS A MIND OR AS A HEART? Or as both? And what is the relationship between them? The mind expresses the power of Reason, although it also has the ability to submit to that which is beyond Reason. The heart represents the power of emotion, of deep longing and yearning, of love and enthusiasm. Does the mind guide the heart or does the heart control the mind? Where should our focus be?

A verse in the Sedra<sup>1</sup> helps us consider this question. It is in an unexpected context: laws about ancient methods of warfare, yet relating to modern concepts of ecology and preservation of nature. When a Jewish army is besieging an enemy city, the Torah forbids the destruction of the fruit-bearing trees around the city. The verse asks rhetorically “for is a tree of the field a man, who can escape from you into the besieged city?”<sup>2</sup>. In other words, the tree is defenceless - so do not destroy it.

This is interesting in itself. However, the Sages tell us “there are seventy faces to Torah”<sup>3</sup>, and part of this verse can be read in a different way, not as a question, but as a statement: “a man is a tree of the field”. It is telling us something about people: we are compared to trees.

There are a number of discussions of this idea. For example, people are compared to trees in terms of the care which is needed to nurture them, the theme of education. Great care is needed in order to ensure that a sapling grows properly, and similar dedicated attention is

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required to help a young person grow in a healthy and balanced way. For both, an apparently minor detail at an early stage can have a very great effect later.

Another approach to the comparison of a person to a tree considers the question of the different aspects of a person's being: their mind and their heart.

In the imagery of the Jewish mystical tradition the "tree" aspect of a person expresses his or her emotional dimension. The tree flourishes or withers, it produces leaves, blossoms and fruit or sheds them. This is similar to the changing emotional aspect of a person, their love, awe, yearning, excitement: the heart. By contrast the mind represents stability.

Now the question is asked: why should the verse in the Sedra compare a person to a tree, emphasising their emotional aspect? Surely their mind and their Reason are far more important? Surely it is the power of the mind which distinguishes humanity from all other creatures?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the reason for focusing on the "tree" aspect of the person, the heart and the emotions, is because the purpose of our wonderful human mind is to guide and sometimes to transform our inner emotional life. The mind is a subtle and delicate instrument which has the power to bring out the best and the most wholesome potential which is in our heart. The root of the emotions reaches higher than Reason, and can bond with the Divine on a level which the mind alone cannot reach.

True, unbridled emotions can be very problematic in the life of an individual. Precisely for this reason the guidance of the mind and Reason is essential. Yet when our emotions receive this guidance, they have the power to reach exalted summits of holiness. The Torah is emphasising that our real spiritual work concerns not just the wisdom of the mind, but the application of the mind to the heart. This affects the way the person actually feels and behaves in the daily world, and also reaches towards G-d, beyond Reason. Through this we fulfil our true potential as a human being<sup>3</sup>.

1. Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9. 2. Deut.20:19. 3. Bamidbar Rabbah 13:15. 4. Based freely on *Likkutei Sichot* vol.4 pp.1116-7.

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SEDRA SHOFTIM

**PLAYING BY THE RULES**

Just like a pro, Shalom leaped for the ball and caught it mid-flight. With lightning speed he dodged an oncoming player and sprinted for the basket at the end of the field. With his eye on the target, he skilfully balanced the ball in one hand, steadied it with the other and aimed for the ring. The ball sailed through the air, right through the basketball hoop.

“Score!”, his team shouted and ran to congratulate him.

As his friends crowded around him with excitement, Shalom noticed a lone figure watching from the sidelines. “Who is that over there?” he asked amongst all the commotion.

“Oh, that's Yossi Green from the other class,” Kovi answered dismissively, “He wants to join but we've got full teams on both sides.”

Shalom felt his stomach turn, this just didn't feel right. “Come on Kovi, we can't leave Yossi out of the game, especially after Rabbi Stern made that new rule last week how we need to include everyone in our sport matches.”

The rest of the team began to gather round.

“Don't worry, none of us will tell Rabbi Stern, right?” Kovi insisted. He looked for some agreement from his friends but could see they weren't too sure themselves. He'd have to think of a better solution. “Hey!” his face lit up, “How about we make Yossi a referee, that way we keep our teams and he joins the game?”

“You know we don't really need a referee” Dovid pointed out  
“We stick to the rules all the time without a referee!”

“Yeah, just like when Moshiach comes!” Shalom exclaimed.

The boys raised their eyebrows in curiosity and exchanged smiles. They loved how Shalom could see a Torah connection in even the most ordinary situation.

He launched into his explanation, “Well, we learnt in this week's Sedra that when Moshe led the Jewish people, there were Shoftim - Judges who taught the Jews how to keep the rules and Shotrim - policemen - kind of like referees, who made sure they kept those rules. But when Moshiach comes, no-one will need policemen, everyone will keep the law simply because they want to!”

“Heh, so we're playing Moshiach basketball! No referees needed!”, Dovid grinned.

“Right on!”, Shalom added enthusiastically, “That's why this week's Sedra is only called Shoftim, even though it speaks about Shotrim as well. It's Hashem's way of telling us he'd rather we didn't need policemen to force us to do anything, He wants us to keep His laws just because we know they're the right thing to do!”

“I get it”, Kovi nodded smiling to himself, “It shouldn't matter whether Rabbi Stern finds out or not, we shouldn't leave anyone out of our game because that's the right way to go. You have to make sure everyone can join in!”

“Slam dunk you're right!” Shalom threw an imaginary ball at the ring.

But Kovi didn't notice, he was already half way across the court, sprinting towards Yossi Green. They didn't usually need a referee, but even so, it would be a way of having Yossi join the game. And that would be good...

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