



THE SHALOM BAYIT JOURNAL



Parashat Shoftim

What We Do Becomes Us

Understanding the Torah and the Human Experience

In the field of counseling, there are many different ways of understanding how problems develop and how change takes place. One important approach focuses on action, on what a person does and how that contributes to where they are in life.

The things we repeatedly do can strengthen certain patterns within us. Different actions can strengthen different parts of who we are. Over time, our actions can affect the way we think, the way we feel, and how we are likely to respond in the future.

The Sefer HaChinuch develops a similar idea while explaining the prohibition against breaking a bone of the Korban Pesach:

דע כי האדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו... כי אחרי הפעולות
נמשכים הלבבות

*"Know that a person is shaped by his actions... for the
heart follows our actions."*

The Chinuch recognizes that the things we do leave something behind within us. What we choose to do, especially when repeated over time, begins to shape our patterns and the kind of person we become.

*What we repeatedly do
shapes who we become.*

Much of this week's portion, Parashat Shoftim, focuses on leadership roles and systems of government across different areas of Jewish life. Toward the end of the parashah, while describing the laws of war, two pesukim turn our attention to the trees surrounding a city under siege:

כִּי תִצּוֹר אֶל־עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתִפְסָהּ
לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצָהּ לְנֹדֶחַ עָלֶיהָ גֵּרֶזֶן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ
תֹאכַל וְאֹתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת

*"When you besiege a city for many days, waging war
against it to capture it, do not destroy its tree by
swinging an axe against it, for from it you shall eat,
and you shall not cut it down."*





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The Torah continues to explain that a tree that does not produce food may be cut down when it is needed for the siege; however, fruit-bearing trees are to be treated differently.

The Sefer HaChinuch explains:

שורש המצוה ידוע, שהוא כדי ללמד נפשנו לאהוב
הטוב והתועלת ולהדבק בו, ומתוך כך תדבק בנו
הטובה ונרחיק מכל דבר רע ומכל דבר השחתה

“The root of the mitzvah is to teach our souls to love what is good and beneficial and to cling to it; through this, goodness will cling to us, and we will distance ourselves from everything bad and destructive.”

The Chinuch is explaining the deeper purpose of the mitzvah. There are times when destruction is necessary, but the Torah is teaching us not to take our actions so lightly, because each thing we do has an impact on who we are as people.

Learning to preserve what is good helps train us to remain sensitive to unnecessary destruction. Each time we choose restraint and learn to preserve what is good, we strengthen something within ourselves.

The Torah recognizes that our actions shape who we become. Perhaps that is why even in a time of war, the Torah asks us to be careful with what we destroy and what we save.

*Over time,
what we do becomes us.*



About The Shalom Bayit Journal

The Shalom Bayit Journal explores the intersection of Torah, psychology, relationships, and the human experience. Through thoughtful essays and practical reflection, the Journal seeks to make timeless wisdom meaningful and accessible for everyday life.

