

mishpatim

There was a young boy who lived in a small house with his family, on the outskirts of forest. He had played in his small yard looking at that wall of beautiful tall trees, and once he was old enough, he received permission to walk the paths of the forest he'd longed to explore.

Day after day he would finish his studies, eat and visit with his family, do his chores, and go out to walk in the forest until it was almost sunset; then he would turn around and come home- always with a feeling of contentment and joy at having taken that walk.

One day, his father said to him, "every day you go out into that forest. But the forest is the same day after day. Yes, the colors change with the seasons, as do the sounds as the birds leave and return; But basically, it's the same forest. The trees are the trees, the shrubs are the shrubs.... You may hear different sounds or see a different animal on any given day, but yesterday is no different than today.... What is it that you see?"

Well, "said the boy, "I go out there to talk to God".

"Does God talk to you?"

"Not really. God just listens."

"Well," said his father, "what is it that you want to happen? Do you want the forest to change?"

"No" said the boy, "I change. Every time I walk out there."

"If a person uncovers or digs a pit and an ox or donkey falls into it, the one responsible for the pit must pay for the damage." The same goes for a raised barrier or other hazard that protrudes in an upward direction.

Each one of us, as we walk the same paths in our lives day after day, after day; has the capacity to either dig pits and put up barriers, or pull up chairs and mugs of tea for others who cross the those paths in our daily routine. We can choose to be a negative or positive influence in the world. To- when faced with those whom we don't understand, who we see as different, the 'other', the 'enemy', choose the path of the accuser the slanderer, the one who's voice must drown out the voice of the 'other', or the one who opens the way for dialogue, understanding, acceptance, and peace.

We grownups so often become caught up in our own 'right'ness, that we fail to see that the person sitting opposite us is a human being, a soul, a neshama, who lives, loves, and is made in God's image.

Our tradition teaches that we must treat every person we meet as though he or she is the messiah, for you never know when you will come face to face with them. It is upon us to ask ourselves if we have done this. If we think back a week- two weeks- three..... Have we treated every person this way?

As each of us walks the paths of our lives, may our prayers and inner reflections help us be the change who brings, love, understanding, compassion, and peace into our world.

Shabbat shalom