

The Fable of Jotham – On Leadership and Leaders

Objectives: Examining various types of leadership, the role of a leader, and democratic rulership by studying the Fable of Jotham.

- The Story of Gideon – the Background to the fable of Jotham – Reading of Chapter 8
 1. Who are the characters?
 2. What did the nation ask for? What did Gideon answer?
 3. Why does Gideon refuse to be appointed as king?
 4. What was Gideon's "compromise"? What did he agree to do in order to help the people?
- Reading of the Fable and its Interpretation – Read Part One of Chapter 9
 1. What is the lesson? Who was being rebuked? (Democracy, belief in G-d, the seven species)
 2. Who are the characters in the fable?
 3. Why were particularly these trees chosen? (fruit trees, the seven species)
 4. Is there any significance in the order they appear?
- The Olive Tree, the Fig Tree and the Vine Tree – What is the Contribution of Each of Them?
Divide the class into three groups. Each group examines a tree aided by some source passages.
 1. What is unique about this tree? (Olive – oil, Fig – fruit, vine – wine)
 2. To what may the contribution of this tree be likened?
 Restore the Sitting Arrangement of the Entire Class and Answers are Provided.
- Questions on Leadership
 1. What is the criticism expressed in the fable and to whom is it directed?
 2. Does being on a mission contradict leadership? Does leadership necessarily corrupt?
 3. Where do we meet up with the dilemma between providing service and being on a mission to leadership?
 4. Is there criticism also towards the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine? What is it?
 5. What could aid the vine, the fig tree and the olive tree in assuming responsibility and not leaving the leadership to the thorn bush? Could a shared mode of action help?
- Read the Moral – Reading of the Second Part of Chapter 9
 1. What is the moral? Who are the characters? Who is the thorn bush? Who are the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine?
 2. On what is the criticism? And to whom is it directed? Is the criticism directed at the thorn -Abimelech or towards the trees who disagreed to assume the role?
 3. Are there similarities of this to today's reality? Who are the thorns, the olive tree, the fig and the vine of our times?
 4. Do you sometimes deliberate whether to take on a role or a mission, due to something you are good at and in middle of doing that you'd rather not stop doing? For example, you'd refuse to become part of the class team due to a club you are in, or your responsibility to your studies? What do you do in such a situation?
 5. What happens when talented people, with aptitudes and willingness to serve refrain from becoming leaders?
 6. Why do the trees agree to accept the thorn? Why do people agree to accept unfit leadership?
 7. How could the trees change the situation? What could help them continue doing what they are good at and also to take on responsibility? Perhaps they could help one another? To operate as a team?



Judges Chapter 8 – The People Ask Gideon to Rule (Background to the Fable of Jotham)

22 The Israelites said to Gideon, "Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian."

23 But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you." 24 And he said, "I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder." (It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings.) 25 They answered, "We'll be glad to give them." So they spread out a garment, and each of them threw a ring from his plunder onto it. 26 The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels, not counting the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian or the chains that were on their camels' necks. 27 Gideon made the gold into an *ephod* (type of garment), which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family. 28 Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land had peace forty years.

29 JerubBaal son of Joash went back home to live. 30 He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives. 31 And his concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelech. 32 Gideon, son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

33 No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god 34 and they did not remember G-d, their Lord, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. 35 They also failed to show any loyalty to the family of JerubBaal (that is, Gideon) in spite of all the good things he had done for Israel.





Judges Chapter 9 – Jotham's Fable

1 Abimelech, Jerubbaal's son, went to his mother's brothers in Shechem. He spoke to them and to the entire clan of the household to which his mother belonged: **2**"Ask all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which do you think is better to have ruling over you: seventy men—all of Jerubbaal's sons—or one man?' And remember that I'm your flesh and blood!"**3**So his mother's brothers spoke all these words on his behalf to all the leaders of Shechem. They decided to follow Abimelech because they said, "He's our relative."**4**They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men, who became his posse. **5**He went to his household in Ophrah and killed all his seventy brothers, Jerubbaal's sons, on a single stone. Only Jotham the youngest of Jerubbaal's sons survived, because he had hidden himself.

6Then all the leaders of Shechem and all people of Beth-Millo assembled and proceeded to make Abimelech king by the oak at the stone pillar in Shechem.

7When Jotham was told about this, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim. He raised his voice and called out, "Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, so that G-d may listen to you!

8"Once the trees went out to anoint a king over themselves. So they said to the olive tree, 'Be our king!'

9"But the olive tree replied to them, 'Should I stop producing my oil, which is how gods and humans are honored, so that I can go to sway over the trees?'

10"So the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and be king over us!'

11"The fig tree replied to them, 'Should I stop producing my sweetness and my delicious fruit, so that I can go to sway over the trees?'

12"Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and be king over us!'

13"But the vine replied to them, 'Should I stop providing my wine that makes gods and humans happy, so that I can go to sway over the trees?'

14"Finally, all the trees said to the thorn bush, 'You come and be king over us!'

15"And the thorn bush replied to the trees, 'If you're acting faithfully in anointing me king over you, come and take shelter in my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the thorn bush and burn up the cedars of Lebanon.'





Judges Chapter 9 – The Moral of Jotham's Fable

16 “So now, if you acted faithfully and innocently when you made Abimelech king, and if you’ve done right by Jerubbaal and his household, and have treated him as his actions deserve— 17 my father fought for you and risked his life to rescue you from Midian’s power, 18 but today you’ve risen up against my father’s household, killed his seventy sons on a single stone, and made Abimelech, his female servant’s son, king over the leaders of Shechem, because he’s your relative— 19 so if you’ve acted faithfully and innocently toward Jerubbaal and his household today, then be happy with Abimelech and let him be happy with you. 20 But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and burn up the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo and burn up Abimelech.”

21 Then Jotham ran away. He fled to Beer and stayed there for fear of his brother Abimelech.

The Olive Tree

8 “Once the trees went out to anoint a king over themselves. So they said to the olive tree, ‘Be our king!’

9 “But the olive tree replied to them, ‘Should I stop producing my oil, which is how gods and humans are honored, so that I can go to sway over the trees?’

Olive trees grow in the Land of Israel as a wild tree in the Galilee and the Carmel. Growing olives exists in the cultures of North Africa and southern Europe till the Middle East. Studies prove that they were first cultivated in Israel and Lebanon. The tree is green, has a long life, and bears fruit for decades. The fruit is pickled, green or black, and from ancient times oil is extracted from it. From ancient times to the present, there are production facilities (an olive press and its equipment).





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- What's special about the olive tree?
- What does the olive tree claim, prevents him from ruling? What is the oil? What does it symbolize?
- To what would you compare the contribution of the olive tree?

Why are the Children of Israel Compared to an Olive Tree?

To teach you:

Just as an olive does not eject its oil until it is pressed, so Israel do not improve their ways until they undergo afflictions. Just as an olive tree, does not shed its leaves in the summer, nor in the winter, so Israel are never invalidated, not in this world nor in the world to come.

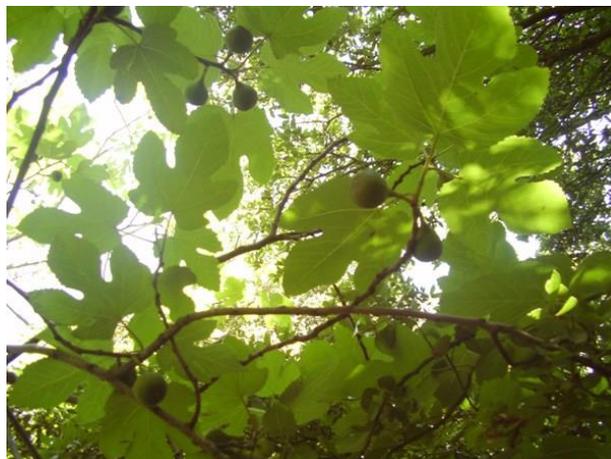
(According to Bavli, Menachot, 53, Page 2)

Fig Tree

10 "So the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and be king over us!'

11 "The fig tree replied to them, 'Should I stop producing my sweetness and my delicious fruit, so that I can go to sway over the trees?'

Fig trees grow near springs and streams in the Land of Israel, from which cultural figs were developed. Fig trees blossom in spring and produce figs - ball-shaped inflorescences that develop into fig fruit. An unripe fig contains male flowers and female flowers, and their fertilization is done by a small wasp not located in the country. Propagation of figs is done with fig cuttings. Fig fruits ripen during the summer, and they are eaten raw, or pressed dry, and these can be preserved for a year or more. In ancient economy, fig trees were of great importance, but with the abundance of fruits in the modern economy, its value declined.





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- What's unique about the fig tree?
- What reason does the fig tree give that prevents it from ruling?
- To what would you liken the contribution of the fig tree?

<p>The Torah is likened to a fig:</p> <p>All of the fruits have wastes.</p> <p>Dates have pits,</p> <p>Grapes have seeds,</p> <p>Pomegranates have peels.</p> <p>But figs are eaten in their entirety</p> <p>So are the words of Torah.</p> <p>(Yalkut Shimoni)</p>	<p>And why is the Torah likened to a fig tree?</p> <p>Because the fruits of most of the trees – the olive, vine and date palm are picked off at once.</p> <p>But the fig tree is picked bit by bit.</p> <p>So is the Torah: One day a person learns a bit and the next day he learns a lot,</p> <p>Since it is not learned, not within a year and not within two years.</p> <p>(Bamidbar Raba 21)</p>
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Grapevine

12 "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and be king over us!'

13 "But the vine replied to them, 'Should I stop providing my wine that makes gods and humans happy, so that I can go to sway over the trees?'

Grape vines are sprawling or rambling shrubs, that are barren during the winter exfoliation. It is developed from the wild vine that grows in the Middle East, and it recently been proven to be found in the Land of Israel. The vine blossom is called *Smadar*, and its products are varied: vine leaves for cooking, grapes for eating, raisins, jams and mainly - wine. It has been grown in the Land of Israel since ancient times, both in the mountains and in the sands of the plain. Ancient wine presses, built or carved in stone, are found in many places in Israel.

The vine and its parts, both clusters and the leaves served as art motifs - in building decorations, in wall paintings, in mosaics and more.

- What's unique about the grape vine?
- What reasons does the grape vine give that prevents her from assuming leadership? What is wine? What is its role? What does it symbolize?
- To what would you compare the contribution of the grapevine?





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Rabbi Shimon the son of Lakish: This nation is likened to a grapevine.

Its twigs – are likened to respectable people. The thin branches are analogous to those who have no merits. Its clusters are likened to the learned people. Its leaves are likened to the ignoramuses.

And a tale is told that people were sent from Israel and the clusters (the learned people) asked for mercy for the leaves (the ignoramuses) since without the leaves, the clusters have no existence.

(Bavli, Chulin, 92 page 1)

