

WHY GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS WRONG IN CHOPPING DOWN THE CHERRY TREE?

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AMERICAN FOLKLORE TELLS THE STORY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON AND THE TIME HE CHOPPED DOWN THE CHERRY TREE. GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS JUST A YOUNG BOY AT THE TIME, AND YOU CAN IMAGINE THAT HE HAD A LOT OF FUN WITH HIS AXE IN CHOPPING DOWN THE TREE. SOMETIME LATER, GEORGE'S FATHER SAW THE TREE LYING ON THE GROUND WITH THE CHERRIES THROWN ALL AROUND AND ROTTING IN THE DIRT. MR. WASHINGTON CALLED ALOUD TO ALL OF HIS CHILDREN AND TO ALL THE NEIGHBOR'S CHILDREN. HE GATHERED THEM AROUND HIM AND DEMANDED TO KNOW WHO HAD CHOPPED DOWN THE TREE. A FEW OF THE CHILDREN CRIED OUT THAT THEY WERE INNOCENT, BUT GEORGE STEPPED FORWARD AND SAID, "I CANNOT TELL A LIE, FATHER, I CHOPPED DOWN THE CHERRY TREE".

IT IS FITTING THAT WE TELL THIS STORY AGAIN TONIGHT BECAUSE IN A FEW WEEKS WE WILL BE CELEBRATING THE ANNIVERSARY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY. GEORGE WASHINGTON, AS YOU KNOW, BECAME THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO KNOW THAT YOUNG GEORGE WAS A TRUTHFUL BOY, BECAUSE HIS HONESTY WAS ONE OF THE REASONS THAT PEOPLE WANTED HIM TO BECOME PRESIDENT. IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT FOR US TO KNOW THAT GEORGE WAS WRONG IN CHOPPING DOWN THE TREE, AND WE WANT TO LEARN WHY HE WAS WRONG.

NO MAN IS PERFECT. EVEN GREAT MEN ARE NOT PERFECT. MOST GREAT MEN MADE BIG MISTAKES WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG, AND THEY BECAME GREAT BY CORRECTING THEIR MISTAKES. THEY DECIDED NOT TO MAKE THE MISTAKE AGAIN.

FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN MOSES WAS A YOUNG MAN, HE SAW AN EGYPTIAN HITTING A HEBREW, AND MOSES HIT THE EGYPTIAN SO HARD THAT HE WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED. MOSES HAD TO RUN AWAY SO THAT THE EGYPTIANS WOULD NOT PUT HIM IN JAIL. LATER, WHEN MOSES GREW WISER AND OLDER, HE NEVER GOT INTO A FIST FIGHT! HE DECIDED THAT A GREAT MAN SHOULD DO HIS

FIGHTING IN ANOTHER WAY. HE FOUGHT FOR FREEDOM BY TEACHING SLAVES TO WANT FREEDOM. HE FOUGHT FOR NEW LAWS, BUT HE DIDN'T FIGHT ANY MORE LIKE A LITTLE BOY FIGHTS, WITH HIS FISTS.

WHEN GEORGE WASHINGTON TOLD HIS FATHER WHAT HE HAD DONE, HIS FATHER TOOK GEORGE ASIDE AND SAID TO HIM, "SON, YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST CHOPPING DOWN A PIECE OF WOOD, BUT THAT ISN'T SO. YOU WERE CHOPPING DOWN A LIVING THING. A TREE HAS ROOTS IN THE GROUND. IT HAS LEAVES AND FRUIT. IT EATS FOOD AND DRINKS WATER THROUGH THE ROOTS AND THROUGH THE LEAVES. A TREE GIVES BIRTH TO OTHER THINGS. THIS TREE GAVE BIRTH TO CHERRIES. WHEN YOU CHOPPED DOWN THE TREE YOU PUT AN END TO THE MIRACLE OF THAT TREE". "GEORGE", SAID HIS FATHER, "DIDN'T YOU SEE ALL THOSE CHERRIES LYING AROUND ON THE GROUND ROTTING? THOSE CHERRIES WERE WASTED WHEN YOU CHOPPED DOWN THE TREE, BUT MORE IMPORTANT, YOU WASTED ALL THE CHERRIES THAT THIS TREE COULD MAKE IN FUTURE YEARS! THIS TREE COULD HAVE MADE THOUSANDS OF CHERRIES IN YEARS TO COME, BUT NOW IT WILL NEVER GROW EVEN ONE CHERRY".

YEARS BEFORE GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS BORN, IT WAS THE USUAL THING FOR THE ARMY OF A NATION WHICH HAD BEATEN ANOTHER IN WAR TO CHOP DOWN THE TREES OF THE NATION THAT HAD LOST THE WAR. BY CHOPPING DOWN THE TREES, THE WINNING NATION HOPED TO KEEP THE LOSING NATION FROM EVER BECOMING STRONG AGAIN. IN OUR BIBLE, WE ARE TOLD THAT MOSES CAUSED A LAW TO BE PASSED WHICH SAID THAT THE JEWS SHOULD NEVER CHOP DOWN THE TREES OF THE ENEMY IN A WAR, FOR HOW ELSE WILL THE PEOPLE LIVE IN FUTURE YEARS?

WHAT MR. WASHINGTON TAUGHT HIS SON ABOUT THE WONDER OF TREES, GEORGE NEVER FORGOT. NOR DID HE FORGET THE WONDER OF HUMAN LIFE.

GREAT MEN LOVE NOT ONLY PEOPLE. THEY LOVE TREES AND ALL THINGS THAT LIVE. THIS IS WHY WE JEWS HAVE A HOLIDAY CALLED TU-B'SCHVAT - WHICH IS THE 15th DAY OF THE HEBREW

SCHVAT. ON THAT DAY WE PLANT TREES AND PLANTS. WE THANK GOD FOR ALL THINGS THAT GROW.

THE CHILDREN OF THE BETH AM RELIGIOUS SCHOOL HAVE PLANTED HUNDREDS OF TREES IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL EACH YEAR, THOUSANDS OF TREES ALTOGETHER. OUR CHILDREN ARE TAUGHT WHAT GEORGE WASHINGTON'S FATHER TAUGHT HIM - THAT THE PERSON WHO STARTS BY LOVING TREES WILL GROW UP LOVING PEOPLE ALL THE MORE.

WHY IS THIS SO? WHAT HAVE TREES GOT TO DO WITH PEOPLE? THE ANSWER IS THAT ALL OF LIFE IS A MIRACLE FROM A TINY BUSH TO A PUPPY DOG, FROM A WHALE TO AN ELEPHANT, FROM A SMALL CHILD TO A BIG MAN. EVERYTHING THAT GROWS IS PART OF GOD'S CONTINUING MIRACLE. GEORGE WASHINGTON LEARNED THIS LESSON WHEN HE WAS A SMALL BOY AND NEVER FORGOT IT. THAT IS WHY HE MADE SUCH A GOOD PRESIDENT. WE HOPE THAT YOU WILL REMEMBER GEORGE WASHINGTON FOR THIS REASON AND THAT YOU WILL ALSO REMEMBER THE JEWISH HOLIDAY OF TU-B'SCHVAT OR ARBOR DAY.

NOW WE WILL HEAR A FEW SONGS WHICH JEWS SING ON THIS HOLIDAY.