



15 Articles for the 15th of Shevat

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Page</b>
G-d, Man, and Trees	Chaya Greenberger	2
Close Encounters of the Green Kind	Channa Coggan	4
A Word Association Game	Marcia Goldlist	5
Five Fantastic Superfoods of Eretz Yisrael	Susie Ben-David	6
Tu'Bshvat Dates	Debra Goldman-Wohl	9
Wood for a holy purpose	Abigail Leichman	10
THE TREE (a Tu Bishvat prayer for 10 voices)	Esther Cameron	11
If Trees Could Talk	Esti Herskowitz	14
Oh, If Man Were But a Tree	Aliza Lipkin	16
For Man is a Tree in the Field	Golda Wahrhaftig	17
Rain Rain Don't Go Away	Ora Grafstein	19
The Torah's Outlook on Nature	Yael Plaskow	21
The Gift of Silence	Mara Goldblatt	23
Word Association Hints (for the game on page 5)	Marcia Goldlist	25
Tu B'Shvat and Mindfulness: Spinning Routine Into Wonder	Susie Keinon	26
Tu B'shvat and the Ten Plagues	Chana Even-chen	28
Word Association Answers	Marcia Goldlist	30

## **G-d, Man, and Trees** by Chaya Greenberger

There is no mention of Tu-B'shevat in the Torah; we first hear of it in the Mishnah (Rosh Hashana 1:1) which designates it as the "new year" for trees. Its import appears at first glance to be limited to a halachic demarcation point for purposes of Orlah, Neta Revai, Maaser, and Sh'mitah.<sup>1</sup> Prior to this date trees are relegated to the past year and subsequently, to the next. Nevertheless, as Tachanun is not recited on that day and fasting is likewise prohibited (Shuchan Aruch, Orach HaChayim, 131: 6-7), the day takes on broader significance as a quasi-joyous occasion. In fact, Chassidic masters, both in the diaspora and in Israel embody it with special kedusha, honoring the day with festive garb and food, especially fruits of Israel.<sup>2</sup> Some revere it as an appropriate time to renew faith in the coming redemption, one of whose harbingers is the fruit bearing renaissance of the Land.<sup>3</sup> The Gaon Mi'Vilnah, moreover claims that the very act of planting trees hastens the redemption (Chazon Zion, p. 139).

In the late nineteenth century, school children in Zichron Yaakov went out to plant saplings on Tu B'shvat<sup>3</sup> and it soon became and is to this very day, a widespread custom. With respect to the significance of planting, Rav Kook (in Megeg Yerachim) writes the following: the motivation for planting trees springs from an individual's desire to toil for the good of future generations; this is most poignantly manifested with respect to the carob (a dioecious tree which often takes a long period of time until it bears fruit) (loose paraphrase). The idea Rav Kook expresses has roots in a story recounted in Tractate Taanit (Talmud Bavli, 23:a).<sup>4</sup> Choni Hamagel met an old man planting a carob tree and asked him (rhetorically, as Choni understood it bears fruit only after 70 years) if he thought he would live long enough to enjoy its fruits. The man replied: I found the world with carob trees which my ancestors planted for me and I therefore want to leave it with carob trees for my descendants. Planting is depicted in this story, as an act of transcendence through which an individual breaks out of the shackles of "self" by tending to the needs of the future generations of which he perceives himself as part.

The old man modelled himself on the prior generations. Who however, is the "ultimate teacher" to be imitated in this regard? Witness the following Midrash: The Torah instructs us to go in the footsteps of G-d (Devarim 13:5), yet how can a human being of flesh and blood cling to the Divine? By imitating His actions. Just as God planted a garden for Adam and Eve in Eden immediately after their creation, so to when you enter the Land of Israel, engage immediately in the act of planting, as per VaYikrah 19:23 (VaYikrah Rabba 25,3, paraphrased). Although the Israelites will find trees in the land sufficient for your own sustenance (see Devarim 6: 11), they are commanded to plant for posterity. God with no "personal" need for sustenance planted for man made in His image; man made in His image respectively plants for his fellow man. It is remarkable that with respect to a parallel verse (Devarim 11:22) which also relates to going in God's footsteps, the Midrash interprets the commandment as imitating God by being merciful and caring. The two interpretations are however intertwined as planting, which incorporates the transcendent dimension of toiling, is a corollary of caring.

An additional dimension of planting is the engagement in the continuous renewal of creation. Man is invited, actually commanded, to partner with the Creator. This awesome role finds expression at the dawn of creation: This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the God made the earth and the heavens (Genesis 2:4), Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, *for the God had not sent rain upon the earth, and [because?] there was no man to cultivate the ground* (Genesis 2:5). **The crux of the history of the heavens and the earth in a nutshell, is the designation of Man as God's partner.** Until He created Man, God kept the earth's vegetation under the surface and withheld the rain. Why so? Because God awaited man to come till the soil. There is, however, a caveat. In order to succeed in fulfilling his role, man as "quasi-creator" must paradoxically admit his subordinacy vis a vis his Master. Yes, he is commanded and enabled to cultivate the earth, but at the same time, must pray for rain. These two actions are intertwined as reflected in the text of Genesis 2:5 cited above. Man's partnership with God clearly does not put him on an equal footing with the Divine. He is a prestigious and indispensable guardian and custodian of the land, not its owner and is dependent on the grace of God for rain and the broader cooperation of nature. Planting is therefore always an act of faith.

The mitzvot accompanying planting are a constant reminder of our role in creation: "When you come into the land, plant *trees but restrain yourself from eating of their fruit for the first three years*" (Vayikrah 19:23, paraphrase). This is of course the source for the mitzvah of Orlah. The very next verse places further limitations upon the consumption of the fruits of our labor, delineating the specific circumstances in which one is permitted to eat the produce during the fourth year, a mitzvah known as Neta Revai. In others places in the Torah it stipulates additional criteria for consumption which further limit our partaking of the fruits of the land; these include Sh'mitah and Maaser. Here we come full circle. The Mishnah in tractate Rosh Hashanah with which we opened, designates Tu'Bishvat as a cutoff point for trees, with respect to these very "limiting" mitzvot.

Adam and Eve chose not to accept limitations but give into temptation and partake of the forbidden fruit, only to being banished from Eden. Noah after the deluge planted a vineyard but abused its wine into a state of irresponsible drunkenness. Both actions brought a curse upon the world. Tu'Bishvat is an ideal time to reflect upon the joy of planting and partnering with God, praying that we be worthy of being God's partners and bring only blessings to the land and its people. This entails maintaining being proud of our role as well as being humbled by it and understanding ourselves as part of a collective with responsibilities to those around us and those who will come after us.

## FOOTNOTES

1. These are mitzvot connected to the Land and its yield. In brief, Orlah delineates the three year period after planting during which the tree's fruits may not be eaten, Neta Revai delineates the circumstances under which the fruits of the fourth year may be eaten, during Sh'mitah year one must refrain from engaging in cultivating the soil, and Maaser refers to the

tithe one must set aside for the needy (and/or the owner's pilgrimage to Jerusalem) before freely partaking of the produce.

2. [See Bezalel Landoy, Tu'Bishvat in the Courts of the Righteous , daat.ac.il.](http://www.daat.ac.il)

3. This event is recounted in "Seder TuBishvat" which can be found in the kibbutz archives in Kibbutz Bet Hashitah.

4. There are other versions of the story. In Talmud Yerushami (23a-25a) Choni is again the inquirer, and in the Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 25; Tanchumah Kedoshim, 8) a similar question is asked of an old man by Adrian Caesar of Rome.

### **Close Encounters of the Green Kind** by Channa Coggan

"Man is like a tree of the field" (Dvarim 20:19). While the Torah meant this as a moral message during times of warfare, scientific research now shows conclusively that this statement is no mere analogy. *Kima'at 2000*, the magazine of the Hebrew University's Center for Science Education, devoted an entire issue (No. 12) to important scientific discoveries concerning trees. It seems that there is far more to trees than meets the eye.

One of the more fascinating of these discoveries is inter-tree communication. Unbelievably, trees have the ability to communicate with other trees. This "connection" takes place without physical contact and even without movement. When a tree is physically injured, the plant responds by making changes to its chemical makeup. "Thus, for example," writes Avial Eiloz in *Kima'at 2000*, when malloccsoma worms damage willow trees, the trees excrete a poisonous protective substance that kills the worms." The trees, he adds, excrete another, bad-tasting substance so that bugs coming close to the tree leaves lose their appetite. Furthermore, the willow excretes a substance that injures the digestive system of bugs and other creatures that have invaded it.

However, the most phenomenal discovery is that healthy trees located nearby respond in the same way! Incredibly, trees located up to 100 meters away also excrete these powerful substances. Imagine two maple saplings planted separately, a short distance apart. When one of the saplings sustains damage, the tree responds as expected – by secreting a chemical substance called phenol, which acts as a protective covering to the affected area. To the surprise of researchers, the other sapling responds in the same manner, even though it is healthy and undamaged in any way.

This, Eiloz notes, indicates that there is "some kind of communication between healthy and unhealthy trees. The damaged tree sent a message, which was received by the other, healthy tree which then vaccinated itself against possible danger," he writes. Such communication is not limited to trees of the same species. Researchers have found that this "silent" communication takes place between trees of different species, as well. Maple, pine, and poplar trees also possess this ability to communicate.

Amazingly, the healthy and unhealthy trees in every example were not in any physical contact whatsoever. How, then, are these “messages” transmitted? Researchers surmise that the plant, when injured, releases a substance that is absorbed by the leaves of other trees in the vicinity. The presence of this material on leaves of a healthy tree begins a chain reaction of activity that ultimately results in the release of poisonous substances to fight and/or protect itself from the “enemy.”

This ability to communicate is obviously advantageous. Not only does the injured tree protect itself from further damage, rather each individual helps the other members of the larger group. Without the warning “communiques” between trees, bug or worms could destroy whole woods or forests. The ability of trees to broadcast and absorb messages in times of trouble gives them a tremendous advantage and enables their long-term survival as a species.

As we celebrate Tu b'Shvat with tree planting and fruit eating, may we also take a moment to appreciate the social and communicative aspects of these wooden wonders.

### **A Word Association Game for Tu B'Shevat** by Marcia Goldlist

This game contains 15 prompts. You are to guess the connection between the prompt and Tu B'Shevat. You will find a list of hints on page 25 and the answers on page 30.

- 1) elephant
- 2) dog
- 3) squirrel
- 4) Avraham, Sarah, Yitzhak, Rivka, Yaakov, Leah and Rachel
- 5) beer
- 6) 70+90
- 7) Air Force, Ground Forces and the Navy
- 8) gibbon, koala bear, sloth, brushtail possum, genet silky anteater, greater glider and tarsier
- 9) nutmeg, mace, cinnamon and cork
- 10) 3-5 degrees Celsius
- 11) 48 pounds/21.8 kilograms a year
- 12) 260 pounds/117.9 kilograms
- 13) 4.5 million
- 14) 240 million
- 15) approximately 3.04 trillion

## Five Fantastic Superfoods of Eretz Yisrael by Susie Ben-David

It's Tu B'shvat! My memories of Tu B'shvat when I was a kid were getting a goodie bag of dried fruit and nuts. I loved it! I was the only one in my class who would eat the very hard and dried out 'bukser' and all the kids who wouldn't eat it passed theirs on to me. Now that I live in Israel, I know the best time to eat **fresh** bukser, aka carob, is in the summer. So what's the deal with the dried fruit?

As we know, Tu B'shvat is one of the New Years of the Jewish calendar chag la'ilanot, the trees' birthday. But this isn't the time to actually eat the fruits of the shivat haminit (7 species) because they ripen in the summer and fall. That's probably why we eat dried fruit on Tu B'shvat. And you know that bukser/carob is NOT one of the shiv'at haminit..... 😊

We're living in Israel and we are very connected to what grows here and when, especially the shiv'at haminit – the 7 species – which are....

אֶרֶץ חִטָּה וּשְׂעֵרָה, וְגִפְן וַיְתָאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן; אֶרֶץ-זֵית שָׁמֶן, וְדִבְשׁ (דברים ח:ח)

*The land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, land of olive oil, and honey.*

Let's focus on the five species which are fruits; the only fruits that were permitted to be brought as offerings to the Beit Hamikdash. But what's so special about these specific fruits? Well, now that we've got lots of science to analyze and check things out in the lab, it seems that they are ALL **superfoods**. Really!

Take note that they are all indigenous to Israel; they were not transplanted here from other countries or regions, like the oranges, kiwis, pineapples, mangos etc. that grow here now. They have been growing here since time immemorial. Each of the species is mentioned numerous times in Tanach, but I will quote just one verse for each fruit.

גִּפְן – vine                      The grape has many uses in Judaism and is most commonly used as wine. Sayings such as 'when wine goes in, secrets come out' and 'wine gladdens the heart' are common. Yaacov's son Yehuda was blessed with so many vines in his nachala (tribal portion) that his blessing was to "wash his clothing in grapes", symbolizing abundance. As Jews, we don't just get drunk with wine for the fun of it, we use it to elevate our lives, such as blessing and drinking wine for kiddush on Shabbat and chagim, havdala, weddings and brit mila. We see grape motifs on ancient coins, and decorated mosaic floors and carved stones. Today we have vineyards in the Golan, the Galil, throughout the Shomron, Jerusalem Hills, the Shfela and down to the Negev. Wine grapes weren't grown much in the Holy Land for hundreds of years when different Muslim powers ruled the area, as it is forbidden under Muslim law to drink wine. But since Jews have returned to Eretz Yisrael, wine has become a major industry growing over 20 varieties of grapes, produced by large wineries and well over one hundred(!) boutique wineries, winning dozens of international awards!

Superfood info: Grapes are very good for our skin, bones, connective tissue, and heart. Grapes have anti-oxidants as well as A, B, C and K vitamins. So drink up! But in moderation.

Finally, in the book of Micha, 4:4 we read:

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ, אִישׁ תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְתַחַת תְּאֵנָתוֹ--וְאִין מִחְרִיד: כִּי-פִי ה' צָב-אוֹת, דִּבֶּר.

*But they shall sit **every man under his vine and under his fig-tree**; and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the L-rd of hosts has spoken.*

As we see, the vine and the fig are often paired together, as they like the same soil and climate and are usually found in the same area. This brings us to our next species...

**Fig – תאנה** The first time we read about figs in the Torah is in 3:7 of sefer Bereishit with the story of Adam and Chava:

וַתִּפְקְחֶנָּה, עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם, וַיֵּדְעוּ, כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם; וַיִּתְּפוּ עֲלֵהּ תְּאֵנָה, וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת.

*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed **fig-leaves** together and made themselves girdles.*

Figs symbolize wisdom, endurance, security, and the ideal future. A fig is unusual in that it is one of the only fruits of which all parts can be eaten - you eat the 'peel' and the flesh with the seeds – the whole kit and kaboodle (just check them carefully for bugs). Figs ripen slowly over the whole summer, so you can't harvest the whole tree at once. The fig is likened to studying Torah: it's sweet, considered the Tree of Life and just as they must be harvested gradually, over a long period of time, learning Torah too, is a gradual process.

Superfood info: figs are rich in potassium, iron, calcium, Omega 3, fiber and antioxidants; they're also known to reduce cholesterol. Best of all, with one average sized fig having only 47 calories - it's a great treat!

**pomegranate – רימון** In Sefer Shmot 28: 33-34:

וַעֲשִׂיתָ עַל-שׁוּלְיוֹ, רִמְנֵי תִכְלֹת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי--עַל-שׁוּלְיוֹ, סָבִיב, וּפְעֻמְנֵי זָהָב בְּתוֹכָם סָבִיב. פְּעֻמַּן זָהָב וְרִמּוֹן, פְּעֻמַּן זָהָב וְרִמּוֹן, עַל שׁוּלֵי הַמַּעִיל סָבִיב

*And upon the skirts of it you shall make **pomegranates** of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the skirts thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: a golden bell and a **pomegranate**, a golden bell and a **pomegranate**, upon the skirts of the robe round about.*



This describes the decoration around the hem of the robe of the ephod worn by Aharon Hacoheh and future Cohenim Gedolim. No, these are not real, edible pomegranates but made of gold. So what did they look like? Well, actually, we know because Eli Shukran, a well-known archeologist, found a bell in the shape of a pomegranate near the southern end of the Kotel in the drainage canal from the time of the second Beit Hamikdash! He took it to

his dentist to X-ray it so he could see what was inside because it really did make a tinkling sound! (picture credit: City of David)

Pomegranate motifs are found on coins, as decorations of capitals (the tops of columns) and often appear on stone carvings in ancient synagogues and on mosaic floors.

Superfood info: The Rambam gives the pomegranate a lot of credit for uses on one's skin (I use concentrated pomegranate seed oil). It also helps ward off heart disease. Modern analysis shows that the rimon reduces inflammation, is good for prostate cancer, lowers blood pressure levels and triglycerides. And finally, pomegranates are considered the number one antioxidant-containing fruit in the world.

זית שמן – olive oil

In Tehilim 128:3:

אַשְׁתְּךָ, כְּגִפְן פְּרִיָה -- בְּרִכְתֵי בֵיתְךָ: בְּנֵיהֶ, כְּשִׁתְּלֵי זֵיתִים -- סְבִיב, לְשִׁלְחָנְךָ.

*Your wife shall be as a fruitful **vine**, in the innermost parts of your house; your children like **olive plants**, round about your table.*

Yes, the olive likes to grow in the same soil and climate as grape vines. You can find them often near each other.

Having recently put away our chanukiyot, we are familiar with olive oil used to light the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash. Olive oil was also used to anoint kings and the Cohen Hagadol. It's the symbol for peace (think Noah's ark and the dove) as well as the symbol of the State of Israel (the Menorah, flanked by 2 olive branches). Olives are so versatile; they are used for cooking, soap, cosmetics, fuel, oiling our skin and protecting leather (make sure to oil your leather shield before battle!). Health spas provide soothing massages with olive oil, and of course it goes on every salad. Israel harvests 19,500 tons of olives annually! With Pessach coming up (no, no, not yet!) we refer to the halachic measurement of כזית k'zayit.

Superfood info: olives are good for the heart, cleanses the liver and is good for preventing osteoporosis. The olive has oleic acid which lowers cholesterol and reduces inflammation. Olives contain Vitamin E, iron, copper, antioxidants, and some fiber.

תמר – date

Tehilim 92:13

צַדִּיק, כְּתֹמֶר יִפְרֹחַ; כְּאַרְז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה.

*The righteous shall flourish like the **palm-tree**; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.*

Dates flourish in salty soil but they produce sweet fruit. Such is the Tzadik, the righteous person, who can take a difficult situation and create positive from it.

I just love dates! As a kid in the States I didn't eat dates because they were all dried up and not too appetizing, but in Israel the dates just drip with honey! And that's why Eretz Yisrael is called ארץ חלב ודבש, the Land of Milk and Honey; the "honey" here refers to honey from dates, not bees. Date honey - silan is readily available in the makolet or supermarket. In ancient times, Jericho was known as the "city of dates". Cleopatra was given the date groves around Jericho by her buddy Mark Antony, and we know that Herod really wanted them for

himself. When pioneering Jews started settling in the Jordan valley and by the Kineret over 100 years ago they saw only one lonely date tree. All the date trees had been cut down by foreigners over many generations. The pioneers thought to plant dates in the area and the local Arabs thought the Jews were loco. *“Dates? They don’t grow here. **Nothing much grows around here!**”* Well, we’ve proven them wrong. Israel exported 26,800 tons in 2019! That’s a lotta dates! Don’t worry, we kept a cool 19,000 tons for sale in Israel...

Superfood info: the date is high in fiber, prevents spiking of sugar levels, powerful antioxidants (of course), it’s good for atherosclerosis, and boosts energy. Dates have folic acid, calcium, iron, potassium, magnesium, zinc, vitamins A, K and B. According to the Technion, one should eat two dates in the morning on an empty stomach to strengthen one’s heart, prevent anemia, strengthen bones and muscles, improve your skin, lungs..... and more!!

Now that you know how special the five fruits of the shiv’at haminim are, make sure to add them to your diet. You’ll be benefiting yourself as well as enjoying the incredible fruits of our beautiful, bountiful land. What a bracha!

Happy Tu B’shvat! L’Chaim!

### **Tu'Bshvat Dates** by Debra Goldman-Wohl

As olim, we have fulfilled a 2000-year-old vision of returning to the Land of Israel. For many of us growing up overseas in the ‘60s and 70’s, Israel was only a daydream. Most of us had not visited Israel and even phoning someone in Israel was a project in and of itself. However, in our Jewish day schools with snow still on the ground, we celebrated Tu B’shvat, New Year of the Trees. We received a brown paper lunch bag with shiny pennies, a Jaffa orange, some bukser (carob) and dried fruit. With great pride, we received our “tree certificate” from the JNF for having purchased a tree in Israel. Dates are one of the seven species of Eretz Yisrael. King David wrote, “The righteous bloom like a date-palm.” Recently, dates were eaten which grew on trees planted from date seeds found at the 2000-year-old Masada excavations. We, along with the date tree bear witness to the fulfillment of the prophecy that one day we will return to our fruitful land of Eretz Yisrael.

## Wood for a holy purpose by Abigail Leichman

Tu B'Shevat, the new year for trees, is a good time to see how wood is used in the Tanach for significant building projects.

Noah used gopher wood (גפר) to build his ark. In the First Beit Hamikdash, King Shlomo used cedar (ארז), cypress (ברוש), olivewood (עץ שמן), and sandalwood (אלמוג). In the desert after leaving Egypt, Bnei Yisrael used acacia wood (עץ השיטה) in building the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*).

A new book titled *Eco Bible* by Rabbi Yonatan Neril of Jerusalem contains ecological commentaries on the Chumash.

In one essay, "Sustainable Forestry for the Tabernacle," Rabbi Neril cites the Midrash Tanchuma that the acacia wood came from trees that Yaacov instructed his children to plant in Egypt.

"Rabbi Tanchuma explained it thus: Our father Jacob foresaw by the gift of the Holy Spirit that Israel would build a Tabernacle in the wilderness: he therefore brought cedars (acacia) to Egypt and planted them there, and instructed his children to take these with them when they would leave Egypt."

Other commentators disagree and say that there were acacia trees growing along their route in the wilderness (remember, it was not really a desert but a wilderness) and therefore there was no need for schlepping wood planks from Egypt.

Regardless of how the wood was sourced, this event finds expression in Psalm 96 (part of our *kabbalat Shabbat* liturgy) where it says אז ירננו כל עצי יער – "Then the trees of the forest will sing for joy." The wood itself is thought to be joyful to be of service for a sacred purpose.

Rabbi Neril observes that the harvesting of acacia for the *Mishkan* "may be the earliest reference to sustainable forest management."

He notes that our tradition encourages us to respect trees. Trees prevent soil erosion, provide oxygen, shelter birds and other animals, and in the case of fruit-bearing trees, keep us nourished.

Nevertheless, using the wood for building the *Mishkan* was planned, permitted and even a source of joy. What can we learn from this? What are appropriate and ethical reasons to chop down trees?

One lesson that Rabbi Neril points out is that acacia wood can withstand a hot, arid climate. Using this type of wood for the Tabernacle demonstrates that "a Torah life is built on stamina and resilience to outside pressures, whether religious persecution or environmental threats."

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch wrote, "A tree is an organic creation ... that develops from a tiny beginning, and over a long period of time it advances in its development, it grows and

spreads out, it grows wide and tall over the course of its development. ... However, the growth and flourishing depend on environmental conditions, primarily the presence of water in sufficient quantity and in close proximity, so that the roots can draw from it. Thus, a tree serves also as a symbol for man who sends out his roots to the words of God and draws the words of the Torah and orders his life in accordance with them.”

Today, writes Rabbi Neril, some 15 billion trees are cut down every year. Much of the wood is used for essential products such as paper and lumber. But often trees are removed for unsustainable and environmentally destructive purposes such as cattle ranching, single-crop fields, and palm-oil plantations.

“In the building of the Tabernacle, we can find the ultimate example of trees used for a higher goal,” he writes.

Let us try to use wood, and all natural resources, with consideration and purposefulness.

## THE TREE

**(a Tu Bishvat prayer for 10 voices)** by Esther Cameron

*Keter/Ratzon (Crown/Will).*

*Within the Ein-Sof, the Infinite unknown,  
quickens the Will that there should be a world,  
purpose that is the Crown of all creation.*

*Chokhmah/Abba (Wisdom/Father).*

*Out of the Will burgeons the seed of Wisdom,  
infinitesimal point, holding a vast  
potential still unconscious of itself,  
First-Father, whom we summon with the thought  
of the Name too high and hidden for our breathing.*

*Binah/Imma/Teshuvah*

*(Understanding/Mother/Return).*

*From Wisdom's arcane point unfolds the matrix*

*Understanding, Mother of all things,*

*shape of all shapes united in one being,*

*Palace of the universe inscribed*

*with the name of the maker, Elokim;*

*soul's birthplace and the goal of all Returning,*

*from her emerge the seven lower spheres:*

*Hesed (Lovingkindness)*

*Lovingkindness, Generosity,*

*spring of giving that is always flowing,*

*impulse of abundance pouring forth*

*beyond all bounds.*

*Din/Gevurah (Judgment/Power).*

*Judgment, shadow of the Mother's structure,*

*Power that begins in self-restraint.*

*Tiferet (Beauty).*

*Beauty, synthesis of love and judgment,*

*balance of freedom and necessity,*

*Splendor of truth.*

*Netzach (Victory/Eternity).*

*Steadfastness rooted in Eternity.*

*Hod (Glory; Acknowledgment)*  
*Glory springing from Acknowledgment,*  
*vesture of recognition and acclaim.*

*Tzaddik/Yesod*  
*(Righteous One; Foundation)*  
*The Righteous Individual, Foundation*  
*of the world, lover and partner of—*

*Malkhut/Shekhinah*  
*(Kingdom/Indwelling Presence).*  
*Shekhinah, holiness of the Creation*  
*with highest purpose crowned, Presence among us*  
*in the Community, upon the Earth.*

*All.*  
*Ten primal Numbers of the universe,*  
*ten Spheres of energy, ten waves of thought,*  
*ten fiery blossoms on one holy tree,*  
*ten limbs of the mystic form of human being.*  
*G-d who are One in all Your varying shapes,*  
*plant this tree in our midst and in our hearts,*  
*and make us fruitful in the coming year.*

## If Trees Could Talk by Esti Herskowitz

Trees are not just pretty, and ecological. Throughout Israel, there are trees with special, unique stories to tell. Here are some of the stories, 15 for the TU part of the Shvat holiday, located in areas that we can all get to and appreciate fairly easily (i.e., not really high north or far down south)

1. In Netanya, tucked behind the bustling malls and office buildings, is a sequoia tree. Not California size, but still, important. In 1928, word gets out that the Arab mukhtar of Umm-el-Halid, the only village in the area for miles, is interested in selling some of the village land. Oded Ben-Ami, with his cohort, jump on their feet and start walking thru the emptiness to get to the sheikh, who welcomes them by the sequoia tree but refuses to sell them the land. You see, the tree had been planted centuries before by the Jews living here. The Crusaders chased them out, and then the Arabs chased the Crusaders out. But the tree was planted, and therefore owned by Jews, and all the mukhtar asked for was payment for guarding it all the years. And so, when Netanya was established, building proceeded around the tree, leaving it undisturbed.

2. Alon Bachut אלון בכוח describes the tree beneath which Devorah, Rivkah's nursemaid, was buried. It is mentioned along with Beit El, where Yaakov builds an altar מזבח to thank Hashem. Today, there's an oak tree there, dated about 1000 years. The interesting thing is, not every oak tree promulgates the same way. This one, the wormwood oak, germinates itself, so the tree standing is actually a descendant of previous trees that were nearby. Hmmmmmm.

3. Anywhere there were swamps, eucalyptus trees can be found. Most of us know about the ones in the Huleh Valley, in the Galilee. But there are many in the Gush Dan area too; that area was a swamp, purposely neglected by the Arabs to discourage the Crusaders returning. But when the Jews started flooding the shores as we came on Aliyah, the thought at the time (1882 and on) was that eucalyptus trees, with their long roots, will drink up the extra swamp water and leave good arable land. So any time you see a eucalyptus tree, even in the Tel Aviv area, you can remember what there had been there, and what there is now!

4. This is more about a bunch of trees, than an individual tree. Israel was a wasteland, derelict of trees, until the Jews returned and began planting. Throughout this desert country, 34 forests were planted. Most of them are named for the area they're in: Sorek, Yattir, Jerusalem. There are a few tho, that aren't. My favorite is called Ataturk Forest, near Mount Carmel. It was planted by Turkish Jewish Olim....

5. And how can we not mention all the trees and shrubbery and plants on the Bahai Shrine? They're not Jews, true, but the Bahai religion has very few 'commandments'. They have to give zedaka on specific days, and have a few holidays here and there. There is a focus on volunteering, and the volunteering is best done at their world headquarters, in Haifa. Most volunteers are involved in some way with the gardening and planting: making the world a prettier place thru planting is big. And so, fitting for an honorable mention on Tu B'shvat.

6. And even more on the Carmel: The Technion, a leading university that focuses on science, dominates the top of the mountain, which is where Haifa is. While building, and

landscaping the University, the international Jewish community tried to support it in as many ways as it could. And of course, consulting with other leading scientists at the time was a must. That's how, in 1923, Albert Einstein and his wife Elsa ended up planting two palm trees by the entrance to the main Technion building, still standing today.

7. Another scientist and tree story would be the one about Chaim Weizmann, and the Weizmann Institute for Science. Not only did our first President found the Weizmann Institute, but, in 1933 when he was going over the plans for construction, he noted that there wasn't a tree or blade of grass, but he remembered the American and British university campuses, and felt that it would be lamentable if we only built buildings on the campus, without tending to the landscape. It was so important to him, that 100 species of different trees were planted on campus, and the logo of the Weizmann University for Sciences is a tree!

8. Rishon L'Zion was a typical wasteland, before it was Rishon. Birds wouldn't fly overhead; it was too hot and there was nothing to eat below. So, in 1882, when the founders arrived and started looking for water and began their agriculture, long story short, it took a while and they needed help. Baron Rothschild gave them that help. When it was time to plant trees, they planted two rows of palm trees, and Rothschild provided the seeds, from the Canary Islands. Today, not only is this a beautiful park, now called Founders Memorial Park, but it has palm trees that are a bit different than the standard palm tree we're familiar with.

9. Other weird palm trees include the Washingtonian Palms, by Atlit. They are identifiable because the trunks are smooth, rather than jagged. Aaron Aaronson (yes, that's really his name!) was one of the founders of the spy ring, Nlli, that was instrumental in getting the Ottomans out of Palestine, and getting the British in (at the time, the British were preferable. Later on, not so much). Professionally, tho, he was a botanist. And he set up an experimental agronomy station near his home in Zichron Yaakov. The Washingtonian Palms are his signature.

10. Yad Kennedy, the Kennedy Memorial, is a building in the Jerusalem Forest, shaped like a tree trunk, which has been cut off. The symbolism continues, as the building, which has only a memorial inside, with an everlasting flame, is comprised of 51 slabs, representing the 50 states and Israel as being one strong growing unit. This was very meaningful not only to the American government and people, and the Israelis, but to the Kennedy Family. That's why, some of the trees surrounding the memorial were planted by Edward Kennedy and some family members when they visited.

11. Jerusalem doesn't naturally have a lot of trees anymore, most of the trees in the forests surrounding, and throughout the green areas, were planted. At Yad Vashem, the entire vast campus is covered with trees representing the Righteous Gentiles Among the Nations. These are people who helped Jews throughout Europe, during the Holocaust, regardless of danger to themselves. Often, the trees are carob trees: Those who plant carob trees rarely see the fruit of the tree they planted, it takes too long to actually bear fruit. Its more for the next generation. The symbolism is obvious, and the story of Honi Hama'agel, who learnt this lesson is well known. What is less well known is, thank G-d, there are 22,000 trees planted as tokens of gratitude to the Righteous Gentiles Among the Nations, at Yad Vashem.

12. It was just recently in the headlines that a mikveh from the time of the second Beit Hamikdash was found under the Church of All Nations, in Gethsemane, below Mount of

Olives. Gethsemane is the anglicization of גת שמנים, olive presses. The entire area was covered by olive trees in ancient times, and within the compound of Gethsemane, there are still several beautiful old olive trees. They're so old, that they're hollow, with new healthy branches sprouting out from the base, like nature's sculpture. They are only about 800 years old tho, not as old as the olive presses from the Second Beit Hamikdash, or the mikveh that was just excavated.

13. Right at the meeting point of Heleni Hamalka Street, and Coresh and Ben Sira Streets, opposite the Mamilla mall entrance, is a teeny park. Easy to walk past, unless you need to use the Change Point or buy some nosh at the snack bar that's there. But if you look closely, you'll see a sign, by the bench and tree that's in the tiny park. George W. Bush, on one of his official visits as President, planted that tree. He gave a really nice speech, too, about peace in the Land of the Bible. Halevai (if only!) the fulfillment of the speech would take root as the tree does, and grow the same way!

14. Perhaps the most famous beautiful tree is the Alon Boded, the Lone Oak tree in Gush Etzion. It started out, with the establishment of the first communities, as a symbol of settlement. Between 1948-1967, we could only see it from afar, and it was a symbol of yearning. After the 6 Day War, it became a symbol of return. Just a month ago, they finished a renovation of the area, where they made it wheelchair accessible, and propped up the centuries old tree. The entrance is opposite the community of Alon Shvut. Translated, that means, Alon (oak) Tree of Return.

15. Rabban Gamliel was an important guy, 2000 years ago, as he was the Head of the Sanhedrin. Rumor has it, that he had a plantation a bit south of Beit Shemesh, in Beit Jimal (Jimal/Gamliel, get it?) The Beit Jimal monastery has, on its grounds, an olive tree that is huge (8 meters in circumference) and ancient (who knows?) which is attributed to Rabban Gamliel's plantation. And it means, that even as you walk towards it, you're walking on the same ground that possibly, Rabban Gamliel and colleagues and family walked on as well. Very cool.

Chag Sameach!

### **Oh, If Man Were But a Tree** by Aliza Lipkin

In the past, I heard several lectures on Tu Bshvat where the speaker quoted a Pasuk in Devarim in order to present the case that "man is like a tree". The metaphor is compelling in so many ways. Both begin with a seed and develop as they remain hidden while being nourished. Both need water, sunlight, and the grace of God to mature. Both have roots that provided their DNA that establish their characteristics. Both can potentially yield fruits that will eventually detach from their source yet serve to nourish others who in turn will hopefully do the same.

This comparison is just one of a myriad of ways that man can be likened to a tree. However, when looking at the Pasuk which serves as the source for this metaphor, I was surprised to find that "man is like a tree" was not a statement but rather a rhetorical question sarcastically posed to make a point.

Devarim 20:19

"(יט) גִּי-תִצּוֹר אֶל-עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא-תִשְׁחִית אֶת-עֵצֶיהָ לְנֹדַח עָלֶיהָ גֵּרְזֵן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכְלֶה וְאִתּוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לִבָּא מִפְּנֵיךְ בַּמִּצּוֹר:

*When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them; for thou mayest eat of them, but thou shalt not cut them down; for is the tree of the field man, that it should be besieged of thee?"*

One should not wantonly destroy a tree for it poses no threat. Its purpose is beneficial and provides man with its fruit. The tree is contrasted to man who can potentially pose a threat to another. He can decide that instead of giving of his fruit (his talents and abilities) to help nourish others, he might give in to hate, greed, etc, or be forced to defend himself against external threats.

One can truly sense a feeling of woe in this statement. As if God is trying to say "if only man were more like a tree. If only he stood his ground, being majestic in who he is without posing unnecessary threats to others. He would then simply give of his gifts that he has been bestowed with". If this were so there would be no war and we could let other "trees", which indeed pose no threat to others, alone to simply be and produce their fruits in peace.

### **For Man is a Tree in the Field** by Golda Wahrhaftig

~a summary of ideas expressed by Rav Adin Even Yisrael Steinsaltz, z.t.l, may his memory be blessed.

The month of Shevat heralds the new year for trees. We read in Deuteronomy, "For Man is a tree in the field." Various sources in the Tanach, among them, Tehillim 1:3 and Jeremiah ch.17, confirm this idea. In what way is Man like a tree, and in what way does he differ from a tree?

We learn from the Zohar that by meditating on nature as a whole we can get a glimpse into the higher worlds. By studying trees, their needs, the way in which they grow, the various kinds of trees and even their relationship to one another, we can learn much about Man, his soul, and his task in this world.

Tu Bishvat is a time for enhancing and deepening our relationship with the Land and its abundance. It affords an opportunity to learn both about trees and from trees. Let us begin by focusing on the connection between trees and the land. Just as a tree receives its nourishment from the Land, and will wither if uprooted, so with Man. Both the individual and the Nation cannot ultimately survive, without being bound to the Land. Interestingly, studies have shown that trees communicate with other trees without physical contact. When one sapling is damaged, it responds by secreting a chemical substance which protects the nearby trees. Trees are concerned with one another's well-being.

Modern man suffers from loneliness and estrangement. His sense of alienation has to do with not being rooted in the Land. Man's social connections today are based more on convenience and

practicality than on meaningful ties. People create social gatherings in order to protect self-interest. They don't feel connected on a deep level, planted in their Land. Many are wanderers, dwelling by chance in a particular place. Nothing of value attaches them to that place; they could just as easily move elsewhere. In some ways, modern Man can be compared to an, artificial flower, which doesn't change and has no need for water, earth and air because it isn't alive. This sad reality stems from an absence of commitment to the land and to one another.

Modern Man has redefined "freedom" as his right to be independent and to detach himself from any society. This enables him to move from place to place as he wishes because he hasn't formed deep bonds anywhere. [I cannot help thinking of the pre-election atmosphere at present. Ministers and members of the Knesset have no problem moving from one party to the other, throwing mud into the well from which they drank. It is easy to move from one party to the next when what guides you is self-interest and not eternal values.] "A righteous man will flourish like a date palm, like a cedar tree in Lebanon he will grow tall. Planted in the House of Hashem, in the courtyards of our G-d they will flourish. They will still be fruitful in old age full of sap and freshness they will be." (Tehilim 92: 13-15) Man firmly planted in his Land, displaying obligation, care and commitment, will ultimately, like a tree, put down roots and blossom. Conversely, "not so the wicked. They are like chaff that the wind blows away." (Tehilim 1:4) Such a person has chosen to live like a hewn tree, drawing strength from nowhere, directionless. Can this be called "living"? We need to discover new paths to reconnect with our past, our roots, for without this, there will be no future.

In one respect man is not like a tree. There are trees that are 4000 years old, still standing erect and proud and continuing to produce fruit, no less delicious than that of their younger counterparts. This is not so regarding human beings. Even before we begin to mature, we begin to age. Certainly fertility is limited to a certain amount of time. Yet the tree symbolizes the possibility that by refreshing and renewing our thoughts and exchanging ideas we can extend the time when we produce fruit, both on an individual level and on a national level.

Trees are nourished from water under the ground, but they need sunlight and carbon dioxide and oxygen even more in order to grow. Just as they are nourished from above, so Man turns to his Creator in order to be inspired. Branches and leaves need pruning so that there is the right proportion between them and the trunk and the roots. Similarly, man strives for balance between laboring to produce fruits and at the same time strengthening his roots, so as to create a harmonious balance between the two.

When summer draws to a close and the leaves on the trees have dried up and withered, the trees stand naked and shiver in the autumn breeze. One may be tempted to cut them down, as they appear dead. But then one knows that it is just a matter of time and once again, when spring comes around, they will blossom under the gentle sun. Similarly with man, there are times when he feels like an empty vessel, that what he may have achieved is lost, not to be retrieved. At this point he is not to despair, for he will be given another chance. At some future time, with renewed enthusiasm, he will again put forth fruits.

May we all be blessed this Tu Bishvat, even in the confines of our homes during this challenging time, to reconnect and delight in the blessings of the land, sing its praises, partake of its fruit, and if possible, to plant a tree -- for a man is a tree in the field.

## Rain, Rain Don't Go Away by Ora Grafstein

Still a week until Tu B'Shvat, thought Michal, it was just now the middle of January. It had been raining on and off for the last three months, plump raindrops tumbling from the sky for a few days followed by a week or so of sunshine. And then it would rain again. Today, the bright blue sky had been replaced by glowering gray clouds, and it looked like rain would start very soon. Better walk faster, she thought, but when she passed Aviva's produce store she just *had* to slow down for a quick look. Rows of nuts and sugary dried fruits were carefully lined up on display under the green awning: banana chips, dried apricots, desiccated pineapple slices, figs, dates, raisins and something that vaguely resembled mango bits. All sorts of exotic items would appear this time of year – dried watermelon, pickled lemons, guava flakes. And on the side there was the traditional pile of glossy dried carobs, like a careless heap of thick dark scimitars. Aviva the Fruit Lady stood in the doorway and smiled, deep creases curving in her cheeks, and called out to Michal: "Come fill up your bag with some Tu B'Shvat fruits, tasty and sweet." Michal stopped for just a second by the display. The carobs reminded her so much of the holiday when she had been a schoolchild. These husks had starred on the Tu B'Shvat table under their Hebrew name, *charuv*, but more often were called by their Yiddish title, "bokser". Someone once told her that "bokser" was derived from the German word for ram's horn, "Bocks-horn". And these dried carobs were indeed hard as bone. Michal had merely sucked on them until she could taste a hint of chocolate. Only the bravest around the table would grasp the impenetrable husk between their teeth and when that didn't work, would try to crack it open with a hammer to get to the sweet stringy layer on the inside of the brown-black pods.

"What are you looking at? Maybe you will take a kilo of dates? Sweet as the Garden of Eden," said Aviva. Michal thought for a second and decided that it was better to wait, get them closer to Tu B'Shvat. But the bokser, maybe it will be sold out by then? Even if hardly anyone eats it, everyone wants some on the table. Actually, she had no idea why. "Aviva, why *do* we eat – or try to eat - carob on Tu B'Shvat?"

"Ahhh, good question. Lots of reasons. It's a classic native Israeli fruit. For thousands of years it's been known as a superfood: dried carobs last a long time and travel well. If you know how to prepare it, it tastes great – really - and packs lots of vitamins, minerals and fiber. All the health food stores sell carob syrup and carob powder. Like the sages told us in the Talmud, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai - Rashbi - and his son lived on carobs for twelve years while they were hiding out from the Romans. But I think that the best reason is that the carob tree comes with a moral. These trees live a long time, and also only produce fruit after many years. Teaches us about patience and perseverance. There's a story in the Talmud about Choni HaMe'agel - Choni the Circle-maker - who was strolling along and ran into a man planting a carob tree. He asked the man how long it will take until the tree will be laden with fruit, and the man answered: 70 years. Well, said Choni, why plant a tree now, if you yourself will probably not live long enough to eat from it? And the man replied: just as my fathers planted trees for me, I am planting trees for my children. Choni fell asleep, woke up 70 years later, and saw the man's grandson picking carobs off very same tree. Nice story." Sure sounds like sustainability, Michal mused, which is a good fit for those who celebrate an

ecological holiday or who plant trees on Tu B'Shvat. "But Aviva", she persisted, "Choni HaMe'agel – wasn't there another story about him? Something with rain?"

Aviva picked out a glossy plump date and handed it to her. "Just try it, you will not be able to resist. I only have the very best dates, Mahjool. Choni? Yes, in the Talmud, just before the story about the carob tree, there are more stories about Choni. He stood in a circle and insisted that he would not leave it until his prayers for rain, not too heavy and not too light, were answered. And rain is also connected to Tu B'Shvat."

Michal really didn't have a lot of time for more stories, but the date was soooo delicious and it would take a few more seconds to lick it off her teeth. "Rain and Tu B'Shvat? It's usually in late January or February, when the rains are petering out."

Aviva handed her another date and another one: "Tu B'Shvat was mentioned in the Mishnah as the New Year for trees, and one possibility was to celebrate it on the first day of the month of Shvat, which was the opinion of Bet Shamai. Of course, 'Aleph B'Shvat' is not as catchy as Tu B'Shvat, but makes sense. Like Rosh HaShana for people, it would seem that any New Year should be on the first of the month and not on the fifteenth. Especially when Tu B'Shvat is the cut-off for all sorts of halachic issues like when to tithe fruits. But Bet Hillel wanted the New Year for trees to occur two weeks later, on the fifteenth of Shvat. By then it is after most of the rains have fallen and the sap is running in the trees, which will soon start blossoming. So the timing of Tu B'Shvat was determined according to when the rains fall. Which brings us back to Choni, who..."

Michal finished her third date and realized that she had better get moving, soon she was going to be late. And the first drops of rain were pattering on the awning above the fruits. She dug deep in her tote for her change purse. "B"H it's raining again. Oh, I'll take a quarter-kilo of carobs now, and will come back for more fruits closer to Tu B'Shvat," promised Michal "Can I also pay you for the dates?"

"No," said Aviva, "I am happiest when people enjoy the fruits of the Land. And don't forget - I will be getting some perfect olives, guaranteed not bitter, and tasty almonds and more of the very best dates. Everything will be fresh, good prices. And all the bokser you can eat!" As she tucked the sack of carob into her bag, Michal asked "Where do you get so much carob? It's not so easy to find." "Well", said Aviva, "We have a little family garden in back of the store. My grandfather planted a carob tree there many years ago. He didn't live long enough to enjoy its fruits, but on every Tu B'Shvat all of the family, three generations descended from that Saba, gather under the tree, eat bokser cake and carob ice cream and have a few sips of charuvim liqueur in his memory." Aviva picked up a carob and waved it in the air and declared: "L'Chaim! Tu B'Shvat Sameach!"

## The Torah's Outlook on Nature by Yael Plaskow

***"Rabbi Yaakov said: One who is walking along the road and is studying [Torah], and then interrupts his studies and says, 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!', the Scripture considers it as if he bears the guilt for his soul." (Masechet Avot 3:9)***

The above Mishna discusses the severity of interrupting Torah study to admire nature. Rashi adds that this is of particular concern when traveling and exposed to all the dangers this entails. In situations that can potentially be dangerous, Torah study ensures Divine protection. A person who does not avail himself of such security "bears the guilt for his soul." Rashi learns this from the verse in the Shema; "... and you shall speak of them... when you walk on the road..."

According to the literal understanding of this Mishna, Rabbi Yaakov conveys a certain level of disdain for nature by implying that appreciation of nature interferes with our service of G-d. However, this opinion is in stark contradiction to an explicit halacha mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch. One who goes out in the month of Nisan and sees trees in full blossom recites the blessing, "Blessed are You... Who has made nothing lacking in His world, and created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees to give mankind pleasure." (Shulchan Aruch, 226:1).

A review of some other teachings of our Rabbis regarding our relationship with nature further strengthens this paradox. There is an obligation to thank Hashem for the beauty he has placed in the world. The Mishna in Masechet Brachot (9:2) sites several blessings called "birkot hare'iya" that one recites when coming across the natural wonders of the world. These include mountains, deserts, thunder or lightning, astronomical phenomena, earthquakes or hurricanes, natural bodies of water, rainbows, exotic animals, and trees. One is also required to thank Hashem upon partaking of seasonal fruits for the first time that year by reciting "shehecheyanu."

In Devarim chapter 20, G-d warns us against destroying fruit trees in times of war when besieging a city. We learn from here the importance of respecting the environment even during the heat of the battle. Our Rabbis go one step further and glean from this chapter the general principle of "baal tashchit," not destroying or wasting food or other items of value.

Also, in Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah, the Rambam discusses our obligation to love and fear G-d simultaneously. He questions how it is possible to build a relationship with an infinite G-d. He answers that when we contemplate the wondrous world that G-d created for us, we will develop awe and love for Him and a desire to know him better. The Rambam concludes that we are obligated to study the natural world for this reason.

Finally, when David Hamelech was on the run from Shaul Hamelech, he sings the glory of G-d's creation, which we find in the Tehillim. "How great are Your works oh L-rd all of them You have created with wisdom."

It appears that Rabbi Yaacov stresses that one should immerse himself in Torah study to the effect that beautiful trees or fields will not be a distraction. His opinion seems to malign the natural world. Rav Ovadiah Bartenura (15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy and Israel) understands the Mishna this way. In his commentary on the Mishna, he explains that indeed voicing one's aesthetic appreciation of the world we live in provides a powerful means to love and respect The Creator. Still, nothing parallels the meaningful study of the Torah. No other experience grants a person a deeper understanding of G-d himself. Hence, there is undoubtedly a need to study the sciences and value nature. Yet, we must heed that it never interferes or displaces our Torah study.

In 1950, in honor of Tu B'Shvat, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook published an article titled "The Beauty of the Tree." In this article, Rav Tzvi Yehuda questions why Rabbi Yaakov was opposed to appreciating the world's beauty, even when it is clear from our sages that one is obligated to make a blessing upon seeing the wonders of nature. Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda proposes a novel slant to understanding this Mishna. The act of stopping Torah study to admire the surroundings is not an error. The fault lies in regarding the trees as an interruption to Torah study and not fundamentally connected to the Divine.

It is human instinct to compartmentalize life by isolating the holy from the mundane; the introspective nature of Torah study from the outside world's beauty and grandeur. The book of Mishlei tells us that the Torah is "a tree of life for all who hold it." (Mishlei 3:18). Torah and nature are not two separate domains. Together they make up one comprehensive structure. So too, our soul is one, as the Rambam mentions in the opening sentence of "Shmoneh Perakim." Such is the meaning of "he bears the guilt for his soul." He abandons the soul's sense of harmony between holiness and the natural universe.

Not so the man who regards nature as part and parcel of his spiritual journey. The Midrash (Vayikrah Rabba 25:3) teaches us that one way to achieve a connection with the Shechina is by planting trees in the Land of Israel. The Almighty created the original trees. The second generation of trees emanated from the seeds of the original trees that man planted in the ground and cultivated. The creation of the world is a continuous process. By participating in its development, man is elevated to partners with G-d in this endeavor.

This is the lesson that Rabbi Yaakov is trying to portray. We need to integrate the beauty of nature into our spiritual lives. When we stop our Torah learning to say, "how splendid is this tree," we need to appreciate this beauty in harmony with our studies. It is this inclusive attitude that will inspire us to thank G-d. "Who has made nothing lacking in His world and created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees to give mankind pleasure."

## The Gift of Silence by Mara Goldblatt

~ Sources - Youtube and book The Thinking Jewish Teenager's Guide to Life both by Rav Akiva Tatz

We are so blessed to live here in Maale Adumim, with the small town feel and the big town facilities. We are close enough to the heart of the universe to just “run in” for coffee to meet friends visiting our country from chul. We can davin at the kotel as often as we would like. (We just need to keep the focus and remember how special that is!) We can easily go bathe in the lowest most magical waters on earth that people come from all over the world to try. Our roads are safe. Our community is supportive. Our kids can be out until all hours and while we may not think that is where they should be, they will arrive home safe and won't have any idea what we are talking about if we warn them of the theoretical horrors of the homeless, major drugs, street walkers.....

I have had a lot of time to think during this period of world pandemic (-between the long and concentrated times of Zoom and constant kitchen duty). Even with the arrival of Netflix in our home during the first lockdown (don't ask!), there was plenty of think time. That is actually hard. All this think time. Even as I race around doing “busy work” I still think..... Even if I could only walk out of my home 100 or 1000 meters, there is perpetual quiet-me time. Sometimes facing myself in silence is tough. It is me and the trees; me and the paths; me and the desert bunnies....and if I am lucky, me and the deer and foxes, too.

The silence. The whistling of the wind. The sun. All among the trees. Here we are in the throes of winter. The trees are readying themselves to burst forth with whatever they burst forth with depending on the tree. They enjoy their silence. But do I?

Rabbi Akiva Tatz speaks often (okay, fine- I found it twice- once online and in one of his chapters from The Thinking Jewish Teenager's Guide to Life) about silence. The Chafetz Chaim asked one of his top students if a word is worth a dollar and silence is worth 2 dollars, what is the real treasure? The student answered the word is more worthwhile because you receive a dollar for every word and you can only be silent once... But indeed the silence, stated the Chafetz Chayim, is the treasure because silence is expressed again for every word you do not say. The understanding behind the silence is key.

Rav Dressler speaks of two facilities humans have in order to see- מבט חיצוני and the מבט פנימי. The external eye is all the facilities in which I engage in the world- my five senses. The internal eye is absolute awareness cultivated in silence because דעת is knowledge on the level of things I know have no form in this world relating to the physical senses. The outer world can and should be expressed in words; that's the best it can be. The inner is belittled when we put its concepts into words.

The true test of a relationship is in the דעת: the depth behind the words unspoken. The better you really know someone, the less that needs to be said. And yet, the more there is to dig up and enjoy as we learn more about our dynamic partner, the more the relationship can grow. If

things remain static, then the relationship remains shallow. The excitement of learning more about our partners (spouses/ best-ies etc.) is in the depth of the relationship-and in the listening.

What types of questions exist in the inner eye? Do I even exist? Who am I? Free will? Free will to share with others my depth?

### Do I even exist?

“I think, therefore I am”- Kierkegaard. From an intellectual standpoint? No, he consciously knows himself. No one can tell me I exist. No one can prove it. I know it internally and I can't explain it. Words do nothing. It belittles me and who I am and who I can become when I put myself into words.

### But who am I?

Rav Wolbe had a student who was struggling in his learning. He sent him off on a hike in the fields for 4 hours. Upon his return Rav Wolbe asked how it was.

“I was afraid.”

“It was because of who you met?”

“No. I didn't meet anyone.”

“Yes, you did, and for the first time.”

### Free will to share with others my depth?

Did you ever notice that when you hear a deep meaningful idea for the first time, if you try to share it with others, you lose it? Before you put it into words you need to sit with it as long as it takes (sometimes years- or not ever) until you digest and understand it internally. Only at that point should you try to share. Even then “words may not give it justice”.

We hear often that Holocaust survivors do not share their stories with their kids/grandkids etc. We assume it is because it hurts too much. But, perhaps it is because the memories are so huge that words cannot describe the events on any level. It is not that they won't share because it hurts but they can't share because there are no words.

The converse, can also be true. If someone experiences terror or abuse and can't speak about it ever because it is too big, the therapy is to begin speaking. Eventually the words spoken bring the indescribable and unmanageable to a dimension that becomes manageable.

Rav Moshe Shapiro gave lectures at the time when students would record a lecture on their cassette recorders for later use. One student showed him the updated device- a voice-activated cassette recorder- which only recorded when the Rav spoke to save tape space – it cut out the silences. He wouldn't hear of it. “Silences are part of the lecture”.

There is a mitzva to count 50 days between Passover and Shavuot. However, we count 49 days. Why do we count 49 days? We should make kiddush on Shavuot and then count day-50. The mitzva is to count 50 days... but, you see, the 50 is silent. The 50 is the inner eye of the actions of the 49. We can't put a number on receiving the Torah. Its not a regular day. In the silence of the day we listen for the depth.

We play notes. The music comes from the collection of the notes. Great music comes from the music itself. Can you put words on great music and explain why it is great???

The silence around us allows us to transcend. The trees are my friends because they wait and they don't interrupt. They allow peace among my silence. I can't explain their beauty. That would belittle them.

Tu B'shvat Sameach.

### **Word Association Hints** for the Game on page 5 by Marcia Goldlist

(Answers on page 30)

1. Think of parts of the elephant.
2. What does a dog say?
3. Autumn
4. Think of parts of a tree.
5. One out of seven.
6. Gematriya
7. IDF
8. Home
9. Origin
10. Difference
11. Absorption
12. Take a breath
13. The new State
14. Blue Box
15. As of 2017

## Tu B'Shvat and Mindfulness: Spinning Routine Into Wonder by Susie Keinon

In Mishnah Rosh Hashanah, we are told about four new years in the Jewish calendar, and one of those is the new year for trees. According to Beit Hillel, we celebrate on the 15th of Shvat.

The Mishnah tells us that, most of the rains have fallen for the year, and the fruit on the trees has begun to ripen.

In D'varim( 8:10 ) it says

And you will eat

And be sated

And you shall bless the Eternal, your G-d for the good land He has given you.

Rav S.R. Hirsch (on D'varim. 8:10 ): "A blessing said before any act of eating expresses the resolution that we will use any renewed vital energy gained from this pleasure, to serve G-d. Only if we make this resolution will we become worthy of enjoying that pleasure."

We obviously have to eat to survive, but even the most mundane acts can and should be elevated and made holy. And so we bless our food before we eat, and also afterwards. We can and should enjoy eating our food, but not in a way that is automatic and does not acknowledge where it all came from.

Mindfulness, like blessings, helps us understand that even the most ordinary activities can be wondrous if we take a moment to appreciate them and look at them in an open and curious way.

When we are mindful, we pay attention to the present moment and are aware of where we are and what we are doing. We're not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. We are also more aware of our senses, such as seeing or hearing, or sensations in our body.

How can we be more mindful?

As you sit to drink your morning tea or coffee, imagine taking a moment to notice the color, the smell, the temperature, what it feels like in your mouth, and anything that we can observe about this liquid that we drink every morning.

Or as you go walking on the same path you have taken countless times, imagine stopping to look at a leaf on the ground with an open and child-like perspective and really take the time to look at it: "A leaf; how interesting -- the shape, the color, the texture, the patterns."

Paying attention, or bringing *כוונה* to what we do is a way to elevate even the most routine activities . Do we even notice what or how we're eating ?

Try this mindful eating exercise. Steps to mindful eating (AKA the raisin exercise) :  
Place a raisin in your hand. If you don't have raisins, any food will do (fruit, nuts, chocolate).  
Imagine that you have just come to earth from a distant planet without such food.  
With this food in hand, you can begin to explore it with all of your senses. Focus on this object as if you've never seen anything like it before. Focus on seeing this object. Scan it, exploring every part of it, as if you've never seen such a thing before. Turn it around with your fingers and notice what color it is. Notice the folds and where the surface reflects light or becomes darker.

Next, explore the texture, feeling any softness, hardness, coarseness, or smoothness.  
While you're doing this, if thoughts arise such as "Why am I doing this weird exercise?" then just see if you can acknowledge these thoughts, let them be, and then bring your awareness back to the object.

Take the object beneath your nose and carefully notice the smell of it. Bring the object to one ear, squeeze it, roll it around, and hear if there is any sound coming from it.

Begin to slowly take the object to your mouth, noticing how the arm knows exactly where to go and perhaps becoming aware of your mouth watering. Gently place the object in your mouth, on your tongue, without biting it. Simply explore the sensations of this object in your mouth.

When you're ready, intentionally bite down on the object, maybe noticing how it automatically goes to one side of the mouth versus the other. Also notice the tastes it releases. Slowly chew this object. Be aware of the saliva in your mouth and how the object changes in consistency as you chew.

When you feel ready to swallow, consciously notice the *intention* to swallow, then see if you can notice the sensations of swallowing the raisin, sensing it moving down to your throat and on its way to your stomach.

Take a moment to observe how it was for you to eat this way.

This Tu B'Shvat, try to eat more mindfully, noticing and really tasting your food.  
Mindfulness can help us have a more meaningful experience while eating, and can help us express gratitude for the food we are eating and where it came from, and this can help us connect more to the significance of the new year for trees.

## Tu B'shvat and the Ten Plagues by Chana Even-chen 5781

I know that winter doesn't always make its presence felt too strongly here in Maaleh Adumim, but Shvat is a winter month. As opposed to Nissan, when we rejoice in the blossoming flowers and the fruit on the trees, Shvat is about the quiet potential in nature. In fact, in the Mishna (Rosh Hashana 1:1) there is a dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai over the exact date on which to mark the new year of the trees. Beit Hillel uses the date of Tu B'Shvat when most of the seasonal rain has fallen and the fruit developing process has begun. Beit Shamai uses Rosh Chodesh Shvat which is the earliest possible time that fruit may start developing. Even within this dispute both positions relate to subtleties within a natural process. Both Hillel and Shamai focus on elements hidden from view which represent potential in nature.

In contrast with this air of quiet hidden elements within nature represented by Tu B'Shvat, in the Torah portions that we read during the month of Shvat, we find the opposite tone. We read about the 10 plagues, about the exodus, the splitting of the sea... overt and powerful miracles. Loud, visible events that defy nature. Miracles done with the intention of making a big impression... both on the Egyptians who witness God and His power, and Bnei Yisrael who need to see and absorb it and pass it on to future generations.

What can we learn from this contrast? I believe that both energies are important in our lives and in our relationship with God. It depends on the context and on the goal of the situation.

Let's look at another Torah source which presents us with an interesting contrast.

If we look at the creation of the world and man in Breishit, we see terminology and language that pull in opposing directions. On one hand, man is told that the land is his for use, and that the land is there for us to dominate.

פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ וכבשוה... הנה נתתי לכם כל עשב... ואת כל עץ... לכם יהיה לאכלה ( 1:28-29 )

On the other hand, man is commanded to guard the land and take care of it.

ויניחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה (2:15)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Z"L explains what we can learn from the language used in Breishit, which gives man dominance and also depicts man as subservient to the land.

"Man was set in the Garden of Eden 'to work it and take care of it'" (Gen. 2:15). Man's dominion over nature is thus limited by the requirement to serve and conserve. The famous story of Genesis 2-3—eating the forbidden fruit and the subsequent exile from Eden—makes just this point. Not everything we can do, may we do. Transgress the limits, and disaster follows."

Our relationship with nature is two-fold and that balance must be maintained for both material and spiritual stability. If we don't make use of the land, we will not have what we need, but if we forget to be mindful and compassionate in our use of the land, it may not continue to provide for us. Finally, we must remember that all that we have in the natural world comes from God.

If we look at the transition of Bnei Yisrael from the desert into Eretz Yisrael we can see another example of the delicate relationship with the land and with God that will pull together the ideas we have brought so far—both the contrast between Tu B'shvat and the Torah portions and the contrast between man's dominance over, and subservience to, the land.

Bnei Yisrael were given Manna during their years in the desert. That certainly falls in the category of overt and obvious miracles.

Rav Elchanan Samet comments that in that stage it was crucial for Bnei Yisrael to be exposed to visible, tangible, obvious miracles, in order to have the opportunity to adjust their belief system and believe in God. However, once Bnei Yisrael entered the land of Israel the Manna ceased. It was appropriate in one context and even crucial to the spiritual development of the nation at the time. But for establishing a day to day life in the land, it became appropriate, and even crucial for the spiritual development of the nation, to work the land and produce food. Once in Eretz Yisrael it was important to develop a relationship with God through nature, through regular daily life.

What's interesting is that one might think that the warnings would come with only the miraculous lifestyle... as in, don't get too used to this, you may not always have miraculous bread falling from the sky every day... And yet, somewhat surprisingly, the non-miraculous lifestyle comes with multiple warnings in Sefer Dvarim. Many times Moshe warns the people that they will be tempted to take all the credit for the food they produce. That they may fall into the trap of forgetting God's hand in what they reap from the land. Moshe repeatedly warns the people not to take it for granted – not what they receive from the land and not God's role in making it a reality.

Our relationship with God evolved from being dependent on overt and visible miracles to a relationship that will develop through nature and our day to day involvement with the land. And within our connection with the land, as we saw in Breishit, we are tasked with being both powerful and dominant and also gentle and caring. This relationship involves both privilege and responsibility. It carries benefits and risks on the spiritual level. It can be tremendously empowering and also vastly humbling.

The month of Shvat, with the holiday of Tu B'shvat celebrating the subtle and natural, and the Torah portions emphasizing the miraculous, reminds us of this evolution in our relationship with God and the land, and of the fine balance we must strive to uphold.

That is the tone of the month of Shvat—drawing on both the miraculous and the subtle, the natural and the supernatural, the power and the humility of man within nature.

## **Word Association Answers** by Marcia Goldlist

~game on page 5 and hints on page 25

1. Trunk (both trees and elephants have trunks)
2. Bark (the dog says bark and trees have bark)
3. The squirrel collects nuts which come from trees.
4. Roots (Avraham, Sarah, Yitzhak, Rivka, Yaakov, Leah and Rachel make up the roots of our family trees)
5. Barley, is one of the 7 minim which we eat on Tu B'Shevat and it is a main ingredient in beer
6. (Eitz) עץ is a tree 70=ע and 90=צ
7. Branches - trees have branches and the Air Force, Ground Forces and Navy are all branches of the IDF.
8. All of these animals make their homes in trees.
9. Nutmeg and mace grow on trees and cinnamon and cork come from the bark of trees. Thus they all originate on trees.
10. In the summer there can be a difference of 3-5 degrees Celsius between a street with trees and a street without trees.
11. A mature tree can absorb 48 pounds of carbon dioxide a year. (In one year, an acre of forest can absorb twice as much carbon dioxide as an average car emits in a year.)
12. One tree produces almost 260 pounds of oxygen a year.
13. The JNF planted about 4.5 million trees before Israel declared its independence in 1948.
14. Since the establishment of the JNF they have planted over 240 million trees. (The traditional charity box for the JNF was a blue box.)
15. As of 2017 (when a way was discovered to count a large number of trees) it was calculated that there was approximately 3.04 trillion trees in the world. (This is much more than previously thought.)