

Shvilei Pinches

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The Fabulous Insight of Hagaon Rabbi Shmuel Engel, zts"l

On Tu B'Shevat the Power of "Teshuva M'ahavah"

- Repentance from Love on Succos Is Realized

It is a Jewish custom, accepted as bona - fide Torah law, to eat many different kinds of fruit on Tu B'Shevat - especially from the seven species that Eretz Yisroel is famous for. The source for this custom is found in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 131,6) where Tu B'Shevat is included among the days on which Tachanun is omitted. The reason being that it is the New Year for the trees, as we have learned in the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 2.):

"באחד בשבט ראש השנה לאילן כדברי בית שמאי, בית הלל אומרים בחמשה עשר בו."

"The first of Shevat is the New Year for the tree, in accord with the teachings of Beis Shammai; Beis Hillel says it is on the fifteenth (tu) of the month (of Shevat)." Rashi comments:

"לענין מעשר, שאין מעשרין פירות האילן שחנטו קודם שבט על שחנטו לאחר שבט, שבאילן הולך אחר החנטה."

Concerning tithing (maaser), one cannot separate tithes from fruit that emerged before Shevat on fruit that emerged after Shevat: the time of emergence (ripening) is the determining factor. The gemorah (ibid. 14.) explains the rationale for Tu B'Shevat's designation as the New Year for trees: "הואיל ויצאו רוב גשמי שנה" - most of the year's rain has passed. Rashi explains: most of the rainy season has passed, the resin (sap) has risen in the trees, and the fruit are found to emerge from this time on.

In summary, Tu B'Shevat is the New Year for the trees, because it commemorates the beginning of the emergence/ripening of the fruit. The Magen Avraham (ibid. 16) quotes the Tikun Yissochar: **"בט"ו בשבט ראש השנה לאילנות, ונוהגין האשכנזים להרבות במיני פירות של אילנות"**. The custom has become widespread throughout the Jewish world to consume lots of fruit on Tu B'Shevat; the later kabbalists even instituted a special "tikun" in this regard.

**The "New Year for the Tree"
to Rectify the Sin of the Etz HoDaas**

We find an amazing chiddush from Rabbi Tzaddok hokohen of Lublin ziy"l, in the Pri Tzaddik (Beshalach). He points out that Rabeinu hokadosh specifically uses the terminology **"ראש השנה לאילן"** - using the singular for "the tree" rather than the plural **"לאילנות"** - "for the trees." He interprets this as an allusion to the fact that on Tu B'Shevat we are to rectify the sin of Adom

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horishon who ate from the etz hodaas—which is referred to as a “אילן” (Berachos 40.): “אילן” שאכל ממנו אדם הראשון.

This is why it is customary to eat lots of fruit and to recite beroches over them on Tu B’Shevat; we wish to imbue them with blessing and kedushah and to remedy the damage caused to the fruit by Odam horishon. The Midrash explains (B.R. 12,6) that the perfection and completeness of the fruit was confiscated as a result of the sin of the etz hodaas; furthermore, they will not return to their pristine state until Moshiach ben Dovid comes.

This is why Tu B’Shevat, the time the fruit begin to emerge, is designated as the tree’s New Year. On this day, the world is judged as to whether or not the damage caused to the trees will remain or whether we will merit rectification of the fruit—as it will be once again in the future.

It still remains to be explained, why Tu B’Shevat is the appropriate time for this tikun? Why did the Almighty arrange that Tu B’Shevat would be the time for us to occupy ourselves with the correction of the sin of the etz hodaas?

Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel Consistent with Their Own Doctrines

To shed light on this matter, I would like to introduce a fabulous insight concerning Tu B’Shevat that I learned from the genius Rabbi Shmuel Engel in his seifer “שפתי מהר” ש ענגיל” (Beshalach). He examines the language of the Mishnah: “באחד בשבת ראש השנה לאילן כדברי בית שמאי, בית הלל אומרים בחמשה עשר בו” – this is the opinion of Beis Shammai—and choose, instead, the formula “כדברי בית שמאי” – like the opinion of Beis Shammai. [Note the addition of the letter “kaf” in the word כדברי.]

His brilliant explanation is founded on the gemorah (Be’ah 16.): “כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד ראש השנה” The gemorah (Yevamos 37.) explains that a fetus is not apparent until one third of its gestation has passed. In the same manner, the abundance that was decreed for the year at the beginning of Tishrei, on Rosh Hoshanah, only becomes evident after four months have passed. After one third of the year has passed, the decree of abundance from Rosh Hoshanah becomes apparent in Shevat.

To better understand the difference of opinion between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel—whether the New Year for the tree is on the first of Shevat or the fifteenth of Shevat—let us introduce the well - known commentary of the Kedushas Levi (Vayelech) explaining the Midrash Tanchuma concerning Succos (Emor 22):

“ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון, וכי ראשון הוא והלא ט”ו יום הוא, ואת אמרת ביום הראשון, אלא ראשון הוא לחשבון עונות.”

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Based on the gemorah (Yoma 86:), he explains that by means of teshuvah m'yirah intentional transgressions are transformed into inadvertent transgressions; whereas, teshuvah m'ahavah transforms intentional transgressions into merits. Now, on Rosh Hoshanah and Yom Kippur, Yisroel repent out of yirah, inspired with fear and reverence by the Day of Judgment and the image of the Almighty King sitting on His throne.

On the other hand, after the high holidays, after the Almighty has forgiven Yisroel their sins, as the verse states (Vayikrah 16,30): **“כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאותיכם לפני ה' תטהרו”**, we celebrate the holiday of Succos. Yisroel dwell in their Succahs, secure and protected by “emunah,” and repent out of ahavah, full of joy and spiritual enlightenment.

As a result, there is no point in tallying Yisroel's transgressions after the high holidays, since up until that time, they have only performed repentance out of yirah, and the transgressions have not yet been transformed into merits. On Succos, however, when Yisroel perform repentance out of ahavah and the transgressions have actually been transformed into merits, it is time to tally and be rewarded by the Almighty - **“ראשון לחשבון עוונות”**.

Beis Shammai's Attribute Is Yirah

Beis Hillel's Is Ahavah

In Shaar Hogilgulim (Intro. 34), the Arizal explains that Hillel the elder was rooted in ahavah; consequently, he was extremely humble and performed frequent acts of chesed. In contrast, Shammai the elder was rooted in severity and judgment; consequently, he was very strict. For this reason, the halachah accords with Beis Hillel, since the world could not survive by the standard of strictness and severity. The world's survival depends on chesed, as it is written (Tehillim 89,3): **“כי אמרתי עולם חסד יבנה”**.

With this background, Rabbi Shmuel Engel clarifies Beis Shammai's and Beis Hillel's positions regarding Tu B'Shevat:

“באחד בשבת ראש השנה לאילן כדברי בית שמאי, בית הלל אומרים בחמשה עשר בו.”

The Mishnah compares man to a tree (Avos 3,17):

“כל שמעשיו מרובים מחכמתו למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מעטים ושרשיו מרובים, שאפילו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו”

“Anyone whose good deeds exceed his wisdom—to what is he compared? To a tree whose branches are few, but whose roots are numerous—even if all the winds in the world were to come and blow against it, they would not budge it from its place. . .”

Therefore, Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel debate when a man's good deeds become apparent based on man's comparison to a tree.

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Consistent with their doctrine of yirah, Beis Shammai view Rosh Hoshanah as the time of our ultimate and complete service to Hashem. Therefore, the abundance that descends on the first of Tishrei, becomes apparent four months later—one third of a year later—on the first of Shevat. This explains the nuance of Rabeinu hokadosh's wording in the Mishnah; by saying "כרברי", like the opinion of, he is teaching us that their position in this matter, accords with their overall doctrine of yirah.

Beis Hillel, on the other hand, whose essence is chesed and love of Hashem, view the first day of Succos, the fifteenth of Tishrei, as the time of our ultimate and complete service of Hashem, because it is then that we do "תשובה מאהבה" - repentance from ahavah. So although the divine poet Rabbi Amnon proclaims: "בראש השנה יכתבון וביום צום כיפור יחתמון", the essential abundance doesn't descend to this world until the fifteenth of Tishrei when Yisroel perform repentance from ahavah, and they become apparent four months later on Tu B'Shevat.

The Tikun for the Sin of the Etz HoDaas Is on Rosh Hoshanah and on Succos

In honor of Tu B'Shevat, let us spice up this idea and expand it further. Tu B'Shevat is in reality the New Year for the trees, since that is when the fruit begin to emerge and ripen; thus, the custom to indulge and eat lots of fruit on this day. While it is true that man is compared to a tree, what connection, though, is there between the tree's New Year and Yisroel's repentance from ahavah on Succos?

We cited the holy words of Rabbi Tzaddok hokohen ziy"l, above, pointing out that Rabeinu hokadosh deliberately used the expression "ראש השנה לאילן" in the singular—to teach us that Tu B'Shevat is a day to concern ourselves with the tikun of the sin of the etz hodaas, which is referred to as an "אילן". We then questioned why the Almighty chose this day, specifically, for that purpose?

By combining Rabbi Shmuel Engel's idea with that of Rabbi Tzaddok hokohen's, everything falls neatly into place. Let us just preface our explanation with Rabeinu Nissim's explanation of why the first day of Tishrei is the Day of Judgment for all of creation (Rosh Hoshanah 16.). We find in the Midrash (Pesiktah 23) that the world was created on the twenty - fifth of Elul; on the sixth day, the first of Tishrei, Rosh Hoshanah, man was created; on that very same day, he was commanded not to eat from the etz hodaas, he transgressed, and the Almighty expelled him from Gan Eden. Also on that same day, he regretted his transgression; he repented and was absolved of his guilt by the Almighty:

"אמר לו הקב"ה זה סימן לבניך, כשם שעמדת לפני בדין ביום זה ויצאת בדימוס, כך עתידין בניך להיות עומדים לפני בדין ביום זה ויוצאין בדימוס, וכל זה אימתי בחדש השביעי באחד לחודש".

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On Tu B'Shevat We Realize If We Succeeded in Correcting the Sin of the Etz HoDaas

We have learned that Rosh Hoshanah is the day of judgment for all of creation, since Adom horishon sinned on that day and all of the souls were contained within him at the time of the sin. As a result, the death sentence was decreed on all living creatures. So, on Rosh Hoshanah and Yom Kippur, we repent out of yirah for our part in the sin of the etz hodaas; whereas, on Succos, we repent out of ahavah for our part in that sin.

Now, on Rosh Hoshanah, when Adom horishon sinned, the Almighty expelled him from Gan Eden and decreed (Bereishis 3,17): **“ארורה האדמה בעבורך ... וקוץ ודרדר תצמיח לך ואכלת את עשב השדה, בזעת אפריך תאכל לחם”**. We cited the Midrash earlier that explained that as a result of the sin and the subsequent decree, the fruit of the land and the fruit of the tree were cursed.

We can now begin to appreciate the connection Rabbi Tzaddok hokohen draws between Tu B'Shevat, **“ראש השנה לאילן”**, and the correction of the sin of the etz hodaas, **“אילן שאכל”** **“ממנו אדם הראשון”**. We've established that the abundance that descends upon the world on Rosh Hoshanah is not apparent until one third of the year passes. It turns out, then, that every year in the month of Shevat, we find out whether or

The halachah accords with Beis Hillel; the New Year for the tree is celebrated on the fifteenth of Shevat. Tu B'Shevat is one third of a year after the first day of Succos—when Yisroel began to repent from ahavah. We have learned that on Tu B'Shevat the effectiveness of our teshuvah for the sin of the etz hodaas becomes apparent - the teshuvah we began out of yirah on Rosh Hoshanah and progressed to teshuvah m'ahavah on Succos. On Tu B'Shevat, one third of the year after the first day of Succos, how wonderful it would be to complete the tikun for the sin of the etz hodaas, and merit the complete redemption and the coming of Moshiach ben Dovid, bimheirah b'yameinu, Amen.