

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

ט' שבט תשפ"ד

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The newly released book "Remarkable Insights about Death and the Afterlife" is now available (as a paperback, hardcover and digitized version) for purchase and delivery on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0C9NDCMNC> or by sending an email to [yalt3285@gmail.com](mailto:yalt3285@gmail.com). Alternatively, you can call 054 849 5217 or 917 732 2371. This extensive and thought-provoking book addresses these questions and many more, providing transformative insights. With a collection comprising over 70 meticulously crafted essays, it eloquently articulates the Torah's viewpoint regarding death and the afterlife. This work stands as an invaluable resource, facilitating readers in acquiring a deeper comprehension of this vital subject. It makes a great gift for friends, relatives, business associates and learning partners. Purchase it at <https://amzn.to/3eyh5xP>. Please spread the word about it.

Some of the questions discussed in this book are the following.

What is the ultimate way to elevate the soul of one's parents?

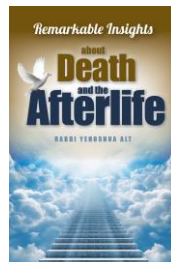
How does the death process rectify a person's soul?

What profound life lessons can we learn from gravestones?

In what ways can the concept of reincarnation help us better understand life?

What is the idea behind davening at gravesites?

What will happen at the Resurrection of the Dead?



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### Tu B'shevat

We are compared to a tree as it states כי האדם עץ השדה, man is a tree of the field.<sup>1</sup> In middle of winter, the trees look empty and dead. We all know that it is now when new life starts to pump through the trees as they begin to rejuvenate. The same applies to us. My Avodas

Hashem may have been going through a difficult "winter" lately but this period has potential for rejuvenation.



<sup>1</sup> Devarim 20:19. The Maharal explains (Chidushei Agados, Nida 25) the pasuk that compares man to the tree of the field (Devarim 20:19). The head is his root and his hands and feet are the branches forking away from its sides. Man is an upturned tree, as his roots are above. His mind,

which is in his head, is planted in heaven, because man is connected upwards towards heaven. Therefore, like the tree's roots are in the earth, as it grows from the earth, so man's root is in heaven, from where he originates.

ראש השנה לאילנות which is Tu B'shevat, brings renewal to the tree.<sup>2</sup> This also refers to the עץ חיים,<sup>3</sup> tree of life, Torah.<sup>4</sup> The Avnei Nazer explains that man's fruit are his Chidushei Torah, his original Torah ideas and teachings. Just as on Tu B'shevat the sap rises up inside the tree, enabling a new crop of fruit, so too, there is a renewal in the Chidushei Torah, in the fruit of each Jew.



In fact, the Avnei Nazer was able to tell a difference in his Torah before and after Tu B'shevat. He felt that his Chidushei Torah were enhanced due to Tu B'shevat. They were on a higher level than they were during the remainder of the year.

The Eretz Tzvi<sup>5</sup> adds that since "tree" is a reference to a person, as in **כי האדם עץ השדה**, the main Rosh Hashana (the main renewal) on Tu B'shevat is in fact for Chidushei Torah and not for the fruit of the actual trees.

We connect to a Yom Tov 30 days before it as the Sages instruct us that 30 days before a Yom Tov, we should learn (שואלין ודורשין) the Halachos of that Yom Tov.<sup>6</sup> A month before Purim (on a non-leap year) is Tu B'shevat. Purim is a form of Kabbalas Hatorah as the Gemara says that is when we received the Torah again.<sup>7</sup> In this way we should prepare ourselves as Tu B'shevat is a time of rejuvenation in Torah. It is specifically in שבט that we hope to merit **שמרם ברכם טהרם**, guard them, bless them, purify them.<sup>8</sup>

Rashi<sup>9</sup> comments on **ועץ השדה יתן פריו**, the tree of the field will give its fruit, that it refers to the אילני סרק, trees that do not bear fruit which in the future will produce fruit. This is also a hint to humans who are compared to a tree, that those Jews who are אילני סרק will bear fruit, Chidushei Torah, in the future. R' Moshe Wolfson points out that **ועץ** has a numerical value of 1,236, the same equivalent as **עשר בשבט**. Astounding!

<sup>2</sup> Rosh Hashana 2a. The Mazel of Shevat is the דלי. This hints to water as in **זול מים מדליו**, water shall flow from his wells (Bamidbar 24:7). With this we can find a hint to Tu B'shevat in (Tehillim 1:3) **היה כעץ שתול על פלגי מים** (simple meaning: He shall be like a tree deeply rooted alongside brooks of water, that yields fruit in its season), as **אשר פריו יתן בעתו** (as in **פלגא דגופא** a reference to the 15<sup>th</sup> day as **פלג** means half (as in **פלגא דגופא**, a half of a body) referring to halfway through the month, the 15<sup>th</sup> day. So, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat it is the time of the tree (עץ שתול) which yields fruit (אשר פריו יתן בעתו) (See Ateres Yehoshua, Tu B'shevat, s.v. בפסוק). On this day the Mishna Brura (131:31) writes **להרבות או במיני פרות של אילנות**, we increase in the types of fruits from trees. Another hint to Tu B'shevat is found in **שבטי יה** - עדות לישראל להודות לשם ה' a testimony for Israel to give thanks to the name of Hashem (Tehillim 122:4). **שבטי יה** alludes to **שבט** - **יה** has a Gematria of 15, thereby making reference to the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat. On this day we thank Hashem by saying a Bracha on fruits (See Toldos Yitzchok)

<sup>3</sup> Mishlei 3:18. Indeed, it was in the month of Shevat that Moshe began to explain the Torah to us (Devarim 1:3,5).

<sup>4</sup> The pasuk (Mishlei 3:18) calls the Torah an עץ חיים, a tree of life. The Vilna Gaon's brother, Rabbeinu Avraham (In the beginning of the sefer Maalos Hatorah, s.v. v'shamati) says the following: A tree is a single entity that splits up into numerous subentities in the form of branches. These branches yield further subentities in the form of fruits. The fruits are comprised of different parts, including numerous seeds. A single seed is one part of one piece of fruit of one branch of the tree. Yet when that



The Divrei Chaim would make an extravagant seuda on Tu B'shevat. He explained that from Rosh Chodesh Shevat until Shavuos there is a Yom Tov at least every 15 days. They are Rosh Chodesh Shevat, Tu B'shevat, Rosh Chodesh Adar, Purim, Rosh Chodesh Nissan, Pesach, Rosh Chodesh Iyar, Pesach Sheini, Rosh Chodesh Sivan and Shavuos.<sup>10</sup> Is it any wonder that the letters of שבט form the phrase **שנתבשר בשורות טובות**, be informed of good news?!<sup>11</sup> The month of שבט should be one of **שלום, טובה, ברכה**, peace, goodness and blessing.

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### Persevering

Since we are currently in the special days of shovivim, the following essay is very fitting.

About the tests of Yosef with Potifar's wife, it says **וימאן**,<sup>12</sup> Yosef refused to be with her. The trop on **וימאן** is called a שלשלת (וּיִמָּאן). The Bechor Shor tells us that this trop symbolizes oscillation and uncertainty.<sup>13</sup> In fact, this is shown in the shape of this trop which is like a zigzag, where the line keeps going back and forth. That is to say, Yosef didn't have clarity to forge ahead with decisive steadfast commitment. Yosef kept going back and forth. Indeed, the word שלשלת means chained meaning he was chained and stuck, ambivalent and unsure.<sup>14</sup>

Yosef struggled but in the end was victorious in not succumbing to the temptation. We each have our own struggles and battles in life, but we must fight until we overcome them.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of six books including the recently released Dazzling Money Insights. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

seed is planted, an entire tree can grow from it. This means that every seed actually contains a representation of the makeup of the entire tree. The same is true with mitzvos which are fruits of the tree of Torah. Every mitzva is a distinct subentity of the Torah but each mitzva contains within it the "code" of the tree. So all mitzvos are inextricably interconnected to the extent that there can be aspects within a certain mitzva which may be related to, and representative of, other mitzvos. We can understand this in that the body consists of various parts each with its own discrete form and function. However every single part of the body shares the same DNA as the rest of the body. So too each mitzva contains the "DNA" of Torah which unifies it with every other mitzva.

<sup>5</sup> Shu"t Eretz Tzvi, Volume 2, Drushim, Drush 1.

<sup>6</sup> See Pesachim 6a. A hint to this is found in the letter ל, which has a numerical value of 30. This alludes to that 30 days prior he should learn about the Yom Tov, as ל spelled out is למד, a reference to לימוד, learning.

<sup>7</sup> Shabbos 88a.

<sup>8</sup> אבא בכה ח.

<sup>9</sup> Vayikra 26:4.

<sup>10</sup> Siach Tzadikim, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> See the fourth yehi ratzon after Krias Hatorah before Ashrei.

<sup>12</sup> Breishis 39:8.

<sup>13</sup> This is also what this trop represents in the only other three places it appears in the Torah, in Breishis 19:16, 24:12 and Vayikra 8:23.

<sup>14</sup> See Sota 36b.