

# Talking to Trees

## A Tu B'Shvat Study by Masorti Israel -The Rav Siach program

### Overview of Tu B'Shvat

#### **What is Tu B'shvat?**

Tu (ט"ו) stands for the number 15 and Shvat is the 5th month of the Jewish calendar, so Tu B'Shvat is the 15th of the month of Shvat. Tu B'Shvat is the New Year of the trees. In the tractate Rosh Hashanah, the first Mishna talks about four New Years, one of which is for the trees. Traditionally it was important to know the age of one's tree, as there is a law forbidding eating the fruits of a tree before it is three years old. Today, some observe the custom of having a Tu B'Shvat seder, similar to that of Pesach, although here they eat fruit, especially the fruits of Israel. Some other customs include eating a new fruit, eating from the seven species of Israel, and planting trees.

#### **How is it celebrated?**

**Have some of the Israeli students speak about what they do for the holiday**  
**If the American students also have Tu B'Shvat customs have them also talk about what they do - See if they do anything for [Arbor Day](#)**

### Text Study: Talking to Trees

Read the texts outloud in both the Hebrew and English; discuss the texts.

Some guiding questions:

#### **How are the two texts similar? Different?**

#### *Some ideas:*

both anthropomorphize the trees

both look at the tree as an object that one can learn from (either by asking it, or thinking about the greater ideas of a tree)

The first text looks at the tree as an object that gives to humans (almost as if it was their job) but it is then our job to praise/thank it. The second text looks at the tree that humans relate to, and is something that we should understand.

In the first text the human talking recognizes all that trees provide, while in the second text they are trying to figure that out.



**If you were to bless the tree in the text from TB Ta'anit, what would your blessing be?**

**What does his blessing mean, "May it be God's will that all your shoots shall be like you?"**

*Some ideas:*

This teaches the idea of continuation through the generations. We hope that our good qualities pass on to our descendants. This text is very often given as a given to new parents as a blessing.

What does one bless one that has everything, it can be said that the basic things are to have continued happiness and health.

**What can we learn from the tree in the second text?**

*Some ideas:*

Learning to be happy with one's lot.

Learning to be happy with the small things in life.

Sometimes it is good to ask other people/things about how they view the world.

Looking at the world from another's point of view will give a different perspective.

Having the recognition that sometimes the things that are good for one person are not good for the other. Each person/being has different wants/needs/desires, and we should respect that.

It is important to take time to listen to others.

**When are times that you want to stay in place? What are the benefits?**

**When are times that you want to move around? What are the benefits?**

**In your times of quiet, what do you hear or notice?**



### TB Ta'anit 5b

When they were about to part, [R. Nahman] said: Please, Rabbi, bless me. He replied: Let me tell you a parable — To what may this be compared? To a man who was journeying in the desert; he was hungry, weary and thirsty and he lighted upon a tree the fruits of which were sweet, its shade pleasant, and a stream of water flowing beneath it; he ate of its fruits, drank of the water, and rested under its shade. When he was about to continue his journey, he said: Tree, O Tree, with what shall I bless you? Shall I say to you, 'May thy fruits be sweet'? They are sweet already; that your shade be pleasant? It is already pleasant; that a stream of water may flow beneath you? Look, a stream of water flows already beneath you; therefore [I say], 'May it be God's will that all your shoots shall be just like you.

### תלמוד בבלי תענית ה:

ר' יצחק שבשעה שעמד להפרד מחברו, ר' נחמן, ברכו בברכה הבאה:  
'אמשול לך משל, למה הדבר דומה - לאדם שהיה הולך במדבר והיה רעב ועייף וצמא, ומצא אילן שפירותיו מתוקין וצלו נאה, ואמת המים עוברת תחתיו. אכל מפירותיו, ושתה ממימיו, וישב בצילו. וכשביקש לילך, אמר: אילן, אילן, במה אברכך? אם אומר לך שיהו פירותיך מתוקין - הרי פירותיך מתוקין, שיהא צילך נאה - הרי צילך נאה, שתהא אמת המים עוברת תחתך - הרי אמת המים עוברת תחתך.  
אלא: יהי רצון שכל נטיעות שנוטעין ממך יהיו כמותך.

### "How Does it Feel to be a Tree?"/ Datya Ben David

Once I asked a tree-  
"Tree, how does it feel to be a tree?"  
"You must be joking!"- said the tree.  
"No, No", I said, "really, is it good or bad?"  
"Bad" answered the tree surprised, "why would it be bad?"  
"It doesn't bother you that you are stuck all week?"  
"I am not stuck, I am planted."  
"You don't want to go visit a friend or see other places?"  
"I have no desire to roam around. Birds sing to me regularly, butterflies kiss me, the wind brushes against me, and before my eyes is the open horizon."  
"And at night, when everyone is sleeping, then what?"  
"At night I listen to the silence and how the earth breaths, how fruits ripen and how the dew falls, and between my leaves sleep little birds, and I make sure they stay asleep."  
"I love you tree"- I said.  
And then I walked home and planted a tree in front of my window.

### איך זה להיות עץ? / דתיה בן-דור

פעם שאלתי עץ -  
"עץ, איך זה להיות עץ?"  
"אתה ונדאי מתלוצץ"- אמר העץ.  
"לא ולא", אמרתי - "ברצינות גמורה, זה טוב או רע?"  
"רע?" תמה העץ. "מדוע?"  
"ולא אכפת לך שאתה תקוע כל השבוע?"  
"אינני תקוע, אני נרתי נטוע"  
"ולא מתחשק לך לפעמים ללכת לבקר חברים או לראות מה נשמע במקומות אחרים?"  
"אין לי כל צורך לנוד ולנוע. ציפורים מזמרות לי באופן קבוע פרפרים לי נושקים, מלטפת הרוח ולנגד עיני כל האופק פתוח."  
"ובלילה כשכולם ישנים - אז מה?"  
"בלילה אני מאזין לךממה ושומע איך נושמת האדמה איך פירות מבשילים  
איך יורדים הטללים ובתוך ענפי ישנים גוזלים ואני שומר על שנתם."  
"אני אוהב אותך עץ" - אמרתי  
והלכתי אל גני ונטעתי לי עץ מול חלונני.