

## Tu B'Shevat - A Time for Hidden Beginnings

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

### Introduction

This winter has been hard on many levels. The snow was a bittersweet blessing bringing needed water to the land together with causing much damage. I don't want to complain about the broken trees in my garden and the chicks in my coop that died of cold, which I know is all a *kapara* (atonement), but I want to share with you my own experience of pulling myself out of feeling low inside.

This was the first time in so many years that all of a sudden I was not super busy. Teaching had to be called off because of the snow, and my upcoming book *The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties*, which I so much hoped would be ready for Tu b'Shevat had additional delays. Since the book had not yet been finalized, I also didn't feel like beginning working on a new book. When I began to sort my photos compulsively on the computer I realized how I thrive when being busy. It was like hibernating, sleeping lazily long, no one knocking on the icy doors, feeling alone and not needed. When things are low there is a tendency to feel the moment isolated from the past and future, as if I forgot how many people got strengthened from my teachings and EmunaHealing sessions throughout the years. I seemed to be unable to call to mind that I have a wonderful role to play in the drama of life, but just succumbed to down feelings.

Then the sun began to shine, and my *emunah* began to grow. In my experience the main healing and rising from a "low" is to accept being in that "low," not trying to run away from it into all kinds of "exits" and escapes. Life has ups and downs and through experiencing the "downs" and calling out to Hashem from the depth, we may accomplish more than when we busily ride the roller-coaster of rampant success. A breathing space for self-inventory and tune up can be viewed as a welcome blessing. So I just slowed down and experienced the power of acceptance. As the snow is melting and the buds of the almond trees are opening, I look forward to a bundle of blessings this coming spring. I bless you to experience personal renewal and strengthening of *emunah* in all the goodness waiting for all of us around the corner!

### The Timing of Tu b'Shevat – A Lesson in *Emunah* (faith)

As the holiday of Tu b'Shevat – the New-Year of the Trees is approaching, we would have expected to see the trees in their full green glory crowned with ripe radiant fruit. Wouldn't it at least be fitting to celebrate the New Year of the trees around Pessach time when the buds are just opening to express the beginning of their new life?

Yet, The New Year of the trees is celebrated at the time when all the fruits and leaves have fallen and the tree stands bare and naked; when the cold and dark envelops nature with its muddy cover. The secret of Tu b'Shevat gently whispers; *"when everything looks dead, dark and murky, life, light and*



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*glory is hiding just below the surface.*” The time when nothing seems to be happening on the outside; is the beginning of the richest inner life.

The fact that the peak of winter is selected to mark the New Year of the Trees reflects the Jewish outlook to begin the day with its preceding night. During the night and dark times of our lives it is only faith in a better morrow that gives us the strength to keep carrying on. It is this faith that has nurtured the Jewish people throughout our troublesome history of anti-Semitism, suppression and pogroms.

## Gardening and Emunah

Gardening and planting also help strengthen our faith in a better future. The first order of the *mishnah* is called “seeds” because it deals with the many Torah laws connected to planting. When the Talmud designates a name depicting the character of each of the Six Orders of the *mishnah*, the Order of “Seeds” receives the name אֱמוּנָה/*Emunah* faith.<sup>1</sup>

## Decomposition Prior to Growth

The medieval Torah scholar and poet Yehuda Halevi points out that the seed actually decomposes completely before it is transformed into a tender plant. He compares this with the fate of the Jewish people who became completely decomposed and scattered before the ingathering of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple.<sup>2</sup> On a personal level, we can learn from the nature of seeds that when things seem most dark and devastating it is only the dark before the dawn. The more hopeless the situation, the closer is its gratifying solution.

## From Crisis to Renewal

In my own life I continuously draw on the faith I receive from the decomposing seeds that get transformed into small saplings in my garden. Many people can testify that it is the crises in their lives, which they can thank for their great personal renewals and growth. Was it not for the difficulties we experience and the decomposing depression of feeling potentially unfulfilled, we would have never taken initiative to make important changes in the direction of our lives. To this day when times are rough I remind myself how great new beginnings surely are just around the corner.

## Renewed Building Emanates from Fallen Structures

The secret of Tu b'Shevat teaches us to view the current crisis in Israel, USA and the world in a new light. Instead of losing faith and giving in to the feelings of depression and despair, we need to realize that although we can no longer hold on to the walls that are crumbling down, the fallen structures give way to building new and infinitely higher strongholds. They teach us that we cannot rely on the

<sup>1</sup> The Six Orders of the Mishnah have each been given a name by the Talmud corresponding to a word in *Yesha'yahu* 33:6 as follows.

הַקִּנְיָה אֱמוּנָת עַמִּיךָ חֶסֶד וְשׂוֹמֵרֵת הַכֶּמֶת וְדַעַת יִרְאַת הַשֵּׁם הִיא אוֹצָרוֹ: (ישעיה פרק לג:ו)

“It shall be the emunah (faith) of your times, a store of salvation, wisdom and knowledge, the fear of Hashem is his treasure” (*Yesha'yahu* 33:6).

“Emunah” corresponds to *Seder Zeraim* (Seeds), “Your Times” to *Seder Moed* (Holidays) “A Store” to *Seder Nashim* (Women), “Salvation” to *Seder Nezikin* (Damages), “Wisdom” to *Seder Kedoshim* (Holiness), “Knowledge” to *Seder Taharot* (Purity)... (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 31a).

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, *The Kuzari*, Article 4:1.



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ephemeral values of financial success, rather we must rebuilt our world founded on spiritual everlasting values, placing G-d in the center of our aspirations for true morality.

May the decomposing seeds of the present darkness take root in new and richer soil, and may we enjoy the fruits of the renewed perfected world!



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