

Rabbi Judah Mischel



THE TREE OF LIFE

Rebbe Yosef Yitzchok, the Freidiker (Previous) Lubavitcher Rebbe, was on a leisurely walk through the forest with his father, Rebbe Shalom Dov Ber, when young Yosef Yitzchok absentmindedly plucked a leaf off a tree.

Surprised, the father turned to his son and admonished him for his seemingly harmless action: “The leaf you tore from its branch was created by the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for a specific purpose! It’s alive, its physical structure is akin to a body, it’s imbued with a Divine life-force, it’s guided by *hashgacha pratit* (Divine Providence). Every blade of grass, every leaf on every tree is invested with G-d’s own vitality, created intentionally, each with a Divine spark, part of a ‘soul’ that has descended to earth to find its correction and fulfillment. How can you be so callous towards a creation of G-d?”

The Ba’al Shem Tov taught: the all-encompassing Oneness of G-d is the fundamental reality underlying all Creation. Everything is an expression of the singular, Divine whole, the *Ein Sof*, the Infinite.

Therefore, coming into contact with even one part, one element of Creation, is connecting to the entirety. Far beyond the Transcendentalist thinkers and writers of the 19th century (*lehavdil*), the Holy Ba’al Shem Tov vividly perceived the

interconnectedness of Creation with a supernal ecosystem, where all things share the same root and all pulsate with the same Divine heartbeat. All of Creation are branches of one tree.

The Torah itself is called עץ חיים, “a Tree of Life for all those who grab onto it” (Mishlei 3). When we grab hold of a single leaf at the very edge of the tree, a small twig, flower or fruit, we are “*ocheiz bekula*,” holding on to the entire tree as well, connected to the whole of Truth and Wisdom.

In the same way that the Rebbe, Reb Sholom Dov Ber, was sensitive to every blade of grass, every petal, so do we need to cherish every word of Torah learned, every letter, every *mitzvah*. Connecting with just one

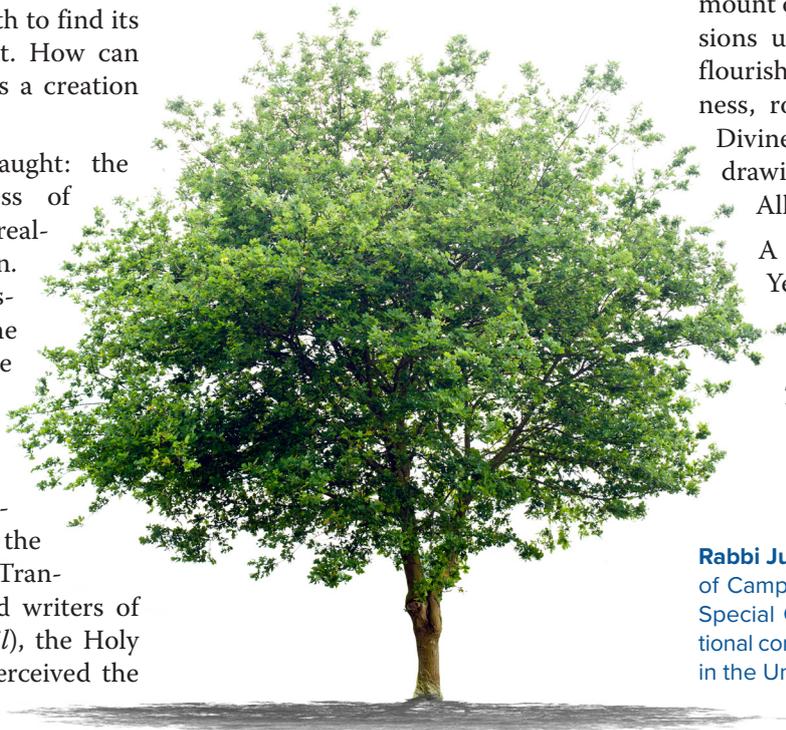
idea or verse of Torah, uttering a single word of prayer, we are bound to the entirety of the infinite universe of Jewish experience and knowledge.

Part of the Torah is the whole of Torah. Every detail is equally connected to the Source and the same Divine current flows through every *nekuda*, and every authentic commentary and *chidush* throughout time.

The Shabbat after Tu BiShvat, *Shabbat Shira*, features the Song of the Sea at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, the Splitting of the Sea. In the midst of *Az Yashir*, the song of praise celebrating the Exodus from Egypt, Moshe has a vision of the End of Days: תבאמו ונתעמו בהר נחלתך, “Bring us to and implant us upon the mount of Your inheritance...” He envisions us “planted” on *Har HaBayit*, flourishing with Temple consciousness, rooted in the headquarters of Divine space, time and awareness, drawing from the infinite Source of All Life. So may it be!

A meaningful and sweet New Year for the Trees to all who strive to cling to any and every part of it!

Tu BiShvat Sameach!



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