

BILVAVI

EATING
ON TU B'SHEVAT



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Eating The Seven Species on Tu B'Shevat

This month of Shevat is about *le'itah*, eating.^[1]

Clearly, on the day of *Tu B'Shevat*, which is called the “*Rosh HaShanah* of the trees”^[2], where there is a custom to eat the seven species of *Eretz Yisrael*, is a day to clarify the power of *le'itah*/slow eating that describes the essence of the month of Shevat.

Why is *Tu B'Shevat* called the “*Rosh HaShanah* of trees”? It means the beginning of trees, hence, *Tu B'Shevat* represents a beginning point. The beginning point, the root of each thing, is always good and holy. *Tu B'Shevat* is the “beginning” of the trees, meaning that it is a day which returns something to its beginning state. In every concept that we can find, there is always a root as well as branches. The root is always good.

A clear example of this is Esav. The head of Esav is buried in the holy Cave of *Machpeilah*^[3], because Esav's root – symbolized by his head - was good. Therefore, Esav's head deserved to be placed in the holy Cave of *Machpeilah*. When Esav demanded to be fed, the Torah uses the term *le'itah*, when he said, “*Haliteini*,” “Feed me now this red stuff.”^[4] Esav's act of eating, which the Torah refers to with the term *le'itah*, would have been a holy act of eating, for *le'itah* is holy at its root. However, the rest of Esav's bodily senses became involved in this eating. Once the food entered his throat, he lost his presence of mind as he ate, and his eating was no longer holy.

What was the ruination of Esav's demand to be fed quickly, which was the impaired use of *le'itah*? What was essentially wrong with the way he ate? Isn't it the way of *tzaddikim* to eat in a rush?

It was because it reflected the act of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was a desire to eat “*for the tree was desirous to the eyes*.”^[5] In contrast, holy eating is when one does not eat out of lust for the food, but out of clarity, presence of mind. Eating is impaired when it stems from excitement and lust for the food, from *taavah* (desire). Eating is holy when one remains with clarity of mind as he eats. When the mind is present, one's beginning point is still present. Esav's problem was that he didn't eat with presence of mind, and instead he ate from his body's desire.

Thus, eating with clarity and presence of mind is like eating from the *Eitz HaChaim*, while eating from desire is like eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*. When Esav began to eat, he was eating quickly, not out of a desire for the food but simply because he needed to sustain himself. This was the proper use of *le'itah*/eating, and therefore his head was deserving of burial. But after the food entered Esav's throat, he was now eating the food purely out of a physical desire for the food, and this was impaired *le'itah*/eating. Therefore, the rest of Esav's body did not deserve a proper burial.

There was a desire for Adam and Chavah to eat from both the *Eitz HaChaim* and the *Eitz HaDaas*. However, although they were both a desire to partake of the tree, they were different kinds of desire. Had Adam desired to eat from the *Eitz HaChaim*, he would have been desiring to partake of wisdom, for the *HaChaim* symbolized the wisdom of the Torah, of which it is

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said, “*And wisdom sustains her owner.*”^[6] But instead Adam desired to eat the *Eitz HaDaas*, which stemmed from desire for the eating itself as opposed to a desire for more wisdom.

Thus, on an inner level, eating from the “*Eitz HaDaas*” is when we eat solely out of a physical desire and yearning for the food. Eating from the “*Eitz HaChaim*,” on an inner level, is when we eat with presence of mind and we don't lost our clarity while eating, and that is how we sanctify the act of *le'itah*, eating.

Practical Avodah In Shevat: Eating Slowly, With Presence of Mind

The holy power in the month of Shevat of *le'itah*/eating is the power to eat in a way of “*le'at, le'at*” – slowly. In this month, we have the power to sanctify our eating by separating the good from the bad in this act – separating ourselves from the physical desire for the food as we eat it – by maintaining our awareness and presence of our mind.

This concept is expressed through the act of eating seven species of *Eretz Yisrael* on *Tu B'Shevat*. *Eretz Yisrael* is called *Eretz HaChaim*, “land of the living”.^[7] It represents *chaim*, true life. It is the land that Hashem's eyes are focused on. When one removes himself from this “life,” from awareness of Hashem's presence, there is absence of “life,” and one is left with death [in the spiritual sense]. Egypt was a land of spiritual death, desolate from any holiness. That represents the entire situation of exile. In contrast to this, *Eretz Yisrael* was the “land of the living,” a land of clarity and presence of mind. Eating the seven species that the land of *Eretz Yisrael* is blessed with is, on a deeper level, a kind of eating which involves the presence and awareness of our mind (*mochin*).

The seven species of *Eretz Yisrael* represents the revelation of the holy mind of a Jew. As a hint, the head contains seven openings in it (the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and mouth). Each of these places reveal the mind. The eyes reveal the mind's wisdom, for it is written, “*My heart has seen much wisdom*”.^[8] The mind is also revealed through the hearing of the ears, for the Sages speak of a quality called “listening of the ears”. The mind is also revealed through the ability of smell of the nose, as well as through the act of eating of the mouth.

The seven species which we eat on *Tu B'Shevat* correspond to each of the seven openings in the head which reveal the mind's wisdom. Thus, our eating of the seven species on *Tu B'Shevat* is a way to eat from the “*Eitz HaChaim*” [within our souls], otherwise known as “eating of the *Eretz HaChaim*, the land of the living.”

Of such eating, it is said, “*And you shall eat and you shall be satisfied and you shall bless Hashem your G-d.*”^[9] The Hebrew word for “satisfying,” which is “*soveia*,” is from the word “*sheva*,” which is equal to the number seven, corresponding to the seven species of the land of *Eretz Yisrael* which we eat on *Tu B'Shevat*.^[10]

When one eats because his body desires to eat, this is like Esav's act of eating, when he said, “*Feed now of that red stuff.*” This is the impaired use of *le'itah*. When one eats purely out of physical desire for the food, the body takes the food and absorbs it into the blood, and the red color of the blood is symbolic of Esav, who is called *Edom*, which also means “red.” The *pesoles*, the undesired

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parts of the food, are absorbed by the blood. However, the higher aspect contained in eating does not become absorbed by the blood. It is like the *manna* which fell from Heaven.

When Esav ate and he said, “*Feed me now of that red stuff,*” he used the word “*haliteini,*” “feed me,” which is a quick, rushed eating. In contrast to this, the act of eating becomes holy when one breaks up the “*haliteini*” and instead he eats *le’at le’at*, chewing his food slowly. We rectify the act of *le’itah*, eating, when we leave Egypt in a “haste,” to transform our eating into an eating with presence of mind. Eating slowly is one part of the rectification, but it is not yet the complete rectification of the act of eating. The complete level of rectifying the act of eating will be at the complete Redemption, when Hashem’s name of *havayah* will be revealed and complete, when it shall be revealed that “*He was, He is, and He will always be.*”

This complete level of rectified eating can be reflected during these days of the month of Shevat. When we eat with presence of mind, as opposed to eating purely out of a physical desire for food. May we merit to leave unholy eating and to enter into a holy eating, and then we will merit to know of Hashem, Who is called a “*fire that consumes fire.*”^[11]

ראש חודש מהות 013 שבט [clip from about 37m until end]

[1] *Sefer Yetzirah 5:3*

[2] *Tractate Rosh HaShanah 1:1*

[3] *Targum Yehonasan Parshas Vayechi (Beraishis 50), Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer 39*

[4] *Beraishis 25:30*

[5] *Beraishis 3:6*

[6] *Koheles 7:12*

[7] *Tehillim 142:6 and Midrash Tanchuma parshas Vayeitzei 23*

[8] *Koheles 1:16*

[9] *Devarim 8:10*

[10] *The seven species are: wheat, barely, grape, fig, pomegranate, olive, date*

[11] *Devarim 2:24*