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## Essence of the Month - 013 Eating & Tu B'Shevat

### *Shevat - A Month of Rectifying Our Eating*

The months of Teves and Shevat in the winter are similar to the summer months of Tamuz and Av. Just as Tamuz and Av are termed as “the most difficult months of the year” regarding the summer, due to the tragedies that took place during those months, so are Teves and Shevat “the most difficult months of the winter” in the wintertime.

The month of Teves contains the power of *rogez*, “fury”, whereas the month of Shevat contains the power of *le'itah*, which means “chewing” (or “slow eating”).<sup>[1]</sup> [1] Thus, in Shevat, there is a concept of eating slowly.

The Vilna Gaon says that the two root evil forces in the soul are anger and desire. Anger is represented by the month of Teves, while the month of Shevat represents the trait of desire [hence the *avodah* of the month of Shevat is to fix the trait of desire, namely, the desire for eating food].

We will try to here to explain, with the help of Hashem, the power in the month of Shevat, which is about the concept of *le'itah*, slow eating.

Eating slowly is called *le'itah*, whereas regular eating is called *achilah*. We find one place in the Torah where the word *le'itah* is mentioned: when Esav demanded that the red lentils be poured down him, he said, “Pour me, now, from this red stuff.”<sup>[2]</sup> [2]The Torah’s word for “pour me” is *hali-tei-ni*, from the word *le'itah*.

The act of *le'itah* found by Esav was the evil kind of eating, in contrast with the holy power of *le'itah* that is in the month of Shevat for the Jewish people.

The root of this matter is when Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), which contained in it both good and evil. When Adam ate from the tree, a mixture of good and evil entered the world. The Jewish people have the power to sift out the evil from the world and cling to only the good parts. When our eating isn’t sifted out from evil, the eating remains entirely evil, resembling the kind of eating that Esav demanded. When Yaakov bought the firstborn rights from Esav after Esav demanded to be fed, Yaakov was essentially sifting out the good from evil. He sifted out the good of this food, and fed the unwanted bad parts (the *pesoles*) to Esav.

In clearer language, it is sin that caused death to come to the world, and Yaakov gave “death” to Esav by feeding him the lentils. Esav said “Behold, I am going to die” and he demanded to be fed the lentils, so when Yaakov fed him the lentils, he essentially fed “death” to him. Chazal teach that Esav

committed five sins on that day, and Avraham Avinu lost five years of his life. On a deep level, the five years which Avraham lost from his life were due to Esav's five sins. Death began from Adam's sin, and Yaakov was sorting out the effects of sin and death, by keeping the good parts of the food and giving the unwanted parts to Esav. Esav's blessing is "By your sword you shall live", and it was Esav who demanded to be fed. Thus, the act of *le'itah* of Esav was an act of eating that was entirely evil.

What happens in the process of eating? The teeth transform the food from a hard substance to a soft substance. This represents the idea that eating can sort out the good from the bad, by turning evil (hardness) into good (softness). We can also see this by the fact that in the future, "The house of Yaakov will be like a fire, and the house of Yosef will be like a burning flame, and the house of Esav will be like straw."<sup>[3]</sup> [3] In the future, the combined holiness of Yaakov and Yosef will destroy the evil of Esav. The holiness of Yaakov and Yosef will turn Esav into straw, meaning that Esav's hardness will be turned into a soft substance, straw.

*Eating The Seven Species on Tu B'Shevat Is Like Eating From The "Eitz Chaim" – When We Eat With Presence of Mind, As Opposed To Bodily Desire*

As mentioned, the month of Shevat corresponds to the power of *le'itah*, chewing, or slow eating.<sup>[4]</sup> [4]

Clearly, on the day of *Tu B'Shevat*, which is called the "Rosh HaShanah of the trees"<sup>[5]</sup> [5], where there is a custom to eat the seven species of Eretz Yisrael<sup>[6]</sup> [6], it is a day to clarify the power of *le'itah*/slow eating, which personifies 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. In every concept we 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, because Esav's root, 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." Esav's act of eating, which the Torah uses the term *le'itah* for, 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.

*Tu B'Shevat* is the "beginning" of the trees, meaning that it is a day which returns something to its beginning state.

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 desirable to the eyes."<sup>[7]</sup> [7] 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*. 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*, whereas eating from desire is like eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*.

The head of Esav was buried in the Cave of Machpeilah because when the food first came into his

mouth, this was a proper act of *le'itah*/eating, and for this reason, his head deserved to be buried with the Avos. But after the food entered Esav's throat, Esav was eating the food out of a desire for it, and this was an impaired act of *le'itah*/eating.

Had Adam desired to eat from the *Eitz HaChaim*, he would have been eating from a desire for wisdom, for the *Eitz HaChaim* symbolized the wisdom of the Torah, of which it is said, "*And wisdom sustains her owner.*" [8] [8] But instead, Adam desired to first eat the *Eitz HaDaas*, which was a desire to eat it simply for the sake of eating it and tasting of its pleasure, rather than to desire it for its wisdom.

On our own personal level, eating from the "*Eitz HaDaas*" place in ourselves is when we eat with a physical desire and yearning for the food. Eating from the "*Eitz HaChaim*" place in ourselves, in contrast to this, is when we eat with an awareness and presence of mind. That is how the act of eating becomes holy.

Esav, who said, "*Feed me from that red stuff*", could have elevated the act of eating, had he eaten using out of a desire for wisdom. Therefore, the "head of Esav" is buried with the Avos, because in potential, Esav's mouth (which was part of his head) could have repaired the act of eating, had he eaten with the right intentions. Instead, it was simply his physical body which ate the food, out of a lust and a desire to simply eat the food. On a deeper level, this was desire for the *pesoles* (unwanted spiritual parts) of the food, as opposed to the good parts of the food, the "wisdom" that can be imbibed from the food - which Esav was not interested in.

#### *Our Practical Avodah In The Month of Shevat: Eating Slowly, With Presence of Mind*

The holy power in the month of Shevat of *le'itah*, "swallowing/eating", is accessed on a practical level when a person eats *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, using the awareness and presence of our mind, when we eat the seven species of Eretz Yisrael on this day. Eretz Yisrael is called *Eretz HaChaim*, "land of the living". It contains *chaim*, life. It is the land that Hashem's eyes were on.

When one removes himself from this life, there is [spiritual] death. Egypt was a land of spiritual death, desolate from any holiness. That is the situation of exile. In contrast, Eretz Yisrael was the land of the living, a land of presence of mind.

#### *Eating The Seven Species on Tu B'Shvat: Eating With 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*". [9] [9] The mind is also revealed through the hearing of the ears, the ability of smell of the nose, and through the act of eating of the mouth.

The seven species which we eat on Tu B'Shevat each correspond to the seven openings in the head which reveal the mind's wisdom. Thus, our eating 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.*" [10] [10]

The Hebrew word for “satisfying”, which is “*soveia*”, is from the word “*sheva*”, which is equal to the number 7, corresponding to the 7 species of the land of Eretz Yisrael which we eat on *Tu B’Shevat*.[\[11\]](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

### *Repairing The Act of Eating*

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 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 this rectification process, 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.*”[\[12\]](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

### *In Conclusion*

The 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 the revelation of “fire that consumes fire”[\[13\]](#) <sup>[13]</sup>, the revelation of Hashem’s Presence, which is called a “consuming fire”.

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[\[1\]](#) <sup>[14]</sup> Sefer Yetzirah 5:4

[\[2\]](#) <sup>[15]</sup> Beraishis 25:30

[\[3\]](#) <sup>[16]</sup> Ovadiah 1:18

[\[4\]](#) <sup>[17]</sup> Sefer Yetzirah 5:3

[\[5\]](#) <sup>[18]</sup> Rosh HaShanah 2a

[\[6\]](#) <sup>[19]</sup> Magen Avraham to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 131

[7] [20] Beraishis 3:6

[8] [21] Koheles 7:12

[9] [22] Koheles 1:16

[10] [23] Devarim 6:11

[11] [24] The seven species are: wheat, barely, grape, fig, pomegranate, olive, date

[12] [25] Zecharayah 14:9

[13] [26] Talmud Bavli Yoma 21a

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