

In preparing this דבר תורה for ט"ו בשבט, a fascinating question arose, which I did not see in the ספרים, but which is answered in the ספרים. And that question is, we celebrate all of life's milestones. We celebrate a ברית, we celebrate a birth, we make a kiddush for a girl, we celebrate בת מצוות, בר מצוות, we celebrate חתונות. But how do we celebrate the conception of a new human being, the very outset of their creation? It's an intriguing question that I had never really considered before.

R' Moshe Kormornick, in his essay on ט"ו בשבט, addresses a similar idea. He explains that the משנה regarding the ראש השנה for אילנות is connected to the month of שבט, where we find the famous מחלוקת between בית שמאי and בית הלל. While we paskin like בית הלל that it falls on ט"ו בשבט, the timing is still notable. שבט comes right in the heart of winter when everything is black, empty, and seemingly lifeless. The branches are bare, the ground is frozen, and the trees appear barren. Is this really the time to celebrate the ראש השנה for trees? On the surface, it doesn't seem fitting.

Yet, R' Kormornick argues that שבט is actually the perfect time to celebrate the life of trees. As the גמרא points out, this is when the sap begins to rise within the trees, marking the very beginning of their new growth cycle, even though nothing visible is happening yet. This represents the "conception" of the tree's life for the coming year.

He deepens this concept by connecting it to the פסוק (דברים כ"י"ט) פִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׁדָה. Just as man is compared to a tree, we too often face moments of great darkness and despair, times when life feels barren, bleak, and hopeless. But just like the tree, the beginnings of ישועה often emerge precisely from such times of difficulty. When the challenges seem overwhelming, when we see nothing but obstacles, that is often when true growth begins - if only we keep pushing forward, putting in our efforts, and staying committed to our goals.

R' Heitman, who recently published a ספר on the so-called "minor" ימים טובים, emphasizes that ט"ו בשבט is far from minor. If we "listen" to the trees on this day, they can teach us profound lessons. One קנייטש he shares, quoting Rabbi Dr. Avraham Twerski, relates to the unique characteristics of trees. A tree stands tall and majestic, yet it humbles itself by providing fruit and shade. It offers humanity tremendous benefits, teaching us that majesty and humility can coexist, enabling us to fulfill our תפקיד in life.

This apparent contradiction - standing tall while lowering oneself to serve others - can be personified by the tree. From it, we learn a crucial life lesson.

The tree, though a physical object, fulfills a profound רוחניות purpose. It helps others without complaint, year after year. Just as the famous saying teaches that your friend's גשמיות should be your רוחניות, the tree embodies this idea naturally and selflessly.

We should strive to adopt this same approach in life - standing strong while providing חסד without complaint. In this זכות, may we all merit the ultimate במהרה בימינו.

