

A Monthly Publication to Empower Unique Kids



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Issue 28

8

**Let's
Talk**

Esty Shore

14

**Tree-mendous
Trees**

C.S. Ben Shachar

17

**Serial
Story**

Menucha Chana Levin



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3

From the Editor

Chaya Sara Ben Shachar

4

Let's Relate with Rosally

A Less than Perfect Match

Rosally Saltsman

6

Let's Read a Story

Remorse

Tovy Mann

8

Let's Talk

Question & Answer Time

Esty Shore

11

Let's Grow Stronger

Feeling Different | Part 2

Leora Gruen

13

Let's Be Enlightened

Tree-mendous Trees

C.S. Ben Shachar

17

Let's Unwind

Missing | Chapter 8

Menucha Chana Levin

20

The Kaiser Clan

Like This?

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FROM THE EDITOR...

Dear Readers,

It's Shevat, and very soon we'll be celebrating Tu B'Shevat – the birthday of the trees.

For some reason, whenever I think of trees and their birthday, I think of the page in Menucha Fuchs' book "Wood", that has a tree with a Happy Birthday sign and a crown on it and another tree that's a stump in the background, with five tree stump rings.

The idea, of course, is that scientists can tell how old a tree is by counting the number of rings it has. But that would mean that the tree in question is dead – for how can scientists count the number of rings present in the trunk of a live tree?

Why would anyone celebrate the birth of a dead tree? Or is the picture in the book indicative of one tree being alive (the one with the banner and crown), while the other tree is dead? And if that is indeed the case, then again, why celebrate?

Maybe the above questions are too much for a children's book. After all, the trees on the page are indicative of growth and a tree's lifecycle; they're not meant to invoke questions about the meaning of life.

But moving away from the children's book for a minute, part of the reason that we celebrate the trees' birthday is a passuk in chumash Devarim that reads: "כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה – for man is likened to a tree of the field," (Devarim 20, 19).

Human beings are compared to trees, because we share three properties:

Roots

Trunks and branches

Fruits and flowers

The roots of a tree are symbolic of our support system and belief. Our emunah, in other words, which is our base and the root of our beings.

The trunk and branches make up the bulk of the tree, symbolizing our Torah learning and mitzvos, which fill the bulk of our days.

The fruit and flowers smell beautiful and contain seeds, ensuring continuity. They represent good deeds, which

perpetuate the world with goodness and kindness.

Now, back to tree stumps and imperfection. To lives that seem to resemble tree stumps more than tree blossoms...

Sometimes, trees (and life!) are really unphotogenic.

There may be a parent who's out of the picture...

A sibling who isn't towing the line...

Or maybe the fruits and flowers on my tree are completely not picture perfect. In fact, maybe they don't even know what perfect means.

When imperfections in our trees and lives exist, do we celebrate? Do we throw a party even when our tree has a branch that's gnarled or a twig that's twisted and worn?

In the book "Wood", the answer is obvious. Yes, we do celebrate! Even when there are tree stumps in the background (and sometimes in the foreground) of our lives and even when the tree of our lives is far from picture-perfect, throwing a party is still the thing to do.

Why?

Because life isn't only about our trunk, branches, and fruits. It's about roots too. And as Jews, we all have perfect roots. We are all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov and they bequeathed us with the most amazing inheritance in the world. An inheritance of emunah, and the firm belief that Hashem loves us and chose us not despite our imperfections but because of them.

Every scratch on our trunk, and every scrape on our branches, is not without purpose or meaning. Hashem put every single nick and groove in our lives for a reason – and it is precisely because we believe in Him, and in His love for us, that we have the perfect reason to celebrate.

Life isn't perfect, because it wasn't meant to be that way. But our foundation is strong and unbreakable and that's reason enough to rejoice.

Enjoy our articles this month.

Happy Tu B'Shevat!

Chaya Sara Ben Shachar



STRONGER Magazine welcomes all comments, feedback, and letters to the editor.

We'd love to hear from you! Email us at: editor@strongermagazine.com

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A Less than Perfect Match

Rosally Saltzman

Dear Rosally,

My 19-year-old sister came back from Seminary in Eretz Yisroel and has started shidduchim. The whole family was very excited for that to happen. Until she started receiving suggestions. We are a really happy, normal family, but because my parents got divorced five years ago, my sister is only being offered boys who have something either seriously wrong with them or whose family situation is very bad or complicated.

What is wrong with people? It's like they don't see my wonderful sister at all, just divorce.

Does my parents' divorce mean that my sister won't make a good wife and mother? There are people whose parents are married but who fight all the time. Is that better?

I used to think that because she went through a difficult time, my sister is stronger and more mature than girls who live a more "normal existence." My sister is smart, sweet, pretty, and popular, with lots of emunah and great middos. Why are people stigmatizing her and only offering her boys with problems?

I'm only 14, so shidduchim for me are years away, but now I'm worried about what kind of boys I'm going to be offered when my time comes.

How can people be so superficial and judgmental?!

Really Upset for My Sister

Dear Really Upset,

I'm sure you've heard that 40 days before a baby is born, a heavenly voice calls out the name of the person they're going to marry. In other words, it's a done deal. Your sister's chassan is out there and when the timing is right, she will meet and marry him. If your sister has lots of emunah like you said, then there's truly no reason for worry. The same goes for you worrying about your chassan.

Of course, I understand why you're frustrated by people who you feel are judgmental and insensitive. Being in shidduchim is always hard. It's a time when people go through a lot of frustration and sometimes heartache, because although Hashem knows who they're going



to marry and when, they don't and not knowing can be very difficult.

Often, people put their prospective shidduch under a microscope and instead of looking for the best match, people look for the perfect match, which is a mistake. Because every single person on earth has virtues and flaws, positives and negatives in their personality, in their mid-dos, in their looks, and in their family history.

In other words, everyone has problems. Some are more obvious, others less so. People mislead themselves when they look for someone who is problem-free. There is no such thing. Sometimes, it's better when the problems are out front, so you know what they are.

Today's demands for perfection are not healthy and not Jewish. Consider for a minute how the great people of Israel would fare in today's world of shidduchim, and you'll realize how crazy some of the impossible standards are.

Avraham ben Terach? For my daughter? But he's a baal Teshuvah and an immigrant!

Miriam bas Amram and Yocheved? Didn't you hear they got divorced?

Moshe, Miriam's brother? He has a speech impediment! And he was adopted!

Rav Moshe Maimon? He left yeshiva to study medicine at a university! Ah shandah!

Ruth from Moav?! Are you kidding? She's a convert and a widow!

Binyamin, Yaacov and Rochel's son? His brother disappeared and his mother died so young, Hashem Yirachem!

As ridiculous as it sounds, that's how ridiculous it is. But you still can't do anything about other people's prejudices. Just try not to take them personally. And don't go along with them.

Do what you can to support your sister, keep your eyes and ears open for possibilities other people might not notice – kids can be shad-dchanim too – and be sure to say Tehillim and prayers for your sister's success in shidduchim. If you project to the world that you are a loving and happy family, that is what the world will see.

Both your sister's and your chassanim have been preselected for you. I suggest you share these thoughts with your sister. Maybe even show her this letter.

And read over the list that I just included, because just a minute, aren't you passing judgment on your sister's could-be chassan the same way that other people offering boys whom you think of as "problematic" are passing judgment on your family? Maybe one of the boys whom you/your sister nixed is also a diamond – who shouldn't be dismissed because of less-than-ideal circumstances? I know you love your sister and believe she's wonderful and worthy of the finest boy possible. But maybe one of these boys is the finest boy possible – for her.

We are all flawed in some way. We are not perfect. And we are not meant to be. Like you said, going through rough times makes us stronger and more resilient, more compassionate and more mature. It makes us wiser and better able to deal with life. Like the expression says, "If it doesn't kill you, it will make you stronger". Maybe that's why people suggest matches with others who have gone through difficult times. Because they get it. Having overcome a difficult situation might actually make them very compatible. They both get it.

Avraham went through ten very challenging trials to make him worthy of being the patriarch of the Jewish people. Eshes Chayil, which we sing every Shabbos, talks about all the hard work a Jewish wife does...

We have to look beyond people's problems and outward appearances and into their souls. That's why they call it looking for a soulmate.

Wishing your sister much success in finding hers, and you too when the time comes.

May we build many batim neemanim b'Yisrael!

Rosally

Rosally Saltzman has a teaching degree and offers creative consulting sessions. She has also written many books, her latest of which is entitled *100 Life Lessons I've Learned So You Don't Have To*.

REMORSE

Tovy Mann



"Do you miss him?"

Nachman's cousin's question was like a punch in the stomach. He felt his face stiffen, and he pressed his lips tightly together.

"I asked you a question." Baruch wasn't going to let him get away without answering.

"I heard you," Nachman whispered.

"So, the question was, now that your parents are formally divorced, do you miss your father?"

Tears sprang to Nachman's eyes, and he bit his upper lip. Baruch was not only his cousin, but also his best friend. They were in the same fifth grade class at yeshivah. The two of them did everything together. There were no secrets between them.

"No," he finally answered. "I never want to see him again." A tear trickled slowly down his cheek.

Baruch put a reassuring hand on Nachman's shoulder. "I heard my parents talking. My mother said your father's gone and never coming back."

Nachman swallowed with difficulty. "I know," he said, adding, "I'm glad."

"My father says it's for the best," Baruch said. "Uncle Avi was a bad man."

"Not bad," Nachman quickly corrected him. "My mom says he's sick. When Daddy gets angry, he can't control himself. She says that he doesn't mean to do the things he does."

The two boys continued their walk to school in silence.

It was hard for Nachman to concentrate in class. His cousin's question had stirred up memories that he wanted to forget.

Noticing that his student was distracted, Rebbe gave him a small nod of understanding. In response, Nachman glanced at his neighbor's Chumash and quickly found the right place. With his finger on the text, he managed to follow the lesson for a few minutes before getting sucked into the past.

Second grade. Vaccination day. Nachman's heart beat so hard while he waited his turn, he was sure everyone could hear it.

There was a long table with a nurse sitting at each end. As each boy finished, a third nurse recorded his height and weight and sent him to sit for another 15 minutes on a bench in the hall. Rebbe was waiting there. Nachman's last name began with an R, so he had a long wait until his name was called.

Finally, it was his turn. Nachman tried hard to be brave. He held his head up and walked over to the waiting nurse. She smiled and gestured toward the empty chair beside her.

The nurse accepted the permission slip his mother had signed and recorded it with other information on a small computer. Daddy had a computer, but he didn't let Nachman close to it. The nurse didn't seem to care whether he looked at her computer or not, so he did.

Nachman watched with fascination as the nurse chose



a small vial and filled a syringe with clear liquid, but when she attached a needle, he pulled away in fear.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," she promised. "Just look to the side. It'll be over before you know it."

Nachman turned his face away. The nurse unbuttoned the top button of his shirt and pulled it sideways to expose his shoulder. He waited for the sting of the needle, but nothing happened. Puzzled, he turned back. The nurse was staring at his arm with a strange expression.

Nachman glanced at his shoulder and saw the bruises she was looking at. Her eyes met his, but he quickly looked away. Instinctively, he yanked his arm away, his face burning hot with shame. He jumped up and ran out of the room, but the nurse followed.

Rebbe somehow appeared on the scene. He took Nachman's hand and led him to the office of the Minahel. Rabbi Leifer's voice was gentle. "Someone hurt you," he said. "Please tell me who."

The loud scraping of chairs and the movement of his classmates roused Nachman from his memory. He sighed.

Nachman hadn't answered Rabbi Leifer's question, but the minahel had called his mother just the same. He'd never forget the look on her face when she'd arrived in the school office on that fateful day...

It was recess time now and he'd missed most of the shiur thanks to his memories. Baruch stopped at his desk. "Hurry, Nachman! They're choosing teams," he urged him.

The warm sunshine felt good. Playing ball with his friends occupied all of Nachman's concentration. He laughed and joined the familiar taunts between the players. The game was hard fought, with both sides just about equal in skill.

A few minutes before the bell was supposed to ring, Shmuel crossed in front of Nachman and accidentally tripped him.

The ball flew out of Nachman's hands and skidded across the playground.

Dovid, from the opposing team, caught it and scored the winning point for his side.

Nachman felt a giant wave of fury wash over him. If Shmuel wouldn't have caused him to fall, the winning score would have been his! Nachman's hands closed into fists. "You tripped me on purpose!" he roared. He

pulled back his arm to punch Shmuel hard. He wanted to teach him a lesson he would never forget, but the look of fear on Shmuel's face stopped him.

Nachman dropped his hands.

The end-of-recess bell rang. Everyone began running off the playing field. Nachman panted hard, as if he'd just climbed a mountain.

Baruch appeared at his side. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"I almost punched Shmuel," Nachman confided, as they joined the throng of boys going inside the building. "I wanted to hit him so badly!"

Baruch looked surprised. "It was an accident," he said. "I saw it happen. Shmuel didn't mean to knock you down."

Tears blurred Nachman's vision. "I was so angry that I couldn't think," he told his cousin. "Baruch Hashem that I stopped in time. I don't want...I don't ever want to be... abusive."

Baruch grabbed his arm. "I think you controlled yourself well," he said. "We all feel angry sometimes. What's important is that you stopped yourself before it was too late."

"Yeah, thanks," Nachman told his cousin, but he was still upset.

That night Nachman discussed what had happened with his mother. After thinking about what he'd told her, she said, "I think we should speak with the social worker about this. She should be able to refer us to a counselor who will give you professional tips on how to cope with such situations. Rage is a common problem, but there are solutions."

Relief filled Nachman's heart as he prepared for bed. "Baruch Hashem," he thought to himself. "When my father was young, he had no one to turn to. Today, all kinds of help are available. No one needs to struggle alone. The counselor will teach me how to control my anger, so it doesn't control me. With Hashem's help, I'll learn the right methods to become the kind of person I want to be. It might not be easy in the beginning, but I'm sure I can do it. Rebbe says that Hashem only give a nisayon to someone who can succeed in passing it."

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Tovy Mann is a mother, a grandmother, and a writer. Her parents divorced twice, once when she was a year old, remarrying when she was five, and again when she was eighteen. Both remarried after that, adding stepparents to the picture.

QUESTION & ANSWER TIME

with kids almost like you

Esty Shore

This month, I had the privilege of interviewing Tovy Mann*, one of STRONGER's writers whose bio reads: *Tovy Mann is a mother, a grandmother, and a writer. Her parents divorced twice, once when she was a year old, remarrying when she was five, and again when she was eighteen. Both remarried after that, adding stepparents to the picture.*

Tovy graciously agreed to share her experiences, and from her bio it sounded like they'd be interesting, so I was excited. But then she said that she was concerned her story might not resonate with today's generation. "After all, my story took place seventy years ago..."

Tovy's words gave me pause, but I decided to proceed with the interview anyway. And, after reading on, I'm sure you'll agree that while the world may have changed a lot in seventy years (a very lot – right?!?), so much about the human experience has remained the same. Furthermore, Tovy's insights and 20/20 hindsight vision are an invaluable window into the inner psyche of the human experience

Hi Tovy, do you have any defining childhood memories that you can share?

Yes. I clearly remember a car ride that took place when I was five, shortly after my parents' remarriage. My parents were moving with me to another state, and I became car sick in the vehicle and fell asleep. I awoke to my father offering me a cup of tomato juice, claiming that it was good for motion sickness. I didn't want the drink, but my father forced me – and in the background I heard my mother arguing with my father, telling him not to force me.

That was the introduction that I had to my parent's remarriage – which took place four years after they divorced each other.



What was life, like for you before your parents' remarriage?

Bliss. I lived with my mother in her parent's home during the week, and I was spoiled by my grandmother and my aunt. Weekends (my parents weren't frum, so there was no concept of Shabbos), I'd go to my paternal grandparents' home to be with my father. I loved every moment of that life. I was doted on by two loving sets of grandparents, and got treats from both of them. Life seemed like it was perfect. Until my parents' remarriage...

Did your parents speak to you about their decision to remarry?

Yes. Shortly before my parent's remarriage, my mother – who'd gone back to using her maiden name – asked me, "Do you want you and me to have the same last name?" I was only five, so of course I told her "Yes", but I had no idea what that really meant.

And then my parents remarried... My mother told me often, afterwards, that she'd remarried my father for my sake – but that statement did not make me happy. If anything, after I saw how difficult it was for them to get along with each other, the statement made me feel terribly guilty – like I was somehow the source and catalyst of my parent's pain.

That is a very difficult feeling to carry around. In hindsight, are there any thoughts or insights you can share that helped you overcome that feeling?

I've B"H had many helpful insights over the years, but first I want to expand on the feeling of guilt. Feeling like I was the source of my parent's pain was a debilitating feeling. It was so difficult to live with that feeling. I have memories of myself at age ten opening the door to my house, looking outside, and thinking: G-d, where are you? Do you feel how hard it is for me and how much it hurts me? Please, bring me closer to You.

Those thoughts may have been the start of my search for Yiddishkeit, a journey that I ultimately took while in college, but they also reflected the depths of my pain. Overcoming that pain wasn't easy, but as I grew in ruchniyus the more capable I became of accepting the fact that Hashem makes no mistakes, and that my life was, and is, exactly perfection. I once spoke to Rabbi Ezriel Tauber, a noted lecturer and author, on the subject. He told me that no matter how legitimate our questions about life may feel, and how much events may seem like they're the result of human intervention, once something happens, it's because Hashem wanted it to happen. Nothing in this world (be it a divorce, a remarriage, or anything else) could ever happen if it's not Hashem's will. Hearing such an idea from such a famous personality, really healed me a lot.



That's a very deep idea. Were there any positive outcomes of your parents' remarriage.

That's a difficult question to answer, because honestly what I saw was a lot of fighting. My parents did have three more children – boys – after they remarried, but my connection with them is tenuous, to this very day, partly because I'm so much older than them.

Internally, my parents changed a lot after their remarriage. When I was about ten years old, they started to go to marriage counseling – and even though they ultimately ended up divorcing when I turned eighteen, I'm sure they learned a lot from that experience. Outcomes, can't always be measured by physical results but I'm sure that there was a definite reason, and purpose, to my parents remarriage. As a child it was hard for me to see that, and I felt a lot of pain, but as a grandmother today – I can see that every single thing that happened was for a purpose.

Can you expand a bit on that idea?

Sure. Every day, in davening, we say the brachah "הַמַּכִּין מַצְעָדֵי גִבּוֹר" – He prepares the steps of man". Looking back, I can see that every single thing that happened in life paved the way for the next thing to happen – and ultimately everything was, and is, good. Yes, my parents divorced when I was one, got remarried when I was five, fought and had a difficult marriage, and they got divorced again when I was eighteen (the confusion that I felt as a result of that second divorce is a subject for a second interview!)-but I went on a parallel journey in the meantime. I searched for Hashem and found Him, married, raised a large family-and today I am reaping nachas from my wonderful children, children-in-law, and grandchildren – because every single last step of my journey was prepared and paved, by our loving Father in Heaven. Not a single step was placed in my path without a reason.

That is a very beautiful perspective. Thank you for sharing your story!



Feeling **DIFFERENT**

Part 2

Leora Gruen

Do you sometimes feel different from your peers because of your unique family situation? Do you feel alone or set apart?

Last month we spoke about some of those uncomfortable feelings and how important it is to remember that we are special and have a unique mission in this world.

This month, we'll explore some ways to grow from our situation.

As with all experiences in life, we have a choice: to stay with our uncomfortable feelings or to grow from our circumstances.

One thing we can always do is turn to Hashem.

A number of years ago, I traveled together with my baby from Eretz Yisroel to America for my brother's wedding. When I boarded the plane, I was shocked to discover that everyone on the very full flight appeared to be Moslem. As I advanced to my seat, alone with my baby, I felt dark eyes staring at me intensely. Somehow, I settled in and hoped for the best. Midflight, I felt a huge migraine coming on. I didn't know who to turn to. Even the stewardesses looked menacing. Desperately, I turned to Hashem. "Hashem, I feel so different, alone and abandoned. There is no one but You here to help me." I looked to the Heavens, literally. Unbelievably, my migraine disappeared and soon after my heartfelt words, we landed in Turkey. The second part of our flight was much better than the first and thankfully, our return flight was packed with families and bochurim flying to Eretz Yisroel for Sukkos.

Uncomfortable, frightened or alone as we may feel, we are always in Hashem's loving hands.

Feeling different or alone is a very human character trait, and something most people experience at some point or another. Because no matter who a person is, or what their circumstances are, all human

crave connection.

The Gemara in Nedarim 64b lists four categories of people who are compared to someone who died.

1. A metzorah (someone with leprosy)
2. A blind person
3. A poor person
4. A childless person.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz discusses the common denominator between the four types of people. It isn't the suffering that they are going through that makes them similar to a dead person, because so long as there is life, even if there is suffering, there is always potential.

Instead, the common denominator is the isolation that all four types of people feel:

The metzorah endures isolation when he sits alone outside the camp. There is something so painful about being isolated, that it is compared to death.

Similarly, a blind person is isolated because he lacks the ability to see what someone next to him is feeling. This isolates him from others and stunts his ability to be present and to fully help them. So, he too is considered dead.

A poor man, because of his limited financial ability, cannot help others in need. This lack is enough to



make him feel very isolated.

As for someone who is childless and can access all the pleasures in this world... The nature of a person is to perform acts of kindness for their children. People who cannot give to their own children are missing something crucial.

Consider the case of the two women who came before Shlomo Hamelech.

Two women gave birth, and one baby died. The two women fought over the live baby and asked Shlomo Hamelech to determine who the true mother was – for she'd get to keep the live baby.

The woman whose baby had died stole the other woman's baby and claimed he was hers. Why? For the rest of her life, she would know that he was not her natural baby...

Rav Shmulevitz explains that since the baby would believe he was the woman's and act accordingly, it would satisfy her deep desire to give. Even though she'd know that he wasn't really hers.

That is the theme that connects all four categories: Someone who connects to others and gives to them, is considered alive. Someone who is unable to connect and give to others feels dead. Because these four types of people lack the ability to give in some manner, they are considered like the dead.

Let's go back to feeling disconnected. Is there anything we can do when we feel different and detached from others?

Certainly!

As we can see from the four people above, human beings need to give to thrive. That is what connects them. It is what keeps them from feeling isolated.

About five years ago, we moved from the neighborhood we'd been living in for more than a decade to a new development. I missed my friends and since most of the women in the new neighborhood did not know each other, I arranged a let's-get-acquainted evening.

At the end of the event, an energetic and successful make-up artist with a large, supportive family approached. "I have eight sisters and in-laws in the older neighborhoods in this city," she told me quietly. "But I don't think I ever experienced the connection created here tonight."

I was flabbergasted. The woman was the picture of poise and sparkle. And yet she valued the power of connection and new friendships!

The woman's words often replay themselves in my mind, reminding me of a truth I keep on rediscovering: People crave true connection.

No matter how popular a person may seem, they can always use a true, even-keeled connection.

It's an idea that's easy to implement:

Ever entered your classroom and noticed someone standing by themselves looking forlorn?

Walked into an event and seen a friend standing to a side, alone?

Gone to shul and seen someone your age who's new to the community?

Go over, welcome them, or say a nice word. Your connection to others, your overture, will keep you from feeling isolated as you spread the light of chessed in the world.

I clearly remember the first woman who approached me in my new neighborhood.

We are very different, speak different languages, and send our children to different schools. She was, however, the first one to greet me, ask me my name, and welcome me to the neighborhood. I'd never have imagined we would be friends.

Yet that first warm interaction created a friendship that I am deeply grateful for and treasure.

There's a good chance that as much as you feel different from your classmates or friends because your parents are divorced, your fellow classmate or friend is struggling with an uncomfortable feeling of their own. Reaching out and making a connection won't only 'break the ice' between you, it'll also help you overcome your own feelings of difference.

Find something that you both have in common—like a game that you both like to play, or a book that you both enjoyed reading, and work from there.

You may be pleasantly surprised to see how much chizzuk you can give someone else. And to discover that different as you may be, Jews are always connected to Hashem and we can spread achdus between ourselves and others.

.....
Leora Gruen, a personal growth and business development coach, has empowered dozens of women and girls to unlock their unique personal and business strengths. With a strong foundation in Torah values, years of experience in education, and advanced training in NLP, psychodrama, and coaching, she brings a well-rounded perspective that caters to diverse learning styles.



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Tree-mendous Trees

Amazing Tree Facts for Tu B'Shevat

Chaya Sara Ben Shachar



With Tu B'Shevat approaching it's the perfect time to celebrate the importance of trees in our life, and to celebrate ourselves. **עץ האדם כי האדם** – for man is a tree of the field (Devarim 20, 19).

Trees are resilient, adaptable, and capable of thriving in various conditions – and so are we.

Read on to discover some facts about the most fascinating and resilient trees on earth.

1. The Oldest Tree in the World

The oldest tree in the world is a bristlecone pine tree called Methuselah. Situated in the White Mountains of California Scientists, scientists claim that the tree is over 4,800 years old.

The trouble with that claim, of course, is that the mabul took place 4,129 years ago – so any tree older than that is sure to have been wiped out in the flood. Still, even if the Methuselah isn't 4,800 years old precisely, that doesn't mean that it isn't ancient.



2. The Tallest Tree on Earth

The tallest tree in the world is a coast redwood named Hyperion. It stands an incredible 379 feet tall – taller than the Statue of Liberty!

The giant tree lives in California's Redwood National Park and was discovered in 2006 by naturalists Chris Atkins and Michael Taylor. In general, Redwood trees are not only incredibly tall, they can also live for more than 2,000 years. Their thick bark protects them from fires, insects, and diseases.





3. Trees That Travel... Almost

In the rainforests of Central and South America, there's a type of tree called a Walking Palm or Cashapona. Cashapona trees have long, stilt-like roots, which at some point scientists thought helped the tree walk when it needed more sunlight.

Over time it was proven that while Cashapona trees cannot take huge strides like people, they can still walk a little – a bit under an inch every day. Over months, and years, these trees manage “to go places”, hence the entrancing name “Walking Palm.”



4. A Tree That Smells Like... Raisins

The Hovenia dulcis, also known as the Japanese raisin tree, has a scent so delicious it might make you hungry. The flowers of the Hovenia dulcis give off a scent similar to raisins, but that's not the only special thing about them. The leaves, stems, and bark of the Hovenia dulcis contain antioxidant properties – special healing powers which are used to treat infections and disease.



5. The Largest Tree by Volume

While the Hyperion may be the tallest tree in the world, the biggest tree by volume is General Sherman, a giant sequoia in California's Sequoia National Park.

Simply put, the volume of a tree is the tree's circumference multiplied by its height, and in that General Sherman is a winner.

General Sherman is so big that it weighs more than 2,000 tons. It's not the tallest tree on earth, but its trunk is the most enormous. The circumference of its base is over 100 feet. Imagine how many people would be able to fit inside it, if it were hollow?!



6. Trees That Glow in the Dark

Did you know some trees can light up the night?

Bioluminescent fungi, also called “foxfire,” grows on certain tree barks and roots, emitting a greenish light that makes the trees appear as if they're glowing in the dark. The light, of course, is caused by chemicals in the fungi reacting with oxygen - and trees with fungi that glows like that are often found in tropical forest areas, like in Brazil or Indonesia.

People often call trees with bioluminescent fungi “fairy fire”, and one look at the glowing trees makes it's easy to understand why. Glowing trees, after all, certainly look magical!





7. Trees That Give Us Chocolate

Cacao trees, responsible for the production of cacao beans, grow in tropical climates and were discovered by Christopher Columbus over 500 years ago. The trees produce large pods filled with seeds/ cacao beans. Those beans, when dried and roasted, can be turned into chocolate.

Cacao trees only grow in specific conditions, and they need shade from bigger trees to stay healthy. Next time that you eat a chocolate bar, just remember: it's source is from a tree.

Hey, doesn't that make for a perfect Tu B'Shevat treat?!



8. The Fastest-Growing Tree

Some trees are speedsters when it comes to growing. The empress tree, also known as the Paulownia, can grow up to ten feet in a single year. It's one of the fastest-growing trees in the world.

In addition to being speedy, empress trees are useful. Their wood is lightweight yet strong, and the trees are often planted to help restore damaged land.

Now how's that for a mightily impressive tree?



9. Rainbow Eucalyptus Tree

When you think of a rainbow, what image comes to mind?

Now think of a Eucalyptus tree – a tree comprised of flowers.

A Rainbow Eucalyptus is a combination of two beautiful elements. Its bark is made up of beautiful pale streaks of green, red, orange, gray, and purple-brown during the summer months, and it has the flowers of a Eucalyptus.

The trees are native to New Guinea, Indonesia and the Philippine Islands. How's that for a reason to visit?



The above is but a small sampling of the many amazing trees that Hashem has created. Some are well known, others less so, but what unites them all is the amazing resilience and adaptability that they all display.

Now look around your own neighborhood. What amazing trees are there for you to discover?

What tree-mendous tree characteristics can you emulate? Send in pictures of amazing trees and write about what you've learned from them.

Editor@strongermazine.com.

We're waiting to hear from you.

Happy Tu B'Shevat!



CHAPTER 8

Menucha
Chana Levin

Recap: Yaakov and Shira Leah go to their father's office to print posters of Heshy to hang around the neighborhood. Leeba's friend Shevy comes over and convinces her to come back to her house. As they prepare to leave, they bump into a news reporter.

"**A**nd wha's your name, dear?" Jenna Ashton, the news reporter, asked.

"Leeba Kestenbaum."

"Your little brother's name is Hershy, is that correct?"

"Not Hershy. Heshy."

"Okay, Heshy. He's eight years old?"

"Yes."

"Leeba, as his big sister, can you tell us what Heshy is like?"

"He's a very cute little boy, super smart, and he can talk a mile a minute."

Ms. Ashton smiled briefly, but her friendly attitude changed with her next question. "So tell me, Leeba, what do you think really

happened to Heshy?"

"I wish I knew. He went off to school as usual and disappeared at the end of the day."

"Did you see any suspicious activity recently in the neighborhood?"

"No."

"Any strange people around who seemed out-of-place? Or any other details I can include when putting this story together. Like a nasty argument at home that made him upset, or anything else that might have happened to make a little boy suddenly run away."

Leeba, resentful of the probing questions, felt angry tears sting her eyes.

Shevy noticed the tears and quickly slipped her arm through Leeba's. "We have to go now," she told the news reporter, gently leading her friend away.

As Leeba walked into the front hallway of Shevy's house, she experienced a feeling of familiarity, almost as if she was coming home. When she had first fled from her situation to the sanctuary of Shevy's nice, calm, normal house, the house had offered her a place of

refuge from her own turmoil – the turmoil that had resulted from her parents earth-shattering announcement that they were getting divorced. That announcement had led to a horrifying outburst by all the siblings, with tears pouring down everyone's faces. Even Yaakov had not been able to maintain the 'cool tough guy' image he liked to assume.

The Kestenbaum family had scattered in different directions after that announcement. Now, however, the shock of Heshy's disappearance had caused the family to draw together again. Leeba knew it was only a temporary situation, but the illusion of family togetherness felt reassuring.

Up in Shevy's room, Leeba sat on the guest bed that felt as familiar as her own.

"Do you want to see some of the schoolwork we did today?" Shevy suggested, hoping to reconnect Leeba to her former life.

"I guess." Leeba shrugged.

"Mrs. Romberg gave us back our social studies projects this afternoon. Here's yours; she put it into a big envelope for you."

Leeba's project was about the pioneers who'd traveled to the Old West. The topic fascinated her and she'd invested a lot of effort in it.

"Wow, look, I got an A plus," Leeba exclaimed, pleasantly surprised.

"That's amazing! What comments did Mrs. Romberg write?"

Leeba leaned forward to read their teacher's comments out loud. "This is an excellent, well-researched paper, very interesting to read. You really made the pioneers' journey come alive, Leeba. Thanks for including the hardtack cracker for a genuine taste of pioneer food!"

"Don't tell me you included one of those rock-hard crackers you make sometimes." Shevy giggled. "Did you warn Mrs. Romberg not to eat it dry, but to soak it in water or milk before trying to eat it?"

"Of course," Leeba replied. "When they're dry, those hardtack crackers are like rocks; people

can even break a tooth on them. Heshy's wiggly tooth fell out when he insisted on biting into one. The last time we went to our cabin in the woods we took a batch of hardtack with us and left it there. I told everyone if it's kept dry in an airtight container, it can last for years."

Suddenly, Leeba gasped. "Oh, my goodness: Shevy, I just got the weirdest idea ever."

While Leeba was at Shevy's house, Shira Leah's friend came to visit.

Dassy, who'd been friends with Shira Leah

“

**THE KESTENBAUM
FAMILY HAD SCATTERED
IN DIFFERENT
DIRECTIONS AFTER THAT
ANNOUNCEMENT.**

”

since first grade, had also brought along some homework.

"But Mrs. Frankel said to do it if only if you feel up to it," Dassy reassured her.

"That's nice of her," Shira Leah said. "Because there's no way I can concentrate on schoolwork right now."

"I totally get it," Dassy said. "I know this is a very rough time for you with Heshy disappearing and everything...."

When the divorce bombshell first exploded, Shira Leah had confided in Dassy immediately. Dassy's parents were also divorced, and the shared experience had caused the two girls to



grow even closer. Listening to Dassy now, Shira Leah recalled previous times when Dassy had reassured her that her emotions were totally normal.

"Of course you're feeling shocked; you weren't expecting the divorce..."

"You may feel angry about what your parents did to your life, and also sad that things will never be the same again. You might feel relieved that there's less tension now at home.... The weirdest thing I felt was guilt, like the divorce was somehow my fault, even though it didn't make any sense...."

Shira Leah had nodded at her friend's explanations. "I feel those things too, sometimes," she'd said. "But the feeling of embarrassment is the absolute worst."

"I know. I totally did not want anyone to know what happened to my family," Dassy agreed. "But of course people found out. Divorce can't be kept a secret. You may also be feeling lonely, because no one understands what you're going through."

Shira Leah looked at Dassy. "I don't feel that way anymore now with you, Dassy." She told her.

Dassy promised to try and always be there for her. "Try to be fair to both your parents," she added. "Do not take sides even if they try to get you to choose between them. You need to be able to keep in touch with both of them..."

Shira Leah tried to shake the image of her friend dispensing advice in the past, and to instead tune in to the words that she was saying now. "You know, if there's too much tension at home, maybe you can stay with a close friend or relative 'til things straighten out." Dassy leaned forward energetically. "I went to stay with my bubby for a while at her house in the country when things were too hard for me at home, and so did my younger sister Adina. She said she felt safe there in



SHIRA LEAH TRIED TO SHAKE THE IMAGE OF HER FRIEND DISPENSING ADVICE IN THE PAST, AND TO INSTEAD TUNE IN TO THE WORDS THAT SHE WAS SAYING NOW.



Bubby's little house at the edge of the woods."

"That sounds so nice," Shira Leah said. "A little house at the edge of the woods. You know, our family's cabin that my father and his friend built a few years ago always feels so cozy and secure. There's a big stone fireplace that we curl up in sleeping bags in front of, and we always feel safe and protected just being there."

Shira Leah's face suddenly turned pale.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Dassy asked.

But Shira Leah just trembled, unable to find the right words for her friend.

To be continued...

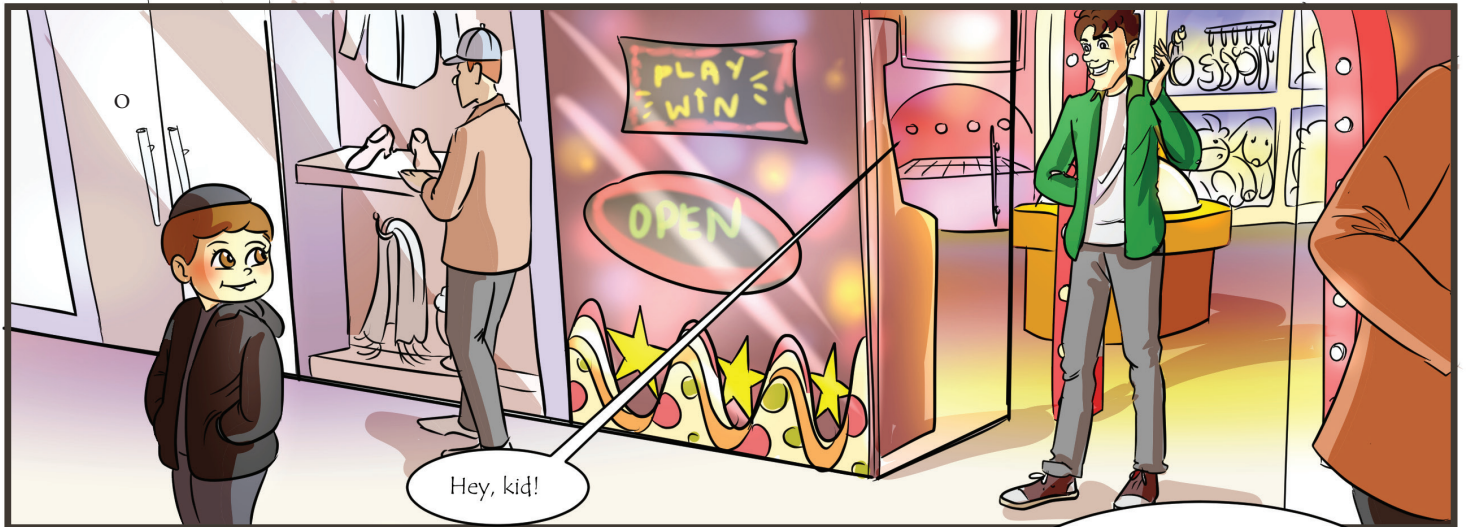
Menucha Chana Levin, a former English teacher, has written many short stories and several novels for children and teenagers. Her latest novel, Hidden Heritage, published by Hamodia Treasures, is available in Jewish bookstores and on Amazon.



The Kaiser Clan

Episode 28:
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To be continued...