



**BADERECH**

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## Tree of Life

Rebbe Yosef Yitzchok, the Freidiker (“Previous”) Rebbe of Lubavitch was on a leisurely walk through the forest with his father, Rebbe Shalom Dov Ber zy’a, when Reb Yosef Yitzchok absentmindedly plucked a leaf off a tree as they passed by it on the trail.

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 is alive, its physical structure is akin to a body, it’s imbued with a Divine life-force, it’s guided by *Hashgacha Pratis* (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 the creation of God?”

The Ba’al Shem Tov taught: the all-encompassing Oneness of Hashem is the fundamental reality underlying all Creation; everything is an expression of 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, the Holy Baal 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 is branches of one tree.

Torah itself is called “*Eitz Chayim*, 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 b’kulah*”, holding on to the entire tree as well, connected to the whole of Truth and Wisdom. (*Baal Shem Tov al haTorah*, Nasso)

In the same way that the Rebbe, Reb Shalom Dov Ber was sensitive to every blade of grass, every flower petal, so do we need to

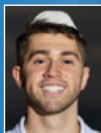
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cherish every word of Torah learnt, every letter, every mitzvah. Connecting with just one idea or verse of Torah, uttering a single word of prayer, we are bound to the entirety of the infinite universe of Jewish experience and knowledge.

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*Shabbos Shirah* features the Song of the Sea at *Kriyas Yam Suf*, the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds. In the midst of *Az Yashir*, the song of praise celebrating the Exodus from Egypt, Moshe has a vision of the End of Days: *T'vi'emo v'sitaeimo b'har nachalasecha*, "Bring us to and implant us upon the mount of Your inheritance..." He envisions us 'planted' on *Har HaBayis*, 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!

*Tu b'Shvat sameach*, a meaningful and sweet New Year for the Trees to you and to all of us who strive to cling to any and every part of it! ■

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