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**Rosh Chodesh is
awesome!**

Man is a Tree

**Take care
of
your tree;
take care
of
Yourself.**

*"Torah is a tree of life for all who grasp it."
(Proverbs 3:18)*

What does it mean, "New Year for the Trees?" Do all the cedars and pines get together, make resolutions to improve themselves, and dip apples in honey?!

Of course not. Tu B'Shvat is the day of the year when trees stop absorbing water from the ground, and instead draw nourishment from their sap.

Why are we compared to trees in the torah?

A tree needs the four basic elements in order to survive - soil, water, air, and fire (sun). "A person is like the tree of a field..." Human beings also require the same basic elements. Let's examine these four elements, one at a time:

SOIL=

A tree needs to be planted firmly in the earth. The soil is not only the source through which nourishment is absorbed, but also provides room for the roots to grow.

A person can appear successful on the outside, with full branches and a fancy car. "But if the roots are few" - if there is little connection to one's community and one's heritage - then life can send challenges that are impossible to withstand. "A strong wind can turn the tree upside down." A person alone is a person vulnerable to trends and fads that may lead to despair and destruction.

Humans require a strong home base, where values and morals are absorbed, and which provides a supportive growth environment. In a world rife with negativity; we need a "filter," a safe haven to return to and refresh. A community provides an impervious shield – the "soil" where we can be ourselves, make our mistakes and still be accepted, loved and nourished.

**Stella K.
Abraham
High**

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WATER= Rain-water is absorbed into the ground and - through an elaborate system of roots - is carried throughout the trunk, branches and leaves of the tree. Without water, the tree will wither and die.

Deprived of water, a person will become dehydrated and ultimately disoriented, even to the point where they may not be able to recognize their own father. So too, without Torah, a person becomes disoriented – to the extent they may not even recognize their Father in Heaven, Hashem.

AIR= A tree needs air to survive. The air contains oxygen that a tree needs for respiration, and carbon dioxide for photosynthesis. In an imbalanced atmosphere, the tree would suffocate and die.

The Torah (Genesis 2:7) states that "God breathed life into the form of Man." The Hebrew word for "breath" - "nesheema" - is the same as the word for "soul" - "neshama." Our spiritual life force comes, metaphorically, by way of air and respiration.

We use our senses of taste, touch and sight to perceive physical matter. But "smelling" is the most spiritual of senses, since the least "physical matter" is involved.

FIRE= A tree also needs fire - sunlight - to survive. The absorption of energy from the light activates the process of photosynthesis, a chemical reaction that is essential for the growth and health of the tree.

Humans also need fire - warmth - to survive. This is the warmth of brotherhood and community. People absorb the energy of peers, friends, family, neighbors and associates - and channel that into identity and actions. All the essential observances and ceremonies of Judaism are based on family and community, from the celebration of birth, through the attainment of maturity, marriage, education, and even death.

The power of community is illustrated in the following Talmudic story:

An old man was planting a tree. A young person passed by and asked, "What are you planting?"

"A carob tree," the old man replied.

"Silly fool," said the youth. "Don't you know that it takes 70 years for a carob tree to bear fruit?"

"That's okay," said the old man. "Just as others planted for me, I plant for future generations."

Indeed, "a person is like the tree of a field..."

This year on Tu B'Shvat, as you're gnawing that slab of carob, ask yourself:

- *Are we getting the spiritual food and shelter we need to survive, or are our trees being blown down by the forces of information overload and rampant materialism?*
- *Are we part of a strong Jewish community, providing a warm and nurturing environment? Or are we cast into the pale bleak anonymity of urban life today?*
- *Are we looking to future generations knowing that we are providing them with the proper foundations for their lives?*

By Rabbi Shraga Simmons

http://www.aish.com/holidays/tu_bshvat/last/tree.htm