



STAYING GROUNDED TO KEEP GROWING

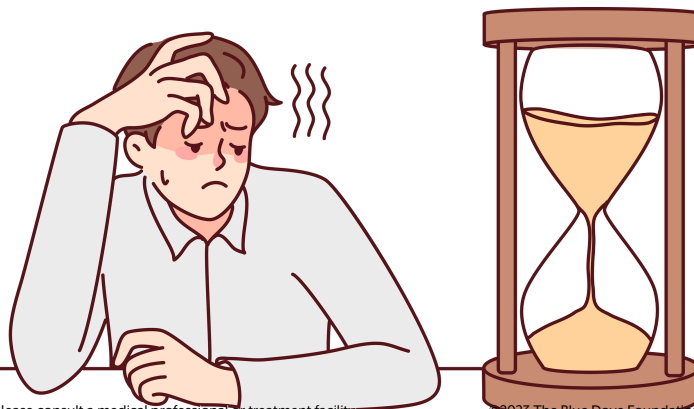
Tu B'Shvat is playfully called the “birthday” for the trees and is a day to celebrate nature and nurture a sense of gratitude for nature and the world we live in. However, its historical roots are not celebratory. Rather, Tu B'Shvat is a day connected to the yearly agricultural cycle used to calculate yearly growth cycles. In the Torah, the Jews are commanded as follows:

וְכִי־תֵבְאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ וְנִטְעַתֶּם כָּל־עֵץ מֵאֵל וְעַרְלָתוֹ אֶת־פְּרִיו שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים
יִהְיֶה לָכֶם עֲרָלִים לֹא יֵאָכֵל: וּבִשְׁנָה הָרְבִיעִית יִהְיֶה כָל־פְּרִיו קֹדֶשׁ הַלְוִיִּם לַיהוָה

When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before God.
(Leviticus 19:23-24)

According to Jewish law, all fruit trees need to be left to grow for a three-year period, and whatever blossoms in the fourth year after Tu B'Shevat until Tu B'Shevat of the fifth year are called “neta revai.” Then, only after a ritual redemptive process in Jerusalem, may we finally eat the saplings of that tree. That first three-year waiting period is called “Orlah.”

On the surface, this long and complicated process may seem tedious and unnecessary. But if you DIG a bit deeper, the laws of Orlah and Neta Revai offer us a valuable lesson about the importance of patience when undergoing growth processes.





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It can be incredibly challenging to practice patience, especially in a fast-paced world where we are constantly moving from one thing to the next. Patience is the “ability to stay calm in the face of adversity, waiting, frustration or suffering” (Sarah Schnitker). Patience allows us to accept our current circumstances while also continuing to move forward.

Practicing patience can have positive impacts on our physical and mental well-being. Studies have found signs that it boosts self-esteem and self-control, increases productivity, strengthens resilience and decreases health risks (Sarah Schnitker and Robert Emmons).

The significance of patience within Jewish tradition is reflected in the book, Avot d’Rabbi Natan:



אם היתה נטיעה בתוך ידך ויאמרו לך "הרי לך המשיח"
בוא ונטע את הנטיעה ואחר כך צא והקבילו.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai used to say: If you have a sapling in your hand and are planting it, and someone should say to you that the Moshiach has come, stay and complete the planting, and only then go to greet the Moshiach (Avot d’Rabbi Natan: 31)

Our roads of recovery and growth can feel endless at times, and there may be times in our lives where we feel ready to move forward. We need to be patient and spend more time building the foundations for our continued wellness and success before we can move forward. Tu B’Shvat is our yearly reminder that our roots need to be grounded and cultivated in order to truly see the long-lasting fruits of our labor.





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כָּל שֶׁמַּעֲשִׂיו מְרַבֵּין מַחְכְּמָתוֹ, לָמָּה הוּא דוֹמָה, לְאֵילָן שֶׁעֲנָפָיו מְעַטִּין וְשָׂרְשָׁיו מְרַבִּין, שֶׁאֶפְלוּ כָּל הָרוּחוֹת שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם בָּאוֹת וְנוֹשְׁבוֹת בּוֹ אֵין מְזִיזִין אוֹתוֹ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שם) וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שֶׁתּוֹלַע מֵיִם וְעַל יוֹבֵל יִשְׁלַח שָׂרְשָׁיו וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה כִּי יָבֹא חֹם, וְהָיָה עָלָיו רֶעֶנָן, וּבִשְׁנַת בְּצֶרֶת לֹא יִדָּאָג, וְלֹא יִמָּשׁ מַעֲשׂוֹת פְּרִי

One whose deeds exceed their wisdom — to what are they similar? To a tree whose branches are few and whose roots are many; even if all the winds in the world come and blow against it, they will not move it from its place. As it is said: "And they shall be like a tree planted by the water spreading its roots toward the stream, and it will not notice when heat comes. Its leaves will be fresh, in a year of drought it will not worry, and it shall not cease yielding fruit" (ibid., 17:8). (Ethics of the Fathers, 3:17)

It isn't always how much we know that builds resilience; it's what we do to prepare for change that keeps us grounded. The real question is, what are the roots that keep you grounded, and how are you nurturing them?





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Activity: Finding Your Roots

Being grounded and present looks different for everyone. Think about the journeys you are currently on. Which aspects of yourself are you working on? What goals are you working toward? What does it look like for you to be grounded and on that journey? Which things/people in your life keep you grounded? Daily meditation or walks? Scheduled phone calls/meetups with loved ones? Write them down on the list below, and consider what you could do to help nurture those roots.

1.

2.

3.

4.
