

"Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God."

Genesis, chapter 21, verse 33 (New American Standard Bible NASB)

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1. Mose (Genesis) 21, 33



אשל

אוכל שתייה לינה

OCHEL, SHTIYA, LINA

A Tamarisk tree is called in Hebrew: **Eshel**. It is the abbreviation of **FOOD**, **A DRINK**, **Overnight Stay**.

Tu Bishvat, the new year of the tree is celebrated this year on Wednesday February 4th, 2015. Normally on this day and in this week in Israel more than 600,000 trees (tree saplings) are planted all over the country. (See [Tu Bishvat article by Ari Lipinski www.eng.arilipinski.com/tu-bishvat](http://www.eng.arilipinski.com/tu-bishvat)) On this day this year trees will not be planted in Israel because it is the **Shemita** year (the 7th year).

Planting a tree in the Holy Land Israel has a very long tradition. 3,800 years ago **Abraham** already planted a tree, namely a **Tamarisk** near Beersheba. We read in Genesis chap. 21, verse 33 "Abraham planted a Tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called the name of the LORD, the everlasting God." **What was the unique message integrated in this event so that it was so important to tell about it in the Bible?** Further more having in mind that the text in the Torah is very deliberate, one may ask, **why was it necessary to tell the very name of the tree which Abraham planted.** This case is a wonderful illustration of how much wisdom is built in the original Hebrew Torah text. The fascinating answer to the above mentioned question one could never find out by reading the text in another language but in Hebrew. Why so? Well, let us see the whole picture.

Upfront I tell you that the original Hebrew name of the tree which Abraham planted is called "**Eshel**" אֶשֶׁל. But telling only this, does not provide the beauty of the story. So let us go step by step: What had happened just before Abraham planted the "Eshel" tree? There was a **water conflict** between Abraham and his team and the Philistines in the northern dry zone of the Negev desert in the south of Canaan (Israel). Abraham's team searched and found water wells in the desert and invested efforts to dig the wells. The Philistines destroyed their work. Finally **Abimelech** the King of the Philistines came with his General Pichol met with Abraham and negotiated a peace accord. The essence of the agreement was absolutely surprising. It was sensational that even though the Philistines came with an army (the king and the general would not come without a proper troupe protecting them on the way), and even though Abraham was without an army, the two sides agreed that Abraham could keep all of his seven wells! **In spite of the fact that Abraham had no troupes he got it all.** There was not even a compromise achieved by the Philistines. One could expect that if the king and his army chief came to negotiate a water treaty they would surely have tried to get at least a few of

the 7 wells in question. But they did not. They left after a peaceful solution was agreed upon. The peace treaty was sealed by Abraham giving King Abimelech a present of seven sheep.

What was the first action of Abraham after he succeeded to keep the water wells? He did not celebrate "his" victory. **His first action was to plant an Eshel tree near Beersheba.** Only after he had planted the "**Eshel**" tree (Tamarisk) he expressed loudly his gratitude with a prayer: "**and called the name of the LORD, the everlasting God**".

Now we can answer the two important a. m. questions:

From the exact sequence of the event we understand first of all that **Abraham** insisted on keeping the water wells **because he wanted to plant a tree, namely an "Eshel"** near Beersheba. The Philistines obviously did not need the water. They destroyed the wells only for harassment purpose. Secondly we note that an "Eshel" tree could be seen from far away in the northern Negev which was a bare mountain. So now we get to the second question of **why the very name of the tree planted by Abraham had to be expressly told:** the "Eshel". The word "**Eshel**" in Hebrew consists of three letters: אשׁל

The famous Torah commentator **Abravanel** quotes the **Midrash** and explains that the three letters are actually the abbreviation of the three Hebrew words: **Ochel** (food), **Shtiya** (a drink), **Linah** / (Levaya, in old Hebrew) (meaning: overnight stay). (See the illustration above in page one).

Now we get to the core of the wonderful interpretation and commentary by the famous Rabbi: People asked **why had it been so important to Abraham to plant a tree in the desert.** By understanding the encoded three words of which the name of the tree "Eshel" consists, the answer to the questions was found. **Abraham wanted to publish the fact that God the LORD was the creator.** He planted a tree, deliberately an "Eshel" so that people who travelled in the region could see the spot from distance. In the desert everyone was looking for a shadow and a place to rest. **So people would be attracted to come to Abraham's place.** ('and not to go somewhere else, like McDonald's... ☺). We know of **Abraham** that he was famous for his generous **hospitality**. When people would get **food** and **water** free of charge in the desert they would thank Abraham. **Abraham then would tell them to direct their gratitude to the LORD as the Creator**, who had made all **food** and **water** available. Since this concept was totally new to the population in the area at that time, a

long conversation would follow, until it would be evening already. **Therefore Abraham would then invite the visitors even to stay over night.**

The quintessence of the story is: **Abraham wanted to make it well known to people that they should recognize the LORD as the Creator and be grateful to him.** In order to get the audience he planted an "**Eshel**" tree to make his place known and easily found. By doing so he would catch the

attention and promote the awareness of the population to the belief in the LORD as the Creator. **So we have learned from Abraham that planting an "Eshel" tree near Beersheba is the best "PR measure" for the monotheistic concept.** Fact is, that we still remember his "PR action" even 3,800 years after Abraham did it!

P.S. (One may doubt whether TV-PR clips of today will be still remembered 3,000 years from today ☺.)