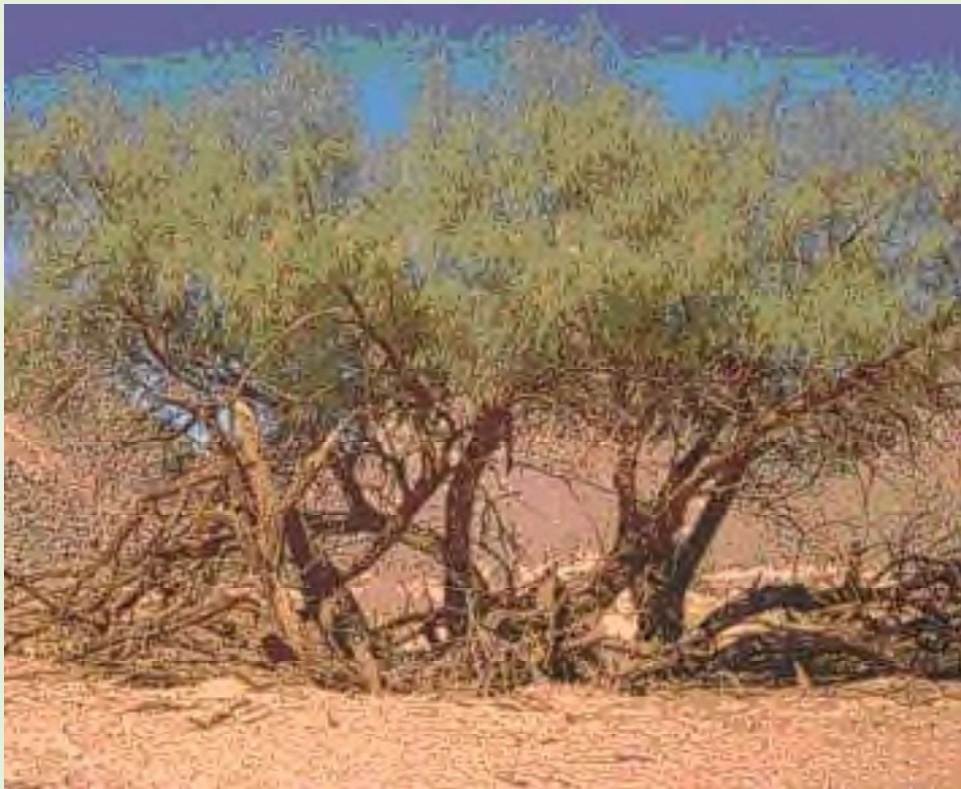


Abraham
planted
a tamarisk tree
in Beer Sheba, and there he
called on the name of the
LORD,
the everlasting God.

Genesis, 21, 33



אשל

אוכל שתייה לינה

Lina Shtiya Ochel

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

TU BISHVAT – Abarbanel about the Eshel, the Tamarisk tree

Tu Bishvat, the new year of the tree, is celebrated every year for 2000 years. 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.arilipinski.com/tu-bishvat) On this day trees will not be planted in Israel if 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. As 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 important to tell about it in the Bible? Furthermore, 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 into the original Hebrew Torah text. The fascinating answer to the above-mentioned question might not be found by reading the text in another language, other than Hebrew. Why is it so? Well, let us see the whole picture. The original Hebrew name of the tree which Abraham planted is called "Eshel" אשל. But telling only this, does not provide the beauty of the story. So, let us go step by step: What happened just before Abraham planted the "Eshel" tree? There was a water conflict between Abraham and his people and the Philistines in the northern dry zone of the Negev desert

in the south of Canaan (Israel). Abraham's men 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 and 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 army 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 seven 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" אשל 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 above-mentioned questions: From the exact sequence of events 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 the purpose of harassment. Secondly, we note that an "Eshel" tree could be seen from far away in the northern Negev which was a barren landscape. 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 אשל. 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 was it so important to Abraham to plant a tree in the desert. By understanding the encoded three words of which the name of the "Eshel" tree 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 a distance. In the desert everyone was looking for shade and a place to rest. So, people would be attracted to come to Abraham's place. (And not to go somewhere else, to the "competition"... 😊). 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 was already nightfall. Therefore, Abraham would then invite the visitors even to stay the night. The quintessence of the story is: Abraham wanted to make it well known to people and 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 draw attention and promote the awareness of the population to the belief in the LORD as the Creator. We have learned from Abraham that planting an "Eshel" tree near Beersheba was the best "PR-measure" for the monotheistic concept. As a matter of fact, we still remember his "PR action" even 3,800 years after Abraham did it! P.S. (One may doubt whether Television PR campaigns of today will still be remembered 3,000 years from now 😊.) The Hebrew name of the tree (Eshel אשל contains another hidden significance: In Hebrew Torah learning often famous commentators looked at the Gimatria value of a word in order to gain a deeper understanding of the text. (Gimatria studies the numerical values attributed to each letter A=1, B=2 etc.) In Gimatria Eshel in Hebrew אשל comes to 331. The sum of the numerical value of these three letters is 7! Seven is a holy biblical number since the Creation. For Bible readers this is surely no coincidence.