

# **Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update January 25, 2024 (Sh'vat 15, 5784)**

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The image shows a book cover on the left and a bottle of oil on the right. The book cover is purple and yellow, titled 'GOD'S APPOINTED TIMES' by Barney Kasdan. The bottle is yellow and labeled 'Anointing Oil' by Jerusalem of Gold.

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## **Israel-Hamas War, Day 111**

### **Two Drones Cross Lebanese Border Into Israel; Rocket Sirens Sound on Gaza Border**

- *Following report of suspicious people near Lebanon border, IDF says scans of area show no sign of infiltration*
- *Palestinians report armed clashes between Israeli army, local armed forces in Jenin*
  - *IDF investigating UNRWA attack, says not due to IDF airstrike or artillery fire*
    - *International Court of Justice to issue ruling on Friday, South Africa's foreign minister expected to attend hearing*
- *Israeli source say sides are far from agreeing on new hostage deal*
  - *American military confirms Houthis fired at U.S.-flagged ship*

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### *Tu B'Shevat Roots of Renewal*

*The 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat is the New Year for Trees, known as Tu b'Shevat.*



There are multiple places in the Bible in which humans are compared to trees. In [Deuteronomy 20:19](#), for example, the Torah asks, “Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?” While this understanding seems to imply that humans and trees are not alike, the sages understand the Hebrew words of this verse homiletically to mean that humans are like trees of the field. Based on this comparison, we can draw a beautiful and profound parallel between the growth of trees and the spiritual and personal development of individuals. This comparison is particularly resonant during the celebration of *Tu B'Shevat*, the 15th day of the Hebrew month of *Shevat*, known as the New Year for Trees.

*Tu B'Shevat* marks a pivotal moment in the agricultural calendar, especially in the Land of Israel where it signifies the start of a new year for tithing purposes. The fruits that blossom before *Tu B'Shevat* belong to the previous year, while those that blossom after *Tu B'Shevat* belong to the new year. However, the significance of this day extends far beyond these agricultural practices, reflecting deeper spiritual truths and lessons.

Rabbi Ephraim Nisenbaum points out that the life cycle of a tree is one of constant renewal and transformation. After a period of abundance in the summer, a tree gradually sheds its fruits and leaves, entering a phase of apparent dormancy during the winter. During these months, the tree seems barren, bereft of all of its fruits and leaves. Though at this stage it appears as if the tree has died, beneath the surface a process is in motion for the tree's rejuvenation. Unseen to the eye, the sap within the tree begins to stir as *Tu B'Shevat* approaches, signaling the onset of new growth and the promise of renewal.

This natural cycle of trees offers a powerful metaphor for human experiences. We, much like trees, go through our own cycles of growth, stagnation and renewal. There are times when we feel as if we are in a

winter phase, feeling unaccomplished, stripped of achievement, down and defeated. However, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe reassures us that these periods of stillness are not empty; rather, just like the winter is the precursor for the growth of the trees, we can use these times in our lives to gather our strength for the next phase of growth.

The message of *Tu B'Shevat* is one of hope and faith in our innate potential for renewal. It reminds us that periods of inactivity or stagnation are precursors to times of flourishing and achievement. Just as the sap stirs silently within the tree during the cold winter days, so does our inner potential quietly gather strength, preparing to propel us towards new heights and aspirations.

Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr introduces another layer to this metaphor, highlighting the difference between trees and annual plants. Trees, when tended to properly, produce fruits each year without the need for reseeded, symbolizing the potential for continual growth built upon the foundations of past experiences and achievements. In contrast, annual plants must be replanted each year, starting anew. This distinction emphasizes the importance of maintenance and care in our own lives, reminding us that, like a tree, with proper nurturing, we can build upon our past accomplishments and continually strive to reach greater heights.

*Tu B'Shevat*, therefore, transcends its agricultural roots, blossoming into a period of introspection and inspiration. It encourages us to recognize our own cycles of growth, to nurture our inner potential, and to continuously aim upwards, towards personal and spiritual development. In the cycle of the seasons and the growth of trees, we find a mirror to our own lives, reminding us of our resilience, our potential for renewal, and our ever-present capacity to grow and thrive. As we reflect on these lessons, let's also remember the literal roots of this day by taking action to plant trees in Israel.

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***IDF Finds Tunnel in Khan Younis Where 20 Hostages Were Held in 'Inhumane Conditions';***

Troops of the Israel Defense Forces operating in the southern Gaza Strip recently uncovered a tunnel where Israeli hostages had been held by the Hamas terror group "in harsh and inhumane conditions," the military revealed Saturday night, January 20. In a press conference, IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said that through "precise intelligence," soldiers had found an entrance to the vast tunnel network beneath the home of a Hamas commander in southern Gaza's Khan Younis. He said troops battled Hamas gunmen as they first entered the tunnel, killing them. "The tunnel was rigged with explosives and blast doors designed to protect the terrorists and prevent the advancement in finding our hostages," Hagari said. Citing intelligence assessments, the IDF said Hamas invested millions of dollars in building the tunnel. "After walking about a kilometer in the tunnel, at a depth of about 20 meters underground, the soldiers found a central chamber where, according to testimonies of hostages who returned from Gaza, we understand that they spent most of their time," he said. No hostages were found in the tunnel when the troops arrived. Some hostages previously held in the tunnel have already been released, he said, noting that the soldiers found drawings made by five-year-old Emilia Aloni, who was freed in November, among other evidence. Hagari said that further into the tunnel, troops found five narrow holding cells, each with a mattress and a toilet. "According to the testimonies we have, about 20 hostages were held in this tunnel at different times under harsh conditions without daylight, in dense air with little oxygen, and terrible humidity that makes breathing difficult," he said. (TOI / VFI News)

***IDF Strikes Islamic Jihad Leader Released in Gilad Schalit Deal;***

Deputy Head of Propaganda for terror organization Palestinian Islamic Jihad Wael Makin Abdallah Abu-Fanounah was targeted and killed by the IDF in an airstrike on Thursday, January 18, the military announced on Friday in a joint statement with the Israel Security Service (Shin Bet). Fanounah was originally arrested in Israel on December 12, 1989, and was sentenced to three life sentences for his terrorist activities but was released in 2011 as part

of the Gilad Schalit prisoner deal. Fanounah then served as deputy to Khalil al-Hayya, the Northern Gaza Strip Commander of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Since 2017, before assuming his role as deputy head of the organization's Propaganda Unit, Fanounah was responsible for producing terror videos related to rocket attacks on Israeli territory and creating and disseminating documentation of Israeli captives as part of the psychological warfare conducted by terror groups in Gaza against Israeli residents. IDF ground troops and naval forces are continuing to conduct joint operational activity in the Gaza Strip, including precise airstrikes. Additionally, IDF naval forces are continuing to assist ground troops through strikes from the sea. In the central Gaza strip, IDF forces continued to conduct counterterrorism activity. (JPost / VFI News)

***Iran Has Almost Enough Uranium for Nuclear Bomb, US Expert Reports;*** One of the world's leading experts on nuclear weapons programs, American physicist David Albright, issued a report stating that Iran's regime needs roughly a week to produce enough uranium for an atomic bomb. In his January 8 report titled "How quickly could Iran make nuclear weapons today?" Albright argues that "Iran can quickly make enough weapon-grade uranium for many nuclear weapons, something it could not do in 2003. "Today, it would need only about a week to produce enough for its first nuclear weapon. It could have enough weapon-grade uranium for six weapons in one month, and after five months of producing weapon-grade uranium, it could have enough for twelve." After Albright published his article, Rafael Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told the media that "Iran is the only non-nuclear weapon state which is enriching uranium at this very, very high level – very close to weapons grade." Also, on Thursday, January 18, he told French media that Iran is barely cooperating with his agency, which feels it is being held "hostage" to the country's disputes with Western countries. "It's a very frustrating situation. We continue our activities there, but at a minimum," Grossi said in an interview at the World Economic Forum in Davos. "They are restricting cooperation in a very unprecedented way." He cited as an example Iran's rejection of inspectors because of their nationalities. (JPost / VFI News)

***Europe's Conditions for a Permanent Ceasefire;*** The European Parliament on Thursday, January 18, adopted a resolution calling for a permanent ceasefire in Israel's war against Hamas. The non-binding, symbolic, resolution, was adopted by 312 votes in favor, 131 against, and 72 abstentions. The resolution consists of an amendment that states that the condition for the ceasefire is the dismantling of Hamas and the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages. "Sustainable peace cannot exist as long as Hamas and other terrorist groups hijack the Palestinian cause and threaten the existence of Israel, the only democracy in the region," Antonio López-Istúriz, an EPP lawmaker, said at the plenary. EU lawmakers also condemned what they called Israel's "disproportionate" response to Hamas's massacre in which over 1200 people were murdered, expressing their "deep concern at the dire and rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip." They also voiced their support for a European initiative to resume the so-called two-state solution. (INN / VFI News)

***North Korea Training, Providing Weapons to Hamas, Hezbollah, and Houthis – Report;*** During the war in Gaza, the IDF recovered large quantities of weapons from the Gaza Strip that apparently were produced in North Korea, as reported by the South Korean National Intelligence Service. Since these weapons were seized, new information has been published revealing the current and historical relationship between North Korea and Hamas, as well as other terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Syria, and the Houthis, according to a study by the Stimson Research Institute. On October 17, a senior official from South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff claimed that "Hamas is believed to be directly or indirectly linked to North Korea militarily in various areas, such as the weapons trade, tactical guidance, and training." North Korea's state media called the allegations that it arms Hamas "a groundless and false rumor." It accused the US of creating the conspiracy to deflect from its own complicity in the Gaza war. However, this statement was undermined by the North Korean F-7 rocket-propelled grenades from Hamas's arsenal that were captured by Israeli forces. In addition, Israeli forces found North Korean Bang-

122 artillery shells on the Israel-Gaza border, and a Hamas-aligned terrorist group in Gaza possesses North Korean-made 122-mm multiple rocket launchers. North Korea has a long history of partnership with Iran and Syria, detailed in the Stimson report, and as a result, its military technology has reached Iran's terrorist proxies, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. (JPost / VFI News)

***Anti-Semitic Incidents More than Doubled in 2023, Highest Annual Surge – Report;*** The Secure Community Network (SCN) has reported a record-breaking 112% increase in anti-Semitic incidents in North America for the year 2023, marking the highest surge in such incidents ever recorded by the organization on Thursday, January 18. 2023 witnessed a dramatic escalation in anti-Semitic activities, with the SCN documenting 5,404 incidents. This figure more than doubles the incidents reported in 2022, indicating a significant and concerning upward trend in hate crimes against the Jewish community. The report reveals that December 2023 was a particularly alarming period, with the highest number of monthly incidents recorded in SCN's history. This surge in incidents included a wave of swatting and false bomb threats targeting Jewish institutions. Examples of this surge can also be displayed in 2024; on Monday, January 15, a video of The People's Forum (TPF) executive director Manolo De Los Santos speaking at an event in New York went viral, "When we finally deal that final blow to destroy Israel, when the state of Israel is finally destroyed and erased from history, that will be the single most important blow we can give to destroying capitalism and imperialism in our lifetime," De Los Santos said. In response to this speech, Congressman Ritchie Torres (D-NY) wrote a letter to Goldman Sachs, which has signed checks for \$20 million to TPF, calling on the organization to cut ties with De Los Santos and TPF, American media reported. (JPost / VFI News)

***Second Israeli Soccer Player Detained in Turkey over Support for Hostages;*** Eden Kartsev was detained on Monday night, January 15, by Istanbul police after being reported for a social media post in which he showed solidarity with the hostages in Gaza. Kartsev was released after giving a statement and is expected to return to Israel. He reposted an image from another account which marked 100 days since the hostages were taken by Hamas with the hashtag "BringThemHomeNow", according to a Turkish state broadcaster. He plays for Istanbul's Bashakshehir F.K., which has announced that he will be investigated for "violating the sensibilities of the country" and may receive disciplinary action. Karsev is the second Israeli player in the Turkish league to be detained by police and vilified in Turkish media, with the event happening the same day compatriot Sagiv Yehezkel was suspended from his club, Antalyaspor, and detained by Turkish police. This has been amplified by Turkish President Erdogan's decision to side with Hamas against Israel, leading to a complete freezing in relations between Israel and Turkey. Meanwhile, it has been reported by Israeli media that Israel and Qatar have included the transfer of life-saving medicine to the hostages in the Gaza Strip during a last round of talks. After more than 100 days, medications for asthma, diabetes, nearsightedness, cardiovascular diseases, inflammatory bowel diseases, and endocrine diseases are expected to be transferred and reach the hostages. (JPost / VFI News)

***Israeli Institute Finds New Effective Cancer Treatment Using Immune Cells;*** Winning on the battlefield takes a combination of determined soldiers and precise intelligence, but when it comes to the battle against cancer, the immune system's fighters – the T cells – quickly lose their ability to kill and become exhausted, while the intelligence-providing dendritic cells (DCs) are scarce. Now, researchers at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot have discovered a new kind of immunotherapy based on intercommunication among different immune cells. They say this technique could pave the way for innovative treatments of cancer and autoimmune diseases. The effectiveness of this new treatment was tested in several mouse models of cancer, including aggressive breast, lung, and skin cancers. Treatment with the new antibody, as compared to the existing treatment, significantly reduced the growth rate of skin and lung cancers. In contrast, breast tumors that did not respond to the existing treatment also failed to respond to the new antibody. Researchers believe this is because of the very small number of active dendritic cells around these tumors. Therefore, they tried combining their new antibody with an existing

treatment that enhances the activity of dendritic cells around the growth. This combined treatment was found to be more effective than the existing options. It proved that even in cancers that had not responded to immunotherapy until now, the synergy between T cells and active dendritic cells creates a powerful immune response against the tumor. (JPost / VFI News)



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