TU BISHVAT

GUIDE TO THE SEVEN SPECIES OF ISRAEL

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DEDICATED ANONYMOUSLY IN HONOR OF THE SCHOLARS AND STAFF WHO BRING HAMIZRACHI TO OUR COMMUNITY
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**Tu BiShvat Sameach to all our readers around the world!**

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The story of the regeneration of the Land of Israel – its soil and shrubs, plants and trees, flora and fruits, is one of the greatest stories of human accomplishment. An ecological marvel, unrivaled in the annals of recorded history.

Two great American gentiles attest to this fact; the renowned author, Mark Twain, and soil conservation expert, Walter Clay Lowdermilk.

In 1867, 11 years before the first modern agricultural settlement in Palestine was attempted – Petach Tikva – Twain visited the land for the first time and was deeply shaken by the great desolation.

“There was hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country. No landscape exists that is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to Jerusalem. The only difference between the roads and the surrounding country, perhaps, is that there are more rocks on the roads than in the surrounding country. Palestine is desolate and unlovely.¹

About 70 years later, in 1939, Lowdermilk would arrive in Palestine on a mission to search for similar soil and climates to the California Dust Bowl he was aiming to develop. He was shaken by what he saw – both by the desolation of the land and soil but equally by the remarkable regeneration begun by the Jewish pioneers of Palestine who he notes had little or no background in agriculture.

He attests: “When Jewish colonists first began their work in 1882... the soil was eroded to bedrock over fully one-half of the hills – streams across the coastal plain would choke with erosional debris from the hills to form pestilential marshes infested with dreaded malaria... Those who can read the record that has been written in the land know that this state of decadence is not normal... Rural Palestine is becoming less and less like Trans-Jordan, Syria and Iraq and more like Denmark, Holland and parts of the United States.”²

Continued on page 4
Lowdermilk was so deeply impacted that he and his wife eventually settled in Israel in the 1950s. His world-class knowledge in the science of soil gave him a unique appreciation for the extent of this miraculous transformation and a desire to use his expertise to contribute to it. He would be a proactive part of the team that built Israel’s national water carrier and has a department named after him at the Technion in Haifa. A true lover of Zion.

He felt so moved by the Israel phenomenon that he opined: “If we were interested in the regeneration of Man, let all the righteous forces on earth support these settlements in Palestine as a wholesome example for the backward Near East, and indeed for all who seek to work out a permanent adjustment of people to their lands.”

What would Lowdermilk say today, more than 70 years after the establishment of the State, when Israel has done the seemingly impossible across the whole Land – transforming a water-scarce country into an abundant oasis through cloud seeding, desalination, drip irrigation and water recycling; converting the once-barren soil into a remarkable lush fruit-yielding area despite the arid climate.

And with over 250 million trees planted in the Land over the last 120 years, what would Twain say today had he had the opportunity to return to the very same barren road that ‘bounds the approaches to Jerusalem’ and cast his eye on the once treeless countryside now home to a forest-like landscape?

What is the explanation of this phenomenal transformation? It seems that the answer lies not only in the realm of the rational and scientific, but also in the mystical and metaphysical – in a Divine promise, an ancient prophecy.

The Torah refers many times to the promise of the Land as an everlasting possession – "an everlasting possession." How can it be everlasting and eternal if we have spent so many long centuries outside it? What type of possession is that?

Rabbeinu Bachya offers a breathtaking insight when he says that “this is a great sign for Israel that from the day they were exiled from it – the Land – no other nation has been able to inhabit and settle it, but it remains destroyed and desolate, until her fledglings return.”

There is a remarkable reciprocal relationship between the Jewish people and the Land – an inexplicable love affair between a place and a people, and counterintuitively between a place and those very same people. Just as the Jewish people have never forgotten the Land, always praying to return to her and dreaming incessantly about reuniting, so too has the Land never ‘forgotten’ her people – her children. She remained loyal, somehow never ‘allowing’ others to cultivate her soil and bring out the best in her. She has constantly and consistently remained barren and unresponsive to all foreign conquests and attempts at settlement over the last two millennia, from the Romans until this very day. As loyal as the People have been to the Land so too, inexplicably, has the Land been loyal to the People.

The tragic story of Gaza today is a tangible example of this, where only 15 years ago Jewish farmers and their hothouses were international-award-winning innovators of hydroponic planting and world cherry tomato champions. The very same hothouses lie desolate despite numerous attempts to recreate the same success.

There is a type of Divine chemistry, a spiritual alchemy at the heart of the reciprocal relationship between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. Like all love stories, there is an element of wonder and mystery never easy to fully grasp but blatantly real for all to see.

Tu B’Shvat has become Israel’s national tree planting day. Many thousands of new trees are planted on this day every year by preschoolers and the elderly alike. Tree planting in Israel represents both the hope and the belief in a better future for all and the celebration of the ongoing miracle of the unique, everlasting bond between a land and a people, a people and a land.

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1 Innocents Abroad, published in 1869 – two years after his return – about his pilgrimage to Europe and the Holy Land. It was his best-selling book during his lifetime.
2 The Promised Land, Lowdermilk 1944.
3 Bereishit 17:8, as part of the covenant of Brit Mila – circumcision. The verse states, “I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the Land of your sojournings, all the Land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and I will be your G-d.”
4 Rabbi Bachya Ben Asher, in his commentary on the Torah to the above verse in Bereishit. Interestingly, another medieval commentator, Ramban, Nachmanides, makes the exact same point on a verse of the curses in Vayikra 26:32, where he sees the ‘loyalty of Land’ as a blessing within the curse.

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Chag Tu BiShvat

At first glance, Tu BiShvat, the Rosh Hashanah for fruit trees, seems to be of mere technical significance – the calendar marker for the yearly mitzvot that pertain to fruits. Surprisingly, we treat Tu BiShvat as a minor holiday – we skip tachanun and avoid fasting. What are we celebrating?

It is also noteworthy that we celebrate only the Rosh Hashanah of the trees and not that of the other plants or even tree saplings. Why are trees more important than any other vegetation? The answer lies in the relationships between trees and Man and the Jewish people.

Our Relation to Trees

Devarim (20: 19) justifies the prohibition against using a fruit tree as a battering ram by explaining that “man is like the tree of the field.” The Maharal uses the Torah’s next chapter to explain this comparison: when faced with an unsolved murder, chapter 21 mandates that we sacrifice a fresh (unworked) calf in a virgin ravine. Chazal explain that this sacrifice of potential work atones for the murder victim’s lost potential ‘fruit’ – his potential to raise a family and fulfill mitzvot. Humans, like trees, always have meaningful potential. Though our ‘produce’ differs from the tree’s, we are taught to respect its productive potential to ensure that we value our own.

The Jewish people are compared to an additional (unique) aspect of trees. Yeshayahu HaNavi teaches us that our history is like that of a tree. What does he mean?

A tree has the unique ability to regenerate after a dormant winter. As opposed to annuals that produce and then die over the winter, trees return the next spring and generate fruit once again. The celebration of the Rosh Hashanah for trees in the middle of the winter emphasizes this unique ability. Though the trees seem dead on Tu BiShvat, they are about to begin a new growth cycle.

In Iyov, we see that a tree also has ‘hope’ – even if most of it is cut down, it can still grow back (often even more vigorously). The Jewish people have a similar resiliency. As opposed to most nations who have their historical moment and then fade forever, the Jewish people have returned to prominence even after thousands of dormant years.

Celebrating Potential and Resiliency

Our celebration of Tu BiShvat should remind us of the potential and, thus, the responsibility we have to realize our potential. As long as G-d grants us the gift of life, we are meant to maximize our impact.

As a people that has returned to our Land and begun to reassert our natural prominence, we should appreciate the miracle symbolized by trees and which we are experiencing every single day.

May this celebration and requisite appreciation merit our being blessed with many more years to maximize both our personal lives and our national redemption.

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1 Mishna Rosh Hashanah 1:1-2.
2 See Bartenura, ibid.
3 Shulchan Aruch 131:6. See the Mishna Berura (se’if katan 32), who notes that our custom is to skip tachanun at mincha on Erev Tu BiShvat as well.
4 Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 572:3, based upon the Responsa of the Maharam MiRottenberg 4:5. See also the Bach, who holds that we delay a ta’anit (fast) even once a series of ta’anitim has begun.
5 Their Rosh Hashanah is the first of Tishrei (See Mishna RH 1:1).
6 Tiferet Yisrael Chapter 3.
7 Sotah 46a.
8 The Bnei Yisscochert (Ma’amarei Chodesh Tammuz/Av 3:Betulah BeMachol) highlights this aspect and its similarity to the human gestation cycle by pointing out that Tu BiShvat is 40 days before the start of Creation (25 Adar, according to the opinion that the world was created on 1st of Nissan). Trees, like humans, begin forming 40 days before anything significant can be perceived.

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FROM THE PARTIAL TO THE FULL MOON:
ALMONDS AND OBSERVATIONS

Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai debate the start date for the New Year for Trees in Shvat.1 Beit Shammai maintains that this new year is just like the other three roshei shana – all of which begin on the first of the month.2 We are meant to celebrate at the time of the New Moon – awaiting the potential of growth and blossoming.

Beit Hillel states that the New Year for Trees should be celebrated on the 15th of Shvat, just as we commemorate the agriculturally and historically oriented holidays of Pesach and Sukkot, both of which begin on the 15th of their respective months, Nissan and Tishrei.

According to Hillel, we celebrate the full moon, not the potential waxing, but the fully manifested light, just as we celebrate more light on each night of Chanukah.3 Tu BiShvat arrives to teach us a message of agricultural and historical-national continuity, not merely of beginning. Our Sages have told us to adopt Beit Hillel’s opinion for halachic practice while still appreciating the perspective of Beit Shammai.

The symbol for this season – as we sing and observe its white-blossomed beauty – is the shaked, the almond tree, as Rav David Kimchi (RaDaK) explains,4 the shaked is the first of the trees to blossom, about two months prior to its peers, who merit the blessing of the trees in the month of Nissan. This blossoming almond tree signifies more than just an Israeli folk tune, for its significance is expressed in the Torah and Nevi’im as well.

Immediately following the dispute and punishment of Korach and his assembly for their attempt to usurp the priesthood, G-d commands the tribal leaders to present their staffs (matot) before the Mishkan. Only Aharon, leader of the tribe of Levi, sees his staff blossom with almonds, expressing the Divine selection of leadership and salvation.

Similarly, in Yirmiyahu’s inaugural address as a navi, his first vision is also a “makel shaked” – an almond staff. This represents the forthcoming blossoming of hastened punishment that G-d will bring upon Am Yisrael. The same scenario of an almond staff is presented in the Torah as a match – a staff of leadership and miracles of redemption, and in Yirmiyahu as a makel – a staff of punishment and rebuke.

Perhaps for this reason, G-d asks Yirmiyahu, “Mah ata roeh?” – What do you see? How do you interpret the current state of the people and the Divine response? Yirmiyahu is requested to interpret, to take account of the religious-historical state of the nation, and deliver an appropriate message.

Rashi explains that the almond tree’s 21-day blossoming heralds the destruction during Yirmiyahu’s time, in the 21 days between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av – Bein HaMetzarim. But then again, the almond heralds the spring – the months of Adar and Nissan, the time for Geula – national redemption. As quickly as the punishment arrives, so will the consolation and blessings for the future.5

We begin on the first of the month, as Beit Shammai maintained, to set the tone for the weeks to follow, awaiting potential blossoming. The 15 days prior to Tu BiShvat allow us to ask ourselves – mah anachnu ro’im? – what do we see? As the moon waxes to completion, we must ask ourselves how we are progressing – religiously-nationally, personally? As the blossom of the shaked is imminent, will it herald Divine punishment or blessing?

The answer is apparently up to us – through our perspectives and ensuing actions.

Significantly, the 21-day blossoming period from Tu BiShvat is completed on the 7th of Adar – the day of Moshe Rabbeinu’s passing (and this year, the day of our third election results in Israel). This is a time of introspection – of observation within and throughout. This is the time we are meant to recognize our agricultural and national-historical responsibilities. This is the season of renewal in every respect – an opportunity to start afresh and determine the outcome of our actions.

May this month herald the continued rains of late winter, and simultaneously the warmth of spring and established government. As we take stock of ourselves over the next few weeks, we hope and pray that we properly respond to our observations and reflections and take advantage of the short-lived almond blossoms to teach us authentic lessons of unity, growth and continuity. May we sing HaShkediya Porachat with greater intent and national optimism as we renew ourselves and anticipate the rich and ripened fruits of our efforts.

1 Mishna Rosh Hashanah 1:1.
2 Rosh Hashanah 14a – most of the rains have come and now the fruit may blossom.
3 Shabbat 21b.
4 Yirmiyahu 1:12.
5 See Yirmiyahu 31:27.

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Kedushat Eretz Yisrael

The kedushat haAretz of Eretz Yisrael is the source of many of the dinim that make Eretz Yisrael unique – the mishnah, the halakhot haAretz, agricultural mitzvot dependent upon the Land. These include the mitzvot of terumah, ma’aser, shemitta, yovel, leket, shichcheha, peah, and challah.

The Rambam writes that the original kedushat Eretz Yisrael, endowed by Yehoshua bin Nun, was nullified when the Babylonian armies conquered the Land at the time of the first churban. The Rambam explains that this was because the original kedusha was a result of the kibbush (conquest) of the Land, and this was undone upon the subsequent Babylonian conquest.

However, the kedusha sheniya, the kedushat Eretz Yisrael effected by Ezra when the Jewish people returned from galut Bavel, was everlasting, never to be undone. The Rambam formulates a reason for this difference based on the fact that the kedusha sheniya did not depend on kibbush haAretz. In fact, there was no kibbush at this time. An independent Jewish government in Eretz Yisrael was not established until the days of the Chashmonaim in the middle of the Second Temple period, 200 years later. Instead of kedushat haAretz resting on the conquest of the Land, it rested on “chazaka” – settlement, a term coined by the Rambam himself.

Why is this a valid explanation of the difference between kedusha rishona and kedusha sheniya?

When Shlomo HaMelech first built the Beit HaMikdash, he not only endowed the structure of the Beit HaMikdash itself with kedusha, but he also sanctified its geographic location – that particular latitude and longitude on the globe. The Rambam’s opinion is that this kedushat makom is an everlasting one. The edifice of the Beit HaMikdash, along with the vessels therein, may have been stripped of their kedusha based on the verse, “And lawless people came into [the Sanctuary] and profaned it.” Indeed, the Gemara applies this principle to the stones of the mizbeach, which were defiled by the Greeks when they seized control of the Beit HaMikdash. Yet, the kedushat makom of the makom haMikdash endures.

To account for the eternal nature of the kedusha of the makom haMikdash, the Rambam offers his famous explanation:

Because the kedusha of the Mikdash and Yerushalayim is based on the fact that, in that place, G-d settled His Shechina, and the Shechina cannot be nullified.

The verse states, “This is My resting place forever and ever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.” The Shechina was unaffected by enemy conquest; it always remained in the makom haMikdash. Therefore, the kedusha of the makom haMikdash – and of Yerushalayim as an extension of kedushat haMikdash – remains intact.

The Rambam, in juxtaposing these two halachot – Shlomo’s hakdasha of the makom haMikdash and Ezra’s hakdasha of Eretz Yisrael – implies perhaps that the reason the kedusha sheniya of Eretz Yisrael endures is related to the everlasting nature of the kedushat HaMikdash.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that there was a major difference between the settlement of Eretz Yisrael in the kedusha sheniya as opposed to that during the kedusha rishona. The First Beit HaMikdash was built many years after the conquest of Yehoshua. For this reason, Yehoshua first endowed all of Eretz Yisrael with its kedusha, and Shlomo, at a later time, endowed the Beit HaMikdash with its kedusha. Therefore, we understand that kedushat Eretz Yisrael and kedushat HaMikdash are two distinct kedushot.

However, just the reverse was true in the days of Ezra. First the Beit HaMikdash was erected, and only then did the people settle around it. The yishuv began in Yerushalayim and then extended further outward. Therefore, the second kedusha of Eretz Yisrael was really an expansion of the kedushat HaMikdash. This form of settlement is what the Rambam meant with his application of the term “chazaka” to Ezra’s kedusha sheniya, and this is why that kedusha was not nullified by the Roman occupation of Eretz Yisrael. Just as the kedushat HaMikdash, based on hashra’at haShechina, remains even after the churban haBayit, so too, the kedushat haAretz of Ezra, an extension of that kedushat HaMikdash, is everlasting.

Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Moadim.

1 Hilchot Beit HaBechirah 6:16.
2 Yechezkel 7:22.
3 Avodah Zara 52b.
4 Tehillim 132:14.

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ME’IKAR HADIN, READING NEWSPAPERS IS PERMITTED

The Yavetz discusses the question of whether it is permitted to read papers on Shabbat. He writes that in light of the Terumat HaDeshen’s comments, that people can chat about the news if they enjoy it, it appears that it is certainly permissible to read newspapers if a person enjoys reading them.

HOWEVER, IT IS FORBIDDEN TO READ ADVERTISEMENTS AND ABOUT FINANCIAL TOPICS

Indeed, the Yavetz continues by saying that there is an argument to forbid the reading of newspapers on Shabbat because of the adverts and the commercial content.

Chazal forbade looking at “layperson’s documents” (e.g. accounts, prices, etc.) on Shabbat, and thus it is certainly forbidden to read those parts in the paper dealing with business, such as the financial section and the ads.

In light of the Yavetz’s ruling, it is clear that one shouldn’t read the ads in the papers or in the Parashat HaShavua sheets (particularly those dealing with secular topics such as trips overseas, real estate, hotel offers, etc.)

IT IS BEST TO LIMIT ONE’S READING OF NEWSPAPERS ON SHABBAT

The Yavetz also addresses the question of whether one can read papers on Shabbat without reading the ads?

Chazal teach us that we should “keep the Nazirite away from the vineyard” so he shouldn’t be tempted to eat the grapes. The Yavetz says that business people are in a similar position, always on the lookout for good deals and offers, i.e. they wouldn’t be able to look at the ads, “so it would be correct to forbid it entirely.”

From his comments, it seems that he is particularly stringent with businesspeople, who have a special interest in commercial ads. However, today in many ways we are all considered businesspeople and so we also have an interest in these ads.

Following the Yavetz’s ruling, the Mishna Berura rules (307:63) that one should not read newspapers on Shabbat.

Nevertheless, since the main problem is reading about business and economics, the Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata (29:46) rules that one is allowed to read papers on Shabbat, if one is careful not to look at ads, classifieds, etc.

Despite the leniencies, it is worthy not to read newspapers on Shabbat, because Shabbat is a day distinct from the rest of the week, designed for Torah study and spiritual pursuits rather than catching up on the news, which – if one must – should be kept to a minimum.

PARASHAT HASHAVUA SHEETS

In light of the above, it would be best if there were no ads at all in our Parashat HaShavua sheets. Moreover, there is another problem – bringing commercial items into the shul, since “one should not make calculations in them [shuls]” (Shulchan Aruch 151:1).

However, it is very difficult to abide by these demands in our times, because it’s the ads that fund the publication of the sheets in the first place, and they wouldn’t be able to produce them without that income. Still, it would be worth having clear guidelines: the majority of the publication should be divrei Torah, prices should not be stated (or in small print at the foot of the ad), preferably the publishers should assess the ads first and give priority to those that strengthen Judaism (like ads for new books, etc.) rather than those that deal purely with business and totally secular matters. Similarly, it would be preferable if all the ads were concentrated in two-three or however many pages, so that the divrei Torah would stand alone, without ads on the page. In this way, one could only read the divrei Torah pages on Shabbat and leave the ads till after Shabbat.

As far as readers are concerned, try not to read ads on Shabbat, and certainly not prices and costs. Likewise, be wary of turning our shuls into non-holy places, and preserving the service as it should be. Hence, I would recommend distributing these sheets after the service outside the actual sanctuary, so that people can take them, if they want, to read at home.

1 The Rambam is of the view that the prohibition is because he may come to erase, while the Rosh, in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak, holds that the prohibition is from the law of preparing things that are forbidden to do on Shabbat even if the actual action will be done on a weekday. One can explain this opinion in that although it is permitted for someone to think about his business on Shabbat, reading is a more significant and obvious action than thinking, and so Chazal forbade it.
Tu BiShvat is first mentioned in the Mishna in Rosh Hashanah: “There are four New Years... on the 1st of Shvat, the New Year for Trees, in Beit Shammai’s opinion. Beit Hillel says, on the 15th.”

Why does the New year for Trees specifically fall in Shvat? Rashi explains: “Because the winds of the rainy days – the time for fruitfulness – has passed, and the resin in the trees has risen and the fruits ripen from now.” In other words, the fruits that grow after Tu BiShvat are definitely fruits that grew from the natural resources of the new year and hence they are considered fruits of the new year. This has halachic significance regarding the mitzvot dependent on the Land: orla, bikkurim, teruma, ma’aser rishon, ma’aser sheini, ma’aser ani and shemitta.

Throughout the years of exile, there was almost no significance to Tu BiShvat, since the Land was desolate and there were no fruits with which one could fulfill the mitzvot dependent on the Land. However, there were customs to eat fruits from the Land of Israel on this day (Magen Avraham 131). In the 17th century, the Sages of Tzfat composed a “Seder for Tu BiShvat Night,” during which they gave divrei Torah and praised the Land and its produce. The aim of this custom was to bequeath a love for the Land to the Jews in exile and to quicken the Redemption. Thus, Tu BiShvat became the day that expresses a yearning to return to the Land of Israel. So when the Zionist Movement began returning to Eretz Yisrael, Tu BiShvat then became a day of tree planting, with the aim of making the desolate land blossom and encouraging people to dwell in it. Making the desert blossom complements the words of the Prophets concerning the Redemption period (e.g. Yeshayahu 35:1-2, Yechezkel 36:8, Yoel 4:18, Amos 9:14-15).

The flourishing and blossoming of the Land symbolizes the process of Geula (Redemption) unfolding before our eyes. For thousands of years, Eretz Yisrael stood barren, and now, once the Jewish people began returning to its Land, the Land has begun to bloom, exactly as the Prophets foresaw thousands of years ago. The pioneers understood these verses as a practical assignment – they had to work hard, with their bare hands, to make the desert bloom, and to settle the Land of Israel. However, from the verses one can see that the success in making the Land blossom is not only technical but also very much part of the signs beckoning the Redemption. During the Geula period G-d will bestow a special blessing which will allow this blossoming to occur.

The flowering of the Land emphasizes the unique connection between Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael. The Land remained barren as long as the Jewish people remained in Exile, and began to bloom and grow as soon as the Jewish people began to return to their roots. Therefore, the flourishing of the Land during the Geula era stems from a combination of human endeavor, and of siyata diShamaya – Divine assistance. G-d opens the door, causes the conditions to be ripe for Am Yisrael’s return to the Land and its subsequent growth (i.e. historical, political changes, technological advances that enable agriculture in desert conditions, and more), while Am Yisrael, for its part, needs to open its eyes, see the new possibilities, hear the voice of G-d calling us to return to the Land, and take action – return to Israel, work the Land and observe G-d’s commandments. That is how we make the desert bloom and become partners in advancing the Geula.

Tu BiShvat, the New Year for Trees, which for generations was a day of commemoration of Eretz Yisrael and its fruits, has become a day of great significance with the return of Am Yisrael to its borders, not only from a halachic perspective, but mostly from a symbolic one – this is the day that symbolizes the blooming of the barren Land of Israel through her children’s return, a sign of the Geula gradually developing before our very eyes.

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Count your Blessings and Make your Blessings Count

When the average non-farmer thinks of Tu BiShvat, his thoughts are generally limited to the omission of tachanun and the realization that we are a month away from Purim. But as we know, every special occasion in Judaism has special meaning and purpose, and thus it behooves us to uncover and glean a message for our urban society as well.

Tu BiShvat, as we know, has halachic ramifications for laws of orla and ma’asrot, laws related to the fruits of the Land of Israel. There is a fascinating comparison found in the Rambam that can give us a meaningful insight into each and every mitzvah we perform. The Rambam writes that there are three types of berachot.

The first is בִּרְכַּת שֶׁבַח וְהוֹדָאָה, berachot of praise and thanksgiving. These are all reactionary to an amazing Divine event or experience. Hearing thunder, seeing a rainbow, using the bathroom, are all events which require the Jew to acknowledge the Divine involvement in all of the above. The second type, בִּרְכַּת הַנְהֲנִין, are berachot recited before we indulge in pleasure – eating, drinking, smelling. Finally, the Rambam presents the third type of beracha, those recited before performing a mitzvah. But instead of just listing this third type, he links category three with category two.

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A beracha on a pleasure is described by the commentators as a matir, a declaration which then allows me to partake of the item. Really, the entire world belongs to G-d. Once I acknowledge His dominion, I am then allowed to partake of His world. What does that have to do with a beracha before a mitzvah? That seems to have nothing to do with the matir idea?! It’s just a preparation to perform the mitzvah!

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik presents an ingenious and breathtaking answer. Yes, even berachot on mitzvot function as matirim. After all, who are we, finite human beings of flesh and blood, who presume to draw close to the Infinite through physical actions and verbal speech? What gives us the audacity to try to close the gap between the created and the Creator, between one whose days are numbered and the One who created days? It seems presumptuous to even try!

That’s the function of a beracha. Once I acknowledge the relationship between commanded and Commander, and I express my recognition that this is His will that we perform His mitzvot to achieve G-dliness, that is the matir, that is what allows us to then perform the mitzvah.

Thus, it is exactly parallel to berachot on food and aromas. Just as we require a matir to partake of the pleasures of the physical world, so too we require a matir to partake of the spiritual bliss which is an outgrowth of each and every mitzvah.

Someone once came to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, asking for a segula for salvation. How many fast days? How many repetitions of Tehillim? He replied, “I am not a segula man. I cannot tell you about non-halachic strategies. But what I try to do when I need salvation is to say my berachot with kavana (intention).” He knew the secret of each and every beracha.

On this Tu BiShvat, let us renew our energies to focus and improve our kavana when we recite all types of berachot, and let us allow ourselves to be shaped not only by the mitzvot that we do, but by the berachot which precede them.

When the average non-farmer thinks of Tu BiShvat, his thoughts are generally limited to the omission of tachanun and the realization that we are a month away from Purim. But as we know, every special occasion in Judaism has special meaning and purpose, and thus it behooves us to uncover and glean a message for our urban society as well.

Tu BiShvat, as we know, has halachic ramifications for laws of orla and ma’asrot, laws related to the fruits of the Land of Israel. There is a fascinating comparison found in the Rambam that can give us a meaningful insight into each and every mitzvah we perform. The Rambam writes that there are three types of berachot.

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In the course of setting out the laws of war, the Torah adds a seemingly minor detail that became the basis of a much wider field of human responsibility and is of major consequence today: “When you lay siege to a city... do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down... However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build fortifications until the city at war with you falls.”

War is, the Torah implies, inevitably destructive. That is why Judaism’s highest value is peace. Nonetheless, there is a difference between necessary and needless destruction. Trees are a source of wood for fortifications. But some trees, those that bear fruit, are also a source of food. Therefore, do not destroy them. Do not needlessly deprive yourself and others of a productive resource.

However, Chazal saw in this command something more than a detail in the laws of war. They saw it as a binyan av, a specific example of a more general principle. They called this the rule of bal tashchit, the prohibition against needless destruction of any kind. As Rambam says: “Not only does this apply to trees, but also whoever breaks vessels or tears garments, destroys a building, blocks a wellspring of water, or destructively wastes food, transgresses the command of bal tashchit.” This is the halachic basis of an ethic of ecological responsibility.

What determines whether a biblical command is to be taken restrictively or expansively? Why did Chazal take this seemingly minor law to build out a wide halachic field?

The simplest answer lies in the word “Torah.” It means law. But it also means teaching, instruction, direction, guidance. The Torah is a lawbook like no other because it includes not only laws but also narratives, genealogies, history, and song. Law as the Torah conceives it is embedded in a larger universe of meanings. Those meanings help us understand the context and purpose of any given law.

So it is here. First and foremost is the fact that the earth is not ours. It belongs to its Creator, to G-d Himself. That is the point of the first chapter of the Torah: “In the beginning, G-d created...” He made it, therefore He is entitled to lay down the conditions within which we live in it as His guests.

The logic of this is immediately played out in the story of the very first humans. G-d commands humanity: “Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” “Subdue” and “rule” are verbs of dominance. Later, however, the text uses two quite different verbs. G-d placed the first man in the Garden “to serve it (le’ovda) and guard it (leshomra).” These belong to the language of responsibility. The first term, le’ovda, tells us that humanity is not just the master but also the servant of nature. The second, leshomra, is the term used in later biblical legislation to specify the responsibilities of one who undertakes to guard something that is not their own.

How are we to understand this tension between the two opening chapters? Quite simply: Bereishit 1 tells us about creation and nature, the reality mapped by the natural sciences. It speaks about humanity as the biological species, Homo sapiens. What is distinctive about humans as a species is precisely our godlike powers of dominating nature and exercising control of the forces that shape the physical world. Power is morally neutral. It can be used to heal or wound, build or destroy.
Bereishit, by contrast, is about morality and responsibility. It tells us about the moral limits of power. Not everything we can do may we do. We have the power but not the permission; we have the ability but not the right. The earth is not ours. It belongs to G-d who made it. Therefore we are not the owners of nature but its custodians.

This explains the story that immediately follows, about Adam, Chava, the serpent, and the forbidden fruit. What the fruit was, why the serpent spoke, and what was the nature of the first sin – all these are secondary. The primary point the Torah is making is that there are limits, even in paradise. There is forbidden fruit. Not everything we can do may we do.

Few moral principles have been forgotten more often and more disastrously. The record of human intervention in the natural order is marked by devastation on a massive scale. Within a thousand years, the first human inhabitants of America had travelled from the Arctic north to the southernmost tip of Patagonia, making their way through two continents and, on the way, destroying most of the large mammal species then extant, among them mammoths, mastodons, tapirs, camels, horses, lions, cheetahs, and bears.

When the first British colonists arrived in New Zealand in the early 19th century, bats were the only native land mammals they found. They discovered, however, traces of a large, ostrich-like bird the Maoris called “moa.” Eventually skeletons of a dozen species of this animal came to light, ranging from three to ten feet high. The remains of some 28 other species have been found, among them flightless ducks, coots, and geese together with pelicans, swans, ravens, and eagles. Animals that have not had to face human predators before are easy game, and the Maoris must have found them a relatively effortless source of food.

A similar pattern can be traced almost everywhere human beings have set foot. They have consistently been more mindful of the ability to “subdue” and “rule” than of the responsibility to “serve” and “guard.” An ancient Midrash sums this up, in a way that deeply resonates with contemporary ecological awareness: When G-d made Adam, He showed him the panoply of creation and said to him: “See all My works, how beautiful they are. All I have made, I have made for you. Take care, therefore, that you do not destroy My world, for if you do, there will be no one left to mend what you have destroyed.”

Environmental responsibility seems to be one of the principles underlying the three great commands of periodic rest: Shabbat, Shemitta, and Yovel. On Shabbat all agricultural work is forbidden, “so that your ox and your donkey may rest.” It sets a limit to our intervention in nature and the pursuit of economic growth. Shabbat is a weekly reminder of the integrity of nature and the limits of human striving.

What Shabbat does for humans and animals, the Shemitta and Yovel do for the land. The earth too is entitled to its periodic rest. The Torah warns that if the Israelites do not respect this, they will suffer exile. Behind this are two concerns. One is environmental. As Rambam points out, land which is overexploited eventually erodes and loses its fertility. The Israelites were therefore commanded to conserve the soil by giving it periodic fallow years, not pursuing short-term gain at the cost of long-term desolation. The second, no less significant, is theological: “The Land,” says G-d, “is Mine; you are but strangers and temporary residents with Me.” We are guests on earth.

It was no accident that Jewish law interpreted the prohibition against cutting down fruit-bearing trees in the course of war as an instance of a more general prohibition against needless destruction, and more generally still, against acts that deplete the earth’s non-renewable resources, or damage the ecosystem, or lead to the extinction of species.

Václav Havel made a fundamental point in The Art of the Impossible: “I believe that we have little chance of averting an environmental catastrophe unless we recognise that we are not the masters of Being, but only a part of Being.” That is why a religious vision is so important, reminding us that we are not the owners of our resources. They belong not to us but to the Eternal and eternity. Hence we may not needlessly destroy. If that applies even in war, how much more so in times of peace!

2 Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 6:10.
3 Bereishit 1:28.
4 Ibid 2:15.
6 Kohelet Rabbah 7:13.
7 Shemot 23:12.
9 Vayikra 25:23.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth @RabbiSacks · www.RabbiSacks.org
I think that if all of us stopped and contemplated the growth and success of the State of Israel in our time, we would truly realize that we are living in a miraculous age. Though the miracles are consistent and regular, oftentimes, perhaps even most times, we take them so for granted that the miraculous becomes mundane.

One of the great miracles of the State of Israel is its agricultural industry. Israel has an arid, rock-filled landscape with very large patches of desert. It is not the lush landscape that exists in other parts of the world where agricultural industries bloom and prosper. Nevertheless, the prophets of Israel guaranteed that as part of the process of redemption and the Jewish return to its homeland, the desert would somehow bloom and the Land would produce delicious fruits in abundance and variety.

As late as a half-century ago this seemed to be an unlikely dream that would never come to fulfillment. The original Jewish pioneers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries faced harsh and unforgiving challenges as they strove for the development of any sort of agricultural success.

Climate, the earth itself, mosquitoes and malaria, Arab marauders, and the lack of proper agricultural tools and training all conspired to make it almost a hopeless venture. But they persisted in tilling the soil, removing the rocks and eventually began to see the results of their labor and sacrifice. Their rate of mortality was high and many gave up on the project and returned to Europe. The hardy few stuck it out and eventually were rewarded with the miraculous success of their efforts.

Even so, there were grave doubts as to whether the Land of Israel could ever feed the people of Israel. The main agricultural products were grapes, oranges and dates. The infamous Peel Commission issued its learned conclusions in 1936, stating that the entire Land of Israel could not support a population greater than 2.5 million souls.

As a result, it recommended the curtailment of immigration into the country at a time when Hitler was forcing the Jews of Germany to find refuge outside German borders. The recommendations of the Peel Commission led inevitably to the British Foreign Office's White Paper, which closed off Jewish emigration to the country for the next nine years, especially during the Holocaust and its aftermath.

It seemed that its conclusions were not so far-fetched, since food was scarce throughout this period in the Land of Israel and of infinitely meager variety. When Israel gained its independence in 1948, for almost the next decade there were great shortages of food, especially in the light of the doubling of its population in five years with the influx of the Jewish refugees from Europe and the Muslim Middle East.

Packages were sent from the United States to families throughout Israel to help supplement their meager diet. I remember how my father and mother scrimped and saved, often to my childish and foolish feelings of deprivation, in order to send these food certificates to our Israeli relatives who could then redeem them for food packages in American warehouses located in Israel.

But Israel struggled on in war and in peace. It developed a National Water Carrier that began to make the desert bloom. Its scientists and researchers developed new techniques, created drip irrigation and pioneered new methods of agriculture that began to make the country self-sufficient and plentiful in food and its varieties.

In 1959, Moshe Dayan, then Minister of Agriculture, introduced the planting of tomato vines into Israeli agriculture. The first year's crop was hard, tasteless, and green in color, and understandably was not popular. The appreciative Israeli public nicknamed them moishelach in honor of Dayan and his experiment. But soon the Israeli farmer developed the finest and tastiest tomatoes, as well as so many other types of vegetables and fruits.

Bananas, mangoes, kiwis and other fruits previously unknown to the Eastern European Jewish palate made their appearance and rapidly gained popularity. Israeli fruits and vegetables were produced in such abundance that a large export market developed and agriculture remained one of the mainstays of the Israeli export economy for a long period of time.

All of this should be remembered as we commemorate Tu BiShvat, a new year and holiday for the trees in the Land of Israel. The prophecies long ago uttered by our holy Sages have come true before our very eyes. What a blessed country the Land of Israel truly is!

Rabbi Berel Wein is Senior Rabbi of Beit Knesset HaNassi in Jerusalem and Director of the Destiny Foundation.
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On January 2, World Mizrachi and Mifalot HaTzionut HaDatit, in partnership with International Young Israel Movement and Koren Publishers, held a sold-out Siyum HaShas event in Jerusalem for over 3,000 people. Hundreds of thousands more around the world watched it online.

Following a variety of fascinating English sessions, participants joined the Hebrew Siyum HaShas event, which included Divrei Torah, music, spontaneous dancing, and some inspirational stories of people who had completed Shas, including a blind rabbi who continues to teach Daf Yomi despite his blindness, and an IDF officer who sees his Gemara study as an integral part of being a soldier in a Jewish army in the Jewish State.

The program can be viewed at www.mizrachi.org/siyum.

With the start of the new cycle of Daf Yomi, World Mizrachi has launched the Daily Dose on the Daf, a daily WhatsApp two-minute insight on the day’s daf recorded by leading rabbis and educators in Israel. Join one of the groups at www.mizrachi.org/daf.
Photos by Mickey Langental and Avi Jacob
Rabbi Hisda and Rabbi Hamenuna were seated at a meal and were served dates and pomegranates. Rabbi Hamenuna made the blessing over the dates.

Rabbi Hisda told him, ‘Do you not agree that the fruit mentioned earlier in the verse take precedence when reciting the blessing?’

Rabbi Hamenuna responded, ‘Dates are mentioned second after the word “land,” while pomegranates are only mentioned fifth.’

Rabbi Hisda exclaimed, ‘If only we had legs of iron to always follow you and learn from you!’

The two scholars referred to the verse that praises the Land of Israel for seven grains and fruits:

“It is a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs and pomegranates; a land of oil-olives and honey-dates.”

Rabbi Hisda felt that the blessing should reflect the order of the produce mentioned in the verse. Thus, pomegranates should come first. Rabbi Hamenuna explained that while the order in the verse is indeed important, there is an even more important factor: how close is the fruit to the word “land” in the verse? Pomegranates are the fifth species mentioned after the first “land” in the verse; dates, however, are the second fruit mentioned after “land” appears a second time. In other words, the position of dates in the verse indicates a greater closeness to the Land of Israel so this fruit deserves to come first.

The thought and care that Rabbi Hamenuna invested in his blessing demonstrates the importance he placed on loving Eretz Yisrael. This great love stems from recognizing the unique qualities of the Land – qualities that enable the Jewish people and all of humanity to attain spiritual goals. One who is closer to the Land of Israel, and demonstrates a greater connection to it, comes first for blessing. Such an individual is closer to the perfection attained through this special Land.

Yet, we may ask: why is the word “land” mentioned twice in the verse? Why does the verse divide up the produce of Eretz Yisrael into two categories?

There are in fact two types of love for the Land of Israel. One’s appreciation for the Land is a function of his spiritual level and awareness. Some value Eretz Yisrael because of its unique spiritual qualities. They long “to take pleasure in her stones and love her dust” in order to fulfill the mitzvot connected to the Land. They recognize the blessings that Eretz Yisrael provides for the spiritual elevation of the Jewish people and the entire world.

Then there are those who appreciate the Land for its material benefits. They recognize it as a homeland for the Jewish people, and work towards settling and rebuilding it. This form of devotion to the Land of Israel, even though it does not take into account its special spiritual qualities, is nonetheless a good and positive trait.

The verse mentions the word “land” twice, each time followed by a list of produce. This corresponds to the two forms of devotion to the Land of Israel. The first list of species represents those who love the Land for its elevated, spiritual properties.

This group consists of five fruits and grains, corresponding to the Five Books of Moses. This devotion to Eretz Yisrael stems from the world of Torah, from an awareness of the spiritual goals of the Jewish people and the entire world.

The second list contains oil-olive, symbolizing knowledge, and the honey-date, representing material contentment. These fruits represent those who appreciate the Land as a place where the Jewish people can be successful in the material spheres of life, whether academic, cultural, or economic.

Rabbi Hamenuna taught us an important lesson: how great is the love for the Land of Israel, even when this love is limited to its physical benefits. When they are connected to the community, all material matters become spiritual ones; the elevated goals will automatically be realized through the bonds of G-d’s people to His Land.

Now we can understand Rabbi Hisda’s fervent response, “If only we had legs of iron to always follow you and learn from you!” Rav Hisda understood the inner message of Rabbi Hamenuna’s teaching. One needs “legs of iron” — courage and fortitude like iron — to be able to receive this remarkable message, and appreciate the importance of Israel’s material strength.

Adapted from Gold from the Land of Israel (Urim Publications, 2006).

1 Berachot 41b.
2 Devarim 8:8.
3 Psalms 102:15.

Rabbi Chanan Morrison is the author of several books on Rav Kook’s writings.
The Seven Species of the Land of Israel are identified in the description from the Torah:

“For the L-rd your G-d is bringing you into a good Land...a Land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a Land of olive trees and honey” (Devarim 8:7-8).

These seven species are specifically connected to the Land of Israel and there is a mitzvah to bring the first of these fruits (Bikkurim) to the Beit HaMikdash. There is also a special blessing – Al HaMichya – one says after having eaten any of these species (apart from bread of course, after which one says Birkat HaMazon).

Israel produces many other fruits and grains. What is so significant about these seven species? On a basic level, these seven are unique in that they provide the necessary nutrients for sustenance. Some commentaries add that the Land of Israel is the only place in which all these very diverse species naturally grow in close proximity. In any case, these fruits and grains were the staple foods of Biblical times, and still maintain a presence across modern Israel’s landscape. It has become a tradition to taste the Seven Species on Tu BiShvat.
My uncle always used to say “Bread doesn’t grow on trees.” He was referring to the monetary kind, but it is common knowledge that the edible kind doesn’t either.

This was not always so. At the dawn of time, in the Garden of Eden, bread actually did grow on a tree, a wheat tree. Adam and Chava just had to do step out into the garden and grab a delicious something off the tree.

This may sound fantastic to you, but it is part of a famous debate in the Gemara in an attempt to define what the etz haDa’at (the tree of knowledge) actually was. We all know the more popular opinions – a fig tree, a grapevine (no not an apple tree, that came later as part of a Christian depiction), but very few are familiar with the hypothesis that the tree of knowledge was wheat.

According to this opinion, wheat was originally created in the form of a tree, a spectacular tree towering over mountains, but still lesser in physical stature than the other trees. In fact it was the lowest and least attractive of the trees in the Garden, but nonetheless assumed pride of place in the center due to its inherent spirituality rather than its material, outward appearance.

To try to prove this theory a number of interesting facts emerge.

The Hebrew word for wheat – chita – has the same grammatical root as the Hebrew word for sin – chet. It is well known that infants do not begin to acquire knowledge until they begin eating grains,2 grains being the embodiment of knowledge. Rav Kook takes this one step further by pointing out that the gematria (numerological value) of chita is 22, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the foundation upon which all knowledge is based.

Not only did Chava eat from the forbidden wheat tree, but she also committed an additional sin by taking the wheat, grinding it into flour and making it into bread which she fed to Adam. She thus sinned by thinking she could improve on G-d’s creation. Until then all food was eaten straight off the trees in the Garden.

This fits well with the theory that states that Adam would never have eaten directly from the Tree of Knowledge, but that he was duped by Chava, who fed him an altered form of the wheat, hence his retort “This woman, who You gave to me, she (deceived) gave me to eat.”

Perhaps the clinching fact in support of the wheat theory is the punishment Adam received – “you shall eat bread by the sweat of your brow.” Chava’s (and womankind’s) punishment was twofold, not only would she suffer the pain of childbirth, but she would also have to rise early each morning to prepare bread for her family (Midrash). Adam and Chava were unsatisfied with G-d’s gifts and thought it necessary to process or alter them, so for all eternity we have to process wheat to make it into bread.

Following the sin, the wheat tree was also ‘demoted’ and reduced in stature from a tree to a lowly grass, the wheat we know today. Thus ever since man was evicted from the Garden of Eden, he has been forced to labor hard to produce his daily bread or perish.

As we celebrate Tu BiShvat, the New Year of Trees, we should be mindful of G-d’s bounty, express our gratitude and try to reverse the process that brought us to this sorry state.

The good news is that this saga will eventually come full circle. When Mashiach comes, wheat will be restored to its former glory and “will again be as high as a date palm and tower over mountains. Lest you wonder how its fruit shall be harvested, G-d will bring forth a wind which will blow through the tree. Man will walk in the field and catch the falling fruits for himself and his family.”3

This article originally appeared in the Jerusalem Post in January 2014.

1 Berachot 6b.
2 Berachot 40a.
3 Ketubot 111b.

Les Saidel, a master baker originally from Johannesburg, South Africa, lives in Ginot Shomron with his wife Sheryl and four children

Les Saidel
In the third chapter of the book of Ruth, as Ruth prepares to depart the threshing floor, Boaz carefully measures six barleys and places them in Ruth’s cloak. Why does Boaz give Ruth barley? This is the second time that Boaz gives Ruth food, underscoring his role as benefactor of the indigent Moabite woman.

Oddly, the verse leaves out the unit of measure of the barley that Boaz gives her. While in chapter 2, Ruth carries home an ephah of barley, six ephah of barley would likely be prohibitively heavy. The Talmud suggests that Boaz gave Ruth six se’ah of barley, which would be enough to sustain Ruth and Naomi for 10 days. Nevertheless, the omission leaves open the possibility that Boaz actually gave Ruth six barleys – that is, six stalks of barley, a minuscule amount indeed! By giving her grain that will not suffice for even one meal, Boaz conveys to Ruth that he intends to act immediately. Before Ruth has finished consuming the paltry grain in six barley stalks, Boaz will already have made new arrangements for her provision.

The six barleys may function more as a symbol than sustenance. Boaz offers Ruth a symbol of his intangible promise of marriage and redemption. This approach is coherent with the broader theme of chapter 3 (as opposed to chapter 2, where Boaz promises Ruth food) and appears in several rabbinic interpretations of the verse:

Why is it written, “He gave me these six barleys”?1 Why six barleys? If it actually means six barleys, is it Boaz’s custom to give a gift of six barleys? It means six se’ah of barley. And is it the way of a woman to carry six se’ah of barley? It means that he gave her a hint that six children would be born from her in the future, each of them blessed with six blessings. These are they: David, Messiah, Daniel, Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. (Sanhedrin 93a–b).

One literary clue that may point to this interpretation is the unusual verb employed to describe Boaz placing the barley stalks in Ruth’s garment.2 The verb, vayashet – placed, appears once again at the end of the book. Oved, the child born to Ruth and Boaz, is placed by Naomi in her bosom, using the very same verb. It transpires, therefore, that the correspondence between the barley and the promise of children has a textual basis. Boaz places the six barleys in Ruth’s outstretched garment. In a strikingly pictorial manner, Ruth’s wrap filled with barley creates a discernible bulge, suggesting a promise of pregnancy and fullness.

In Ruth, the motif of food runs parallel to the motif of children. Both emerge from a zera, a seed, and both are essential for reversing Naomi’s tragedy. Without food, there is no survival in the short term, and lacking children, Naomi will not have survived in the long term. The combination of chapter 2 (in which Boaz and Ruth resolve Naomi’s problem of lack of food) and chapter 3 (in which Boaz and Ruth resolve Naomi’s problem of the lack of progeny) together facilitate chapter 4, in which Naomi’s tragic predicament will find a felicitous resolution.

This theme mirrors a broader theme in the Tanach. G-d promises Avraham land and progeny, the twin pillars of national existence. Without sustenance (zera haAdam), a nation cannot exist in the present, but without progeny (zera haAdama), there is no future. The restoration of Naomi’s blessings bodes well for the nation of Israel during this dismal period of the Judges, fostering hope that the book of Ruth will produce David, who will restore Avraham’s blessings to the faltering nation of Israel.

1 See Ruth 2:14.
2 Sanhedrin 93b.
3 See Malbim on Ruth 3:15.
4 Ruth 3:17.
5 Ibid 3:15.
The vine is a major contender to be the crown of the Seven Species. Throughout the Bible, it reflects life. It is a metaphor for the people of Israel both when they are righteous and when they sin and disappoint. Countless parables speak of the vine — the plentiful vine and the bare vine, and life is enhanced by and intertwined with work in the vineyards, wine festivities, and clusters of juicy grapes.

Vines are first mentioned in the story of Noach. Noach, as Chazal say, saw a world built and destroyed and built again. He walked out of the ark and saw a world obliterated. He survived but his world was gone. Everything had to be rebuilt.

As a man of the earth he is driven to cultivate it. But after all the annihilation, he is not content with the practical crops of wheat or barley. Instead, he chooses a fruit that can delight a human heart, that can instill joy and uplift the spirit. Just like in Yotam's parable, when trying to lure the vine into a political career, it replies “Should I leave my wine, which cheers G-d and Man, and go to rule over the trees?”

In the depths of darkness and depression, the vine is a promise of hope that the future still holds joy and gladness. Perhaps, Noach tells himself, it will also please G-d; after all, wine is offered on the altar.

Unfortunately though, Noach, who had struggled valiantly with the corrupt pre-Flood generation, couldn’t put limits on himself. He drank and drank until he lost control completely, lying drunk and naked in his tent, disgracing himself. The man who guarded himself in a generation full of corruption and vulgarity submits himself to incest.

One aspect of drinking wine is the extent and the quantity. Like the Midrashic portrayal of the devil meeting Noach and joining him in planting the vineyard, the devil then slaughters a lamb, lion, monkey and pig, hinting at the transformative effect of alcohol — first soothing, then strengthening and ultimately leading to foolishness and humiliation.

Another aspect is the company one keeps while drinking. For so many years Noach stood strong and apart from so many people. But now he drinks alone.

While some religions choose to abstain from wine, Judaism readily accepts wine as a device to bring people together; a symbol of solemnity and joy, and a mark of consecration, of time or event: Shabbat, Yom Tov, Brit Mila, weddings, etc. At the same time, there is no drinking during mourning and bitter times and almost no drinking alone.

Wine will connect people in times of joy, and the company itself will keep its members from drifting into excessive drinking. Society will envelop a person in his or her grief, but will not allow them to drown their grief in the wine of oblivion. Noach, who knew how to maintain his self-determination against the attitudes and shortcomings of others, loses his boundaries when left alone.

When we say kiddush or recite a beracha, we do not leave the words to wander abstractly into space. We anchor them to a “kos shel beracha,” a cup of blessing, a vessel to hold the bounty. We give the blessing a foothold in one of the most wonderful fruits of this world — one that pleases the soul, gives validity to the words and translates their impact into the world.

We allow wine to connect us as we proclaim G-d’s name in the world. We do not abstain from wine in asceticism, or overdo it to a state of contempt. We rejoice in the pleasures that G-d has gifted to this world, raising them into vessels of blessing, an abundance of goodness from which to grow and live.

1 Judges 9:13.

Rabbanit Rachelle Fraenkel teaches Torah at midrashot in Israel.
“Now that the Cabernet vines have grown older and our knowledge has improved, one can say that the Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve is reaching new heights every year.”

Golan Flam, Winemaker
Upon hearing that he would not enter the Land of Israel, Moshe’s first concern was that G-d should make sure He had an appropriate leader to replace him. Such was the unparalleled selflessness of the great Moshe.

G-d commands Moshe to ordain Yehoshua as the new leader. Although it seems perfectly natural that Yehoshua would assume the mantle of leadership from Moshe, the commentators suggest that there were other deserving candidates for the position.

Nevertheless, G-d informs Moshe that Yehoshua is the only one who is truly worthy. After all, it was Yehoshua who served Moshe selflessly, who “would not depart from within the tent.” In support of the choice of Yehoshua, Rashi cites a verse ascribed to Shlomo HaMelech: נֹצֵר תְּאֵנָה, יֹאכַל פִּרְיָהּ. He who guards the fig tree, shall eat its fruit.

The second example is Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, who succeeded his teacher, the Vilna Gaon. Rabbi Chaim Volozhin was chosen, in part, due to his trusted role as the Gaon’s primary confidante. It was in this role in which Reb Chaim distinguished himself because he was a confidante to a greater degree than the Gaon’s other disciples.

Rabbi Soloveitchik draws attention to the Midrash’s deliberate use of the fig tree metaphor. Unlike the fruits of the olive or date trees, the fruit of the fig tree takes particularly long to ripen. This lengthened ripening period is likened to a person’s acquisition of Torah, which, rather than being learned quickly overnight, is absorbed, studied and learned over an extended period of time. Only he who guards the fig tree will merit to eat its fruits – the fruits of Torah and of kingship. This is precisely what happened to Yehoshua.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik expands on this concept suggesting that it is not unusual in Jewish history for a leader’s successor be chosen on the basis of loyal service, in addition to their intellectual prowess.

Rabbi Soloveitchik cites two examples: when the Ba’al Shem Tov passed away, the logical choice to succeed him would have been Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, the Torah giant and author of the Toldot. Instead, the Maggid of Mezeritch was chosen, in part because he had selflessly served the Ba’al Shem Tov.

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1 Shemot 33:11.
2 Mishlei 27:18.
4 As cited in Darosh Darash Yosef, by Rabbi Avishai David.
5 Shemot 33:11.

Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald is Director of NJOP and Rabbi of the Beginners Service at Lincoln Square Synagogue.
This Year,
Give Your Parents the Precious Gift of Peace of Mind…
and Your Children the Priceless Gift of Meaning

Most of us lead ordinary lives and yet, each and every family has a story to tell that is uniquely their own.

Having a book compiled for the benefit of my children and grandchildren and future generations was indeed the right decision, and I would encourage others to do the same before all is forgotten.

Working with Danny Verbov was a great source of joy and at the same time fun. His sensitivity and humor enhanced our working relationship and most importantly resulted in a book that I am truly proud of.

Sandy Collins, London

"... I cannot stop being amazed at how much you really live the story. I could not have chosen a better person to share this phenomenal experience of writing a book..."

Prof. Noah Stern, Jerusalem

"It is the most well-done book I have ever read, in every way. What a masterpiece – the layout, the print, the coloring, the photos... brilliant!"

Sandra Lippy, Ohio, USA

"These untold secrets have monumental significance to me and my family and have had a huge impact on our understanding of my mother's difficult war experiences."

Evelyn Nuszen, Jerusalem

To discuss your ideas and wishes for a book to immortalize your loved ones and leave a meaningful legacy for your family, please contact Danny Verbov at dannyverbov@gmail.com or call +972-523115682.
The rimon, the pomegranate, in many ways, is the “King” of the Seven Species. Firstly, it resembles a crown; indeed, the ornaments which traditionally “crown” the Sefer Torah are referred to as rimonim. Rimonim also formed the border of the Kohen Gadol’s robe, representing the blessings of love and fertility: “Your lips are like a crimson thread; your mouth is lovely. Your brow behind your veil gleams like an open pomegranate.”

Not only are pomegranates featured on many ancient coins, dating back to the Bar Kochba revolt in the 2nd century, perhaps the oldest ritual object in Jewish hands today is a thumb-sized pomegranate made of hippopotamus bone. Now in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, it bears the inscription, “Holy to the Kohen of the House of G-d,” and is thought by some scholars to date back to the time of the First Beit Hamikdash. The rimon was also one of the fruits brought back by the spies to indicate the amazing bounty of Eretz Yisrael. The rimon symbolizes the study of Torah, which is paramount in Jewish life. The verse, “Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has flowered, if the grape blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates have budded” refers to the little children who study Torah, who sit neatly in rows in their class like the seeds of a pomegranate.

Most of all, the rimon is a metaphor for the mitzvot, as each rimon fruit is said to contain 613 seeds. “May we be as full of mitzvot as the pomegranate is full of seeds,” is a bracha recited during the Simanim Seder on Rosh Hashanah. In essence, the rimon is a connector, joining us to our ancient roots, symbolizing Torah and mitzvot, but most of all, emphasizing that all Jews – regardless of their background – have a share in Jewish life because they carry within them a holy neshama and the breath of G-d.

This idea is brought home in a stirring, true story recounted by the late Professor Yaffa Eliach in her magnificent work, “Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust.” She tells of Rav Yisrael Spero, the Rabbi of Bluzhov, who was imprisoned during the Shoah, along with several of his Chassidim, in the Janowska Road slave labor camp. As in most of these horrendous places, there was back-breaking work and the ever-present danger of imminent death. The beleaguered inmates were controlled by kapos who obediently did the Nazis’ bidding. As Yom Kippur approached, the Chassidim approached Rav Spero and asked if perhaps he might speak to the kapo, whose name was Schneeweiss, and ask if they might be given only work that would not transgress any of the 39 melachot. Uplifted with sudden joy, the Chassidim quietly whispered the words of the machzor, which they knew by heart, and felt some of their spirit return.

Suddenly, a Nazi officer entered the room, pushing a cart filled with food, the likes of which the Jews had not seen in years: meat, bread, hot soup. “We know what today is,” barked the officer, “now you will all eat or you’ll be shot!” The Jews froze with fear, but then, to their shock, Schneeweiss stepped forward and confronted the German. “This is our fast day, we will not eat from this food,” he said defiantly. The Nazi was furious. “In the name of the Fuhrer, you dogs shall eat, and you shall eat as well, Schneeweiss, or you will be shot!”

Schneeweiss stood firm. “This is against our tradition,” he repeated, “we shall not eat.” With that, the officer drew his pistol, shot the kapo in the head, and stormed out of the room. As Schneeweiss lay dying, Rav Spero whispered to his Chassidim, “Now I finally understand the words: ‘Even the transgressors of Israel are as filled with good deeds as a pomegranate is filled with seeds.’”

1 Shir HaShirim 4:3.
2 Ibid 6:11.
3 Shir HaShirim Rabbah.
4 Erurin 19a.

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**The first mention of zayit, olive, comes in Parashat Noach,1 when the dove brings an olive branch to Noach signaling that it was safe to leave the ark. Later, olives are mentioned as one of the two foods which would be waiting for the Jewish people when they entered the Land of Israel without having to plant them,2 King David appointed members of his staff to oversee his olive trees and olive oil3 and the oxen that led the parade of Jews heading to Yerushalayim with their bikurim were crowned with wreaths from olive trees.4 These are just a few examples.

What can we learn from the olives which appear so frequently in our tradition?

Yirmiyahu teaches that the nation of Israel is compared to olives.5 What does this mean?

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explains: “Just like the leaves of the olive tree do not fall to the ground in the summer and the winter, so too, the Jewish people will never cease to exist both in this world and the next.”6

In that same Gemara, Rabbi Yochanan sees a different message in the comparison, teaching that “Just like the olive can only give forth its oil through being crushed, so too the Jewish people only return to the right path through suffering.”7

Rabbi Acha learns one additional message from the olive-nation of Israel comparison as recorded in Yalkut Shimoni: “The Jewish people are compared to olives and G-d is compared to a candle... Just like olive oil fuels a candle and they both give light together, so too G-d says to the Jewish people, ‘since My light is your light and your light is My light, I and you will go together and light up Zion.’”8

The three lessons our Sages learn from the comparison of olives to the Jewish people work in perfect consonance with one another and should serve as a roadmap and inspiration for us as we move forward as a nation.

There is no questioning that the Jewish people have been crushed throughout the ages. We have suffered horrific persecution at the hands of the world’s greatest empires. But just like the olive leaf knows that it won’t fall to the ground, we knew that we were destined to survive whatever came our way.

And not only survive. Just like the olive can only give the world its greatest product, olive oil, after being crushed, we must recognize how our national suffering has led us to the greatest of heights. Throughout 2,000 years of exile, we have learned how to withstand whatever the gentile world has thrown our way. That has certainly prepared us to be a strong and stubborn nation that was able to do the unthinkable - such as to declare our independence in May 1948 in the face of Arab armies surrounding us ready to annihilate us, to preempt the potential catastrophe in June 1967 by attacking and destroying the Egyptian Air Force before they could attack us, to rescue our hostages from Entebbe in July 1976, and much more, while ignoring all the world’s condemnations and building an advanced world power.

But as we reflect upon the olive, we cannot forget Rabbi Acha’s teaching. The reason why we are destined to survive no matter what comes our way, and the good byproduct to which all our suffering should be leading us, is to “go together” with G-d and “light up Zion.” Our destiny as a nation is to connect to G-d, bring spirituality to Eretz Yisrael, and from there to light up the entire world.

So, next time you enjoy olives or benefit from olive oil, reflect upon our survival as a nation just as G-d promised we would, remember that our suffering is meant to make us stronger, and commit yourself to doing your part in contributing to bringing G-d and spirituality to Israel.

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1 8:11.
2 Devarim 6:10-11.
3 See Divrei HaYamim I 27,28.
4 Bikurim 3:2-3.
5 Yirmiyahu 11:16.
6 Menachot 53b.
7 Yeshayahu 499.

Rabbi Dov Lipman is a former MK and the author of seven books about Judaism and Israel.
As with any tree, and as is integral to Torat Yisrael, there is first and foremost a natural reality. דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ קָדְמָה לַתּוֹרָה – literally, the way of the land preceded the Torah. So as we look at the tamar, the date, we start with nature, reality, and work our way up into the spiritual meanings of the tree.

The palm is the tree of the desert: its roots are very deep, it knows how to use water and find it deep in the soil. Consequently, the tamar grows in places that need it. It gives travelers shade and provides them with sweet, full-bodied, fruit that gives them the strength to continue. It also has a unique shape – a tree that strives upwards. Botanically it is unique in that it has one main trunk that does not split. Even in terms of its external shape, it stands out.

The palm tree is also the only tree that belongs to two systems of commandments.

The first is the holiday system: the lulav is a part of the Four Species, which we use to celebrate the Asif holiday in the Temple. Although there are four species, and even though we usually see the etrog as the ‘senior partner,’ we say “al mitzvat lulav” over all four species together. This is because the date palm frond is the most prominent. The lulav is tall, symbolizing the baton of a king, or a sword to fight with, and with it we thank the Sovereign of the world for the great abundance He gave us on Sukkot.

The second system is the Shivat HaMinim – the Seven Species the Land of Israel is blessed with. Most of the Torah’s fruit-related laws – and the mitzvot that depend on the Land – refer only to the Seven Species, including the date. In this context, the Torah refers to the date as honey, determining its main expression in the natural world: sweetness, pleasure, longing. The date’s partner is the bitter, sharp olive – its complete opposite.

Judaism has a special and complex attitude to sweetness: on the one hand, it is good to us, and we describe the Torah and mitzvot as וּמְתוּקִים מִדְּבַשׁ וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים “sweeter than honey dripping from the combs.” We raise no objections to the sweetness of life, and we are not a religion of monks fleeing the beauty and goodness of this world.

On the other hand, we are warned: “It is not good to eat much honey;” 1 “for no leaven or honey may be turned into smoke as an offering by fire to the L-rd.” 2 Sweetness is at once delightful and dangerous, an object of desire and the danger of a slippery slope.

When we delve into the wisdom of our Sages, the date is a powerful source of inspiration, for example, “Just as a palm tree has only one heart, as a palm tree does not send out separate branches, but rather has only one main trunk, so too, the Jewish people in that generation (of Queen Esther) had only one heart, directed to their Father in Heaven.” 3 The special shape of the tamar is a call for all of us to unite. We have to be people with “one heart.”

The tree climbing upwards symbolizes Am Yisrael’s special attitude towards G-d. The palm not only gives shade, but delivers sweet fruits to everyone, and its fruits are not hidden among the leaves, but are visible for all to see.

However, it is not just the Sages who looked upon the date palm for their metaphors. We too can look at the palm and eat from its fruits, and it reminds us of who we should be. First and foremost, “righteous as a flowering date” 4 – to be righteous, to make fruit, to be sweet, to strive upwards. And to view this tree as a guide that teaches us not only to gather within ourselves, but to give as much as we can to others. There are many people walking aimlessly in life’s desert – and they are lonely, thirsty, perhaps even tired of life – and we are called to help them: give shade, share our fruits, call them to rest with us.

And when we do this in our natural reality with one heart, and direct it to our Heavenly Father, we will enjoy the shade and the nutritious, sweet fruit of the spiritual date palm.

1 Mishlei 25:27.
2 Vayikra 2:11.
3 Megillah 14a.
4 Tehillim 92:13.
5

Rabbi Yuval Cherlow is a Rosh Yeshiva and a founding member of an organization devoted to bridging the religious-secular divide in Israel.
The World Zionist Congress convenes every five years. Delegates to the Congress are members of slates that represent various factions and ideologies across the spectrum of Judaism. Slates are awarded delegates based on the number of votes they receive in the World Zionist Congress Election. The more votes we receive, the stronger our voice will be at the Congress. These delegates determine leadership positions and will influence policies that shape the future of Israel and impact Zionist programming and organizations in the United States.

The OIC

The Orthodox Israel Coalition (OIC) is a broad-based coalition of the major Religious Zionist and Orthodox organizations that has advocated for Orthodox Jewry as part of the World Mizrachi delegation in the World Zionist Congress for over 100 years. It includes Mizrachi, the Orthodox Union, Yeshiva University, Bnei Akiva, the Rabbinical Council of America, Young Israel, AMIT, Torah MiTzion, Touro College, and other affiliated organizations.

JANUARY 21 – MARCH 11, 2020 • VOTE SLATE #4 • WWW.VOTEOIC.ORG

AMERICAN RESIDENTS WHO ARE NOT ISRAELI CITIZENS ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE
It has already been many years since Keren Kayemet LeIsrael (KKL) – Jewish National Fund (JNF) has planted a new forest in Maale Adumim. Since then, no new forests have been planted anywhere “over the Green Line” – in Yehudah and Shomron. Today, KKL-JNF is the only organization in Israel that is responsible for afforestation, as stipulated in the covenant signed between KKL-JNF and the state of Israel. Forests in Yehudah and Shomron are being maintained, but new ones are not being planted.

This is not for financial reasons. KKL-JNF has an annual budget of around 1 billion NIS. Some of their budget comes from donations from Jews across the world, while the majority comes from land sales of Israeli land. KKL-JNF owns 14% of Israeli land, 80% of which are located north of Be’er Sheva. These are valuable pieces of property. This means that most Israelis who are purchasing new apartments today are buying land from KKL-JNF at the end of the day.

KKL-JNF was one of the institutions established to help facilitate the necessary processes towards establishing a Jewish state, at the first meeting of the World Zionist Congress in 1897. In addition to KKL-JNF, over the years, the World Zionist Congress has established the Jewish Agency, Keren HaYesod and other institutions that helped with the founding of the State.

Since the time of Theodor Herzl and the first World Zionist Congress, the Congress has met once every five years to discuss the future of the Jewish nation and the Jewish state. Starting with the decision not to establish the Jewish state in Uganda and continuing with the establishment of Hebrew University and more, there is no doubt that the World Zionist Congress has made important and necessary decisions towards the establishment of the State of Israel.

Even after the establishment of the State of Israel, the National Institutes (KKL-JNF, World Zionist Organization, Keren HaYesod and the Jewish Agency) have continued to work in their various fields. First and foremost as a place for the Jewish communities of the Diaspora to meet, discuss and reach agreements, but also as a representative of the Jewish World to the Israeli government.

The various institutes operate with a certain synergy but are completely independent. Each has its own policies, plans, annual budget and goals. The upcoming vote for the World Zionist Congress will determine, among other things, who sits on the board of directors of those organizations and a large number of key positions ranging from the heads of the institutes to the various directors. These directors will then decide on key policies such as programming and cooperation with Israel and pro-Israel organizations combating BDS and antisemitism; Direct influence over the national institutions budget, pushing more support and subsidies to gap year programs; Support building and developing the Golan Heights, Jerusalem, Yehudah, Shomron and the Jordan Valley; Enriching our shuls, schools, yeshivot, campuses, camps and youth movements with shlichim, campus leaders, educational programs and joint US-Israel programs.

Despite the undeniable importance of this vote and even with the support of various senior rabbis, it seems that the public itself is not interested in voting for the World Zionist Congress. Thus five years ago, only 9,000 people voted for the religious “Torah” party OIC, made up of Yeshiva University, Orthodox Union, Touro College, Bnei Akiva, World Mizrachi and more.
There are various possible reasons for the low voting rate despite an intense campaign involving ads across a broad spectrum of media outlets and speakers in local shuls. It remains a mystery as to how to change the result and motivate people to vote. Even though you don’t even need to leave home to vote! Voting is done online by declaring that you are Jewish and paying between $5 to $7.5 to fund the costs of the Congress voting system.

“The vote mainly affects people living in Israel and not those abroad,” Meyer Sterman, publisher of HaMizrachi, says. “People vote for what affects them. If it does not affect them, they simply don’t vote. Even though this vote does not directly pertain to the Jews abroad, it has a daily impact on those living in Israel. How many prayer sections there are at the Kotel will certainly interest the Jew overseas, but it does not affect him as much as it affects the Jews here. In Israel, it is a living reality. It will keep the media busy for weeks, cause rifts in Israeli society and question the religious identity of the State of Israel. The Jew in Texas will feel it less. Therefore, the US Jew is hardly interested in the vote.”

Dov Katz (38), a resident of Ma’aleh Adumim and a strategic consultant, is working to change the reality. “Planting a new forest in Ma’aleh Adumim is just one small example in the KKL-JNF policy I would like to see changed. Today, the KKL-JNF does not make active investments beyond the Green Line. There is no reason for them not to contribute to the building of a new kindergarten in Ma’aleh Adumim, as it does elsewhere. KKL-JNF does not lack the funds, in fact, the National Institutes have a combined annual budget of over $800 million. It is all a matter of policy determined by voting for the World Zionist Congress.”

As Rabbi Hershel Schachter recently stated: “Every few years, when they have the World Zionist Congress, decisions are made where they should place their money, which direction we should push the Medinah. And it’s very important. All the different groups are pushing their own direction. If we want to see to it that Eretz Yisrael should continue to be a Jewish country, with the flavor that we know it’s supposed to have, we have to see to it... the Orthodox Israel Coalition – the Mizrachi Vote Torah slate will see to it that the money will be allocated to those projects and programs that are most important both in Eretz Yisrael and in Chutz La’aretz. It is terrible that much of the money, millions of dollars are wasted. The money is put in absolutely the wrong direction, to destroying the nature of Eretz Yisrael as we know what it’s supposed to be. It is incumbent upon us to see to it that everyone should join and have their voice heard. Bottom line, we encourage everyone to vote for Orthodox Israel Coalition – the Mizrachi Vote Torah slate.”

Sterman and Katz are encouraging those with family and friends in the US to tell them to vote. “It is not enough to hope something changes, this is our opportunity to make our prayers come true. All we tell people is contact your relatives and ask them to vote for you because it really affects us directly and indirectly on the character of the State of Israel and the Jewish people in different areas.”

Are you asking Israelis to get involved with American politics?

“This is about Jewish values, not politics. While ideally we would like people to vote for OIC which brings together a broad spectrum of mainstream Orthodox, from AMIT to Yeshiva University and the Orthodox Union (OU),” says Sterman “our main goal is to open people’s eyes to the importance of voting for the World Zionist Congress and the power the WZC has to shape the future of the Jewish nation and Jewish State. Believe it or not, most people are not even aware of the WZC vote.”

“We made it as simple as possible: we are just asking people to send a WhatsApp in the family group. It takes literally five seconds. We send you the WhatsApp to send with a link for registration and an explanation on how to vote. Voting is done online and does not require people to leave home at all.”

To receive materials to send to your relatives, WhatsApp or call Dov Katz on +972-52-524-8575.
Tu BiShvat, the New Year for Trees, marks the date on which farmers began calculating the tithing of their fruit crop for the coming year. It takes place in the month of Shvat because "most of the annual rainfall has passed," causing the trees to renew and their fruits to ripen.

At the time when the Jewish pioneers began to settle in the Land of Israel, working the land became an ideal, and they began a process of afforestation to overcome the widespread desolation. The planting of trees on Tu BiShvat gradually became customary, and in 1908, the Jewish National Fund and the educational system officially adopted the custom.

Since then, Tu BiShvat is known as the holiday for planting trees, a day on which schoolchildren and their teachers plant trees all over Israel. The tree-planting ceremonies symbolize the renewed connection between the nation and its Land.

2,856 types of plants have been recorded as native to Israel, and about 110 plant names are mentioned in Tanach. While we can not always know for sure which tree was being referred to in Tanach, "biblical botanists" have done their best to match descriptions to trees we know today. Here are five such trees to search for as you head out to plant trees this Tu BiShvat!

**Umbrella Thorn Acacia**

The Umbrella Thorn Acacia tends to grow in areas where temperatures vary from 0 to 50 degrees Celsius. In extremely arid conditions, it may appear as a small, wiry bush. It grows up to 21 meters (69 ft) high. The plant is known to tolerate high alkalinity, drought, high temperatures, sandy and stony soils, strongly sloped rooting surfaces and sandblasting.

G-d commands Bnei Yisrael regarding the description of the **Aron Kodesh**:

> "Have them make an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high" (Shemot 25:10).

**Almond Tree**

The almond is a deciduous tree, growing four to 10 meters (13-33 ft) in height, with a trunk of up to 30 centimeters (12 in) in diameter. The young twigs are green at first, becoming purplish where exposed to sunlight, then grey in their second year. Almond grows best in Mediterranean climates with warm, dry summers and mild, wet winters. The fruit matures in the autumn, 7-8 months after flowering.

Once the brothers successfully convinced Yaakov that they must travel to Egypt to buy food during the famine, Yaakov commanded them: "If it must be, then do this: put some of the best products of the Land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift – a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds" (Bereishit 43:11).
Mediterranean Cypress

The Mediterranean Cypress is a medium-sized coniferous evergreen tree up to 35 meters (115 ft) tall, with a conic crown, level branches and variably loosely hanging branchlets. Some trees are reported to be over 1,000 years old.

Upon deciding to destroy the world, but to save Noach, G-d commands him: "So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out" (Bereishit 6:14).

Lebanon Cedar

Lebanon Cedar trees grow in well-drained calcareous lithosols on rocky, north- and west-facing slopes and ridges and thrive in rich loam or sandy clay in full sun. Its natural habitat is characterized by warm, dry summers and cool, moist winters.

Shlomo HaMelech built the Beit HaMikdash: "And he built the side rooms all along the temple. The height of each was five cubits, and they were attached to the temple by beams of cedar" (Melachim Aleph 6:10).

Myrrh Tree

The Myrrh is very spiny and grows to a height of about four meters (13 ft). It grows at an altitude of between about 250 to 1,300 meters (820-4,270 ft). It does best in thin soil, primarily in areas with limestone.

After the brothers had thrown Yosef into the pit, the Torah says: "As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt" (Bereishit 37:25)

1 Rosh Hashanah 14a.
Our forefathers in the desert were aware that upon entering the Land of Israel, the manner in which G-d related to us would change from one of open miracles to one of miracles within nature. Manna would no longer descend from the heavens; rather, we would plow and plant and harvest in order to eat. A well would no longer accompany us; rather, we would depend on rainfall to quench our thirst.

Their mistake, however, was to reason that if their lives were apparently subject to the same natural order as the rest of the world, then their ultimate success or failure depended on their own military prowess. This was a grievous error. It was this mistaken outlook from which Moshe prayed that Yehoshua would be spared. Moshe reasoned that he could better prove to the people their mistake by letting them actually see the Land of Israel. He hoped that they would realize the impossibility of conquering Israel with their own might. And yet G-d had assured them that they would still be completely dependent on G-d’s beneficence. Without water, fruits cannot grow, and in Israel water depends solely on rainfall, which is obviously not in Man’s hands. Moshe wanted them to recognize that even though there would be more effort required to secure a livelihood in the natural setting of Israel than in the desert, the final result would depend no less on G-d than when the manna descended directly from Heaven.

Unfortunately, only Calev and Yehoshua grasped this point. The others saw only that it was beyond their “natural” abilities to conquer the Land, and concluded that even G-d Himself, as it were, could not help them, since He had chosen to let them be governed by the natural order. This reasoning led to the purposeless crying on the night of Tisha B’Av when the people wept as a sign of hopelessness.

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, the great Mirrer Mashgiach, explains the Mishna at the end of Sotah to mean that Mashiach will not come so long as we attribute our successes and failures to “natural” causes. As long as we look for political, economic and sociological explanations of world events, and excuse ourselves from Torah learning on the grounds that we must earn a livelihood, we will not merit an end to our exile.

Let us strengthen our faith and trust in G-d so that we can finally dry the tears of exile and celebrate our return to Eretz Yisrael with jubilation, for a Redeemer will have come to Zion.

Rabbi Zev Leff serves as the Rav of Moshav Matityahu.
World Mizrachi is privileged to present a new initiative in partnership with OU-JLIC

Beit Mizrachi advances Jewish education, leadership and community for a new generation of college students in Israel by providing:

- engaging and dynamic Jewish education
- a welcoming religious community for students
- a warm and supportive home environment for students
- resources for personal and religious growth

Rav Josh and Margot Botwinick are the founding couple of the thriving Jewish community of IDC Herzliya. They have successfully engaged hundreds of students in Jewish life and learning and supported the Aliyah of an entire community of students.

Rav Yehuda and Chagit Peles are the pioneer Beit Mizrachi couple at Givat Shmuel and Bar-Ilan University. They have an open house for young adults at all stages in life, whether a student at Bar-Ilan, a young professional, or a young couple working in Tel Aviv or elsewhere.

“The first Shabbat made us realize how much we had been missing a strong sense of community with a real Torah presence. We never had a minyan or community that was ours and where we felt comfortable. Beit Mizrachi has already brought that to the area, and hundreds of students are excited to be involved.” — Yoni
I t’s 5 am and I just got to work. I check in with the night guard that there’s nothing to report and send him to sleep before starting my rounds.

I work on a sheep farm just outside a small yishuv in Gush Etzion. Until we got started, Arab shepherds were bringing their flocks right up to the fence to graze. Over the last three or so years, we’ve established a presence not only on two hills outside the fence but also across thousands of acres of grazing land. While overall we have cordial relationships with our neighbors, there is still the ever-looming threat of theft. That’s why, since we’ve started, there’s been a Jew awake on the premises 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Just seeing that there’s a person patrolling every once in a while is enough of a deterrent.

I start by checking on each of the pens to see that none of the animals are visibly ill and that the water troughs are full. The herd, breeding rams, and six groups of lambs between one week and eight months old, are each in separate sections. Everyone seems healthy, even the one ewe who hurt her leg a few days ago. We’ll keep her separated for another day just to make sure she’s back to top condition and we’ll send her back out with the herd.

The rooster crows just before the sky begins to brighten and I know that the sun will soon be peeking out over the Jordanian hills behind the Dead Sea. It’s 5:30 and our shepherd is here opening the gates to let each of the groups into their respective yards on his way to take the herd to pasture. As he hears the herd start to shift, our sheepdog comes racing into the pen to help push them out. I watch as 300 sheep stream through the open gate and out toward the green hills. The shepherd, staff in hand and tefillin bag over his shoulder, shouts commands to the dog as they head out for most of the day.

Now that it’s bright enough to see, I start preparing breakfast. The dogs are easiest – just scoops of food and buckets of water. The sheep take longer. I weigh out pellets and hay for each of the groups that stay behind – close to 40 kg of hay just for the rams and older lambs and over 100 kg of pellets for the day. The pellets have been mixed with whole grains before going into a 50-foot high silo. Now I pour them into buckets to be distributed. I clean out the troughs on each pen and call the sheep as I pour in the pellets. I nearly fall over as a 100-kg ram rushes to get his breakfast. While the rams eat, I fill up barrels of pellets for the weaned lambs – six weeks to six months old. Like babies, they need to be able to eat whenever they’re hungry so they have full-time access to food. The older sheep are fed at specific mealtimes and have gotten used to the routine.

Unfortunately, not all sheep make very good mothers. Especially with
the high rate of multiple births in this breed, they often don’t produce enough milk to sustain their lambs. Instead, we have a machine that uses a special baby formula and mixes it at a certain ratio with water that’s been heated to a precise temperature. This machine is next on my list. I drain the old formula, disconnect the hoses and nipples, scrub down all the parts, and reassemble. While I work, day-old lambs nose at where they know milk should come from. They climb over me and each other to get to their food as I screw together the clean pieces and switch the machine back on.

During this process, I’m interrupted by a ewe in the next pen. I’ve been keeping an eye on her for about 20 minutes now because she looked like she was going into labor. Now I hear her making the sound unique to a sheep who has just given birth – almost a chuckle, welcoming her child into the world. I look over and see her cleaning a glistening baby lamb. He’s all leg and already trying to stand. I check her number and mark the time she gave birth. Then I soak the umbilical cord in iodine to prevent infection, tag the lamb, and mark his number on the chart next to his mother’s. I can see his twin’s hooves and nose poking out from under his mother’s tail. I’ll come back in a few minutes to take care of her as well.

It’s almost 9 am and the guys have started to wake up after guard shifts all night. I decide to take advantage of this and have a little break. I make myself a glass of black coffee with cardamom and jump in the Ranger. Yesterday a couple of the guys went out with the tractor to plant a wheat field, and I want to get a look. I drive over the hill past the First Temple-era water cistern the shepherd will use to water the sheep on their way home in a few hours. In the valley below, there’s a freshly turned patch of earth spread out between the rocks and thorns. G-d willing we’ll have the right rains at the right times and we’ll harvest in a few months. On my way back, I take a different route – this time passing through our Cabernet vineyards and olive orchards. Right now they’re dormant, but soon we’ll see buds and new leaves.

By the time I’ve returned to the sheep pens, the sounds of power tools and hammers are already in the air. There is always work to be done; whether repairs, expansions, new structures, or personal projects. I’m building an incubator for the eggs the goose has started laying in the middle of the pen. For now, we collect and eat them, but it would be great to have hatchlings too. Two guys are repairing a fence that’s beginning to come loose, and someone else is building a new wood stove.

After schnitzel with Israeli salad and rice for lunch, we hear the sheepdog barking in the distance. One person runs down to help bring in the herd. Another stands at the gate with a counter, clicking each time a sheep passes though. The herd gathers around the long water trough as they wait patiently for their turns. Once everyone is in, we pour the rest of the pellets I had weighed in the morning. They contain vitamins that supplement the grasses and shrubs they get at pasture. We milk the goats while they’re eating and get about a liter and a half from each. Maybe I’ll make cheese later; we’re almost out.

At this point, the day is beginning to wind down. The sun is setting. People are packing up tools and returning them to their places. Each group of lambs is returned to its pen and the yards closed up. We debate what to make for dinner and end up with a hearty soup and fresh pitas. We divide up the guard shifts while we eat, and those with later shifts go to bed right away. The rest sit around the new wood stove while someone strums on a guitar. I go home to sleep. Tomorrow is another day.
Moshav Massuot Yitzchak, a moshav shitufi, is located 15 km northeast of Ashkelon. A moshav shitufi is a cooperative agricultural community somewhat similar to a kibbutz.

Named after Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog, Massuot Yitzchak was one of four kibbutzim in Gush Etzion from 1945 until 1948, when it was overrun and captured by the Arab Legion. Many of the present older generations, then the pioneers, were imprisoned in Jordan for several months.

In 1949, after their return from captivity, the pioneers established the community anew in its present location. Massuot was almost entirely an agricultural moshav until 1990 when the Albaad factory was established. Albaad was among the first manufacturers in Israel to produce wet wipes sold across the globe. They now have factories located in Israel, Europe and the US. Despite the success of its industries, Massuot continued to expand in the field of agriculture. In 2003, for the sake of efficiency and to optimize its overall agricultural potential, Massuot Yitzchak merged with neighboring Kibbutz Negba, a non-religious kibbutz, that now observes the laws of shemitta and orla and doesn’t work its fields on Shabbat. Rabbi Meir Nehorai, Rabbi of Massuot Yitzchak, was instrumental in bringing members of both kibbutzim together to participate in joint shiurim to understand the halachot involved for this endeavor to succeed.

There are so many halachot dependent on the Land and when you actually work the Land you can understand the depth of what the Torah teaches us about agriculture.

Massuot and Negba have reservoirs that hold 500,000 cubits and 800,000 cubits of collected rainwater respectively used to irrigate the fields. Thank G-d, after this very rainy winter, both reservoirs are almost full to capacity – we thank You for every single drop You have brought down for us.

The farmers of Massuot Yitzchak and Negba grow wheat, sweet corn, sunflower seeds, chickpeas (humus) and Malley watermelon (grown for seeds), as well as olives, avocados, almonds and newly planted mango orchards. The moshav recently built an avocado packing house that processes both avocados grown on the moshav as well as those belonging to other local growers. The moshav also houses an egg hatchery and grows poultry both for eggs and meat.

The dairy farm in Massuot Yitzchak consists of 1800 Holstein cows, 800 of which are milking cows, milked three times a day. Holstein cows usually produce more milk than other dairy breeds. Each cow gives an average of 10-12 liters of milk per milking.

One of the most exhilarating, breathtaking and exciting experiences is watching a cow give birth. It is truly amazing to watch the new mother lick her baby calf clean, which as well as cleaning off the baby, also helps initiate blood flow. Within a very short time, the calf will stand and begin wobbling around. This is a very critical time. Within a maximum of six hours, preferably less, the calf must receive four liters of colostrum, a mother's first milk. This does not come from its own mother but from another cow whose milk has already been tested for high-quality antibodies or immunoglobulin. Unlike a human baby born with a strong immune system, the calf is not. The colostrum is thus crucial to enable the calf to have a fighting chance to survive.

On a personal note, now that I’m semi-retired, I have the opportunity to experiment in seeding and growing vegetables in flower pots until after Pesach when, if they are still alive, I will transplant them into my garden. I’ve started with four types of peppers, garlic and tomatoes. I also compost our vegetable peels, eggshells, leftover bread, tea bags, paper towels and cardboard and anything else natural I can find. Since I’ve been composting, we have significantly less household garbage. Composting recycles essential nutrients back into the soil and you don’t need to live on a moshav to compost!

Moshe Lebowitz was born and raised in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. He and his wife settled in Massuot Yitzchak 40 years ago.
**Start-Up Nation**

**START-ACH**

**CO-FOUNDER**

Dor Saban  
I am an entrepreneur and a reserve captain for the 8200 unit of the IDF.

**CO-FOUNDER**

Moshe Shalev  
I am 32 years old and a senior officer in the Intelligence Corps of the IDF.

**WHAT IS START-ACH?**

Start-Ach (a play on the phrase Start-Up and ach - brother/fellow) is a non-profit organization (established in 2017) that develops technology solutions for the community. The association is made up of volunteers from many different fields - product managers, graphic designers, programmers and more who come together to help find technological solutions for nonprofits that benefit and affect large and diverse sections of the population.

**CATEGORY**

Chesed, Volunteer.

**WHAT NEED IS START-ACH COMING TO FILL?**

There are many non-profit chesed organizations running various programs all across Israel. Unfortunately, without technology, there is little room for these non-profits to advance and expand. These non-profits, who only want to do good and help society, are also running on a very limited budget and can not afford to hire outside help to create apps and other web-based technology for them. Start-Ach only helps non-profits where technology will allow them to make significant advancements. Start-Ach helps from start to finish. From understanding what the non-profit needs most through the development of the perfect technology all the way through to the completion of the product.

**HOW DOES START-ACH WORK?**

Start-Ach is completely reliant on our volunteers. All the technologies Start-Ach develops are designed and programmed by volunteers. The volunteers even provide the web-hosting necessary to allow the apps to go live. Start-Ach is a non-profit, therefore they rely on donations and investments in order to continue developing. Start-Ach volunteers are ready and willing to develop as many apps as are needed in order to help chesed based organizations. While in the past, if one wanted to donate to a Jewish cause, they had to rely on local initiatives, now, technology allows us to take chesed to a whole new level. That is what Start-Ach is trying to do.

**WHAT KIND OF APPS HAVE YOU DEVELOPED?**

In Israel, there is an organization Yedidim which helps motorists who are stuck and in need of help - people with flat tires, drivers locked out of their car, out of gas, etc. Yedidim has over 18,000 volunteers across the country. We have created five different apps for Yedidim thus far - two for stranded motorists and three for volunteers, including an app that alerts volunteers in close range to a driver in need. Start-Ach has also developed apps for organizations that support sick patients in hospitals. The app allows Israeli citizens to join a group of volunteers visiting sick patients at hospitals all around the country.

**WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NOW?**

Right now we are working on an app to help connect potential volunteers with volunteer opportunities. Currently, someone who wishes to volunteer their time needs to call up each organization, one at a time, until they find the place and time that works for them. We are working on creating an app that will list various volunteer opportunities, so that volunteers can easily search for one in their field, region, etc. This will also allow organizations to easily post a volunteer opportunity and reach a broad range of potential volunteers. We are also developing an application that allows the management of drug, medical documents and food transfers for those in need around the country and the world.

**WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT CHALLENGES?**

Thank G-d, Start-Ach has seen rapid growth in both the number of volunteers and potential projects. Unfortunately, Start-Ach does bit have the means and resources to accommodate this expansion. As time passes, Start-Ach has learned to maximize what they have and produce as much as their volunteers can give. Start-Ach believes in utilizing the strongest tool of the 20th century, technology.

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For more information:

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Have a Start-Up? To be featured in this section, please email production@mizrachi.org
What is the Ideal Age to Get Married?

The Sages cite many reasons for marrying young as well as for delaying marriage. After careful consideration though, they concluded that 18 is the most appropriate age for marriage. Nevertheless, they agree it is not a “one size fits all.” Sometimes it is advisable to marry earlier, to prevent sinful thoughts for example. And sometimes it is justified to marry at the age of 20 or even later, if one is focused on learning Torah or developing one’s personality.

Of course there are risks in both approaches and today we live in a much more complex reality. It is clear that we cannot establish a uniform and standard age for marriage. The optimal marriage age is personal and dependent on circumstances. It is a combination of the individual’s spiritual, mental and emotional state, the considerations the Sages took into account and other factors.

Here are some brief considerations for both approaches:

WHY MARRY EARLY?
1. The importance of the mitzvah of establishing a family.
2. “Any man who does not have a wife is not a man, as it is stated: ‘Male and female He created them... and called their name Adam.’” The same is true for a woman. Personal perfection is made up of two levels. The first is personal maturation. The second is the ability to conduct an emotionally healthy relationship with a member of the opposite sex and understand its importance within a family setting.
3. Overcoming “sinful thoughts” in a timely manner, before they debilitating the person entirely.
4. Adapting to marriage at a more advanced age is difficult. This difficulty comes to light most often during the dating stage.

WHY DELAY MARRIAGE?
1. Lack of maturity to manage a family and relationships in all of their mental, emotional, economic and other aspects.
2. Continuing to study Torah in order to develop a spirit-rich personality and to formulate a solid Torah worldview to contribute to the family and give it substance. Torah study is also a response to “sinful thoughts.” On the other hand, “sinful thoughts” could undermine peace of mind, which is a condition for meaningful and purposeful Torah study.
3. At a young age, the choice of a spouse is sometimes superficial. Infatuation, or immaturity, without paying attention to the depth and details of the relationship, can lead to a hasty and reckless decision.
4. Many young couples are financially dependent on their parents. Some believe that without economic independence, emotional independence cannot be possible.

One of the most talked about arguments for postponing marriage is the claim that marrying young forces the couple to give up their self-actualization, something that is allegedly only possible to accomplish while single. Completing academic studies for example, or pursuing a competitive career. After a few years of marriage, they may experience a sense of having missed out on their personal development and the maximum utilization of their talents. This manifests itself in brooding, anger and frustration and often the deterioration of the relationship. This argument is one of the major causes of late marriage in Western society. Men and women reject marriage year after year because they do not yet feel they have “fulfilled their potential.” And so the years rush by without having established their home.

Although this argument should not be rejected out of hand, it has its roots in a view of the world that is quite contrary to the spirit of the Torah – an approach that places the individual on a supreme pedestal while relegating the family to a position of secondary and maybe even optional importance. Judaism’s approach to life – including the right and proper attitude towards marriage – can eliminate all negative feelings and inspire joy and satisfaction. There is also no reason why a successful marriage cannot contribute and even enhance a person’s self-actualization. It all begins with a positive, Torah-based approach to marriage and healthy family values.

1 Yevamot 63a.

Rabbi Elisha Aviner teaches in yeshivot hesder and founded an organization to help parents with adolescent education aviner@neto.net.il
“Could you edit my English essay?” “I need help with my algebra.” “What do you know about the Industrial Revolution?” “Can you review with me?”

The nights are a blur of questions and a clamor of voices as you tick off the days until summer vacation...

Homework can be a major source of struggle between parents and children of all ages. But that need not be the case.

As with any other challenge, half the battle is to honestly and reflectively assess the situation. The following analogy may help you to understand some of the do’s and don’ts of effective homework time with your children. Walking a mile in your child’s shoes may, in fact, help you gain insight into the challenges you and your child face as homework time approaches.

For the past 10 years, you have hired an accountant to prepare your tax returns. This year, you decided to try to fill out your 1040 tax forms on your own. You attended a three-hour seminar but you still have some questions. Who do you ask? You have some friends who are knowledgeable in the field of tax law. Some are brilliant and very knowledgeable but impatient and distracted. Others are average in their knowledge but are more patient and focused. Which qualities most inform your decision?

As an exercise, please list the importance of each quality below, rating it from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest score:

- Teaching skills __
- Acknowledged expert __
- Patience __
- Non-judgmental __
- Ability to give undivided attention __

When I conduct parenting classes on effective homework techniques, I often ask parents to self-assess in these areas. The vast majority of parents maintain that the last three attributes – patience, non-judgmental and attentive – are far more important to them than expertise. After all, the questions they are posed are not that complicated. Therefore, the first order of business when doing homework with your child is to make every effort to present yourself as a resource, not a tester.

Your attitude to your adolescent’s school and homework is another important factor. If you are frequently critical of your daughter’s teacher, if you are dismissive of your son’s English studies, your children may adopt the same attitude. It is important that you model respect for their studies and for their faculty members. Your child is entitled to get emotional and perhaps indignant about something their teacher may have said or done that day. Calmly listen to what your child has to say. Try to present an alternative view of things. Try to have your child step back a bit and remove the emotion and anger from their reactions.

If your child is overwhelmed with the amount of homework they have, contact the teacher. If most of the classmates are able to complete the homework in less time, you may choose to look into this matter more carefully. In the meantime, perhaps consider asking the teacher to accept a note from you that your child spent appropriate time on homework, and have them do part of the work, say, every second math problem.

Set goals for your children, but try hard not to compare them to their siblings or to other children. Maybe your friend’s child is very committed to and excited by learning. Don’t expect your child to respond in similar fashion. Just focus on what’s special about your child.

It is difficult to force your teenagers to be someone they’re not. You can help direct them but, as the Vilna Gaon cautions us, it is nearly impossible to change their basic nature. Don’t hurt them or yourself by trying. If your teenager is unmotivated, harness the power of incentives. At all ages, incentives can be very effective. Rambam speaks of long-term and short-term goals with children. He cautions parents not to confuse the two, and not to expect all children to be self-motivated at a young age.

If you find that you have neither academic tools nor the requisite patience to help your child effectively, consider hiring a tutor. Do not allow homework time to become a battlefield. Don’t replay the same scenario daily. Your relationship with your child is far too important to have it eroded by daily struggles over homework.

One final point: use this time to instill in your child a lifetime love for learning. Try not to ‘only answer the questions,’ but rather add color to the canvas of your child’s learning experience. Good luck!

Rabbi Yakov Horowitz is an educator, author, and child safety advocate. He conducts parenting workshops in Jewish communities around the world.
Early in my practice, it became evident to me that virtually all of my patients harbored negative-self feelings: low self-esteem, inferiority, inadequacy, unlikeability, low self-confidence. Some had grandiose feelings, which were a desperate attempt to escape painful feelings of low self-esteem. Furthermore, from my perception, these feelings did not appear to be justified and were of a delusional nature. I wrote a book, Life’s Too Short, in which I described some of the more common defense maneuvers utilized to avoid the discomfort of low self-esteem.

The causes of negative-self feelings are frequently cited as poor parenting, childhood illnesses, failures in early life, and sibling rivalry, which have cast a pall on the young child. Therapy can be helpful in clarifying these origins of the negative self-image, but whereas the client may have some relief, the negative delusions often persist.

Having suffered from low self-esteem myself, the usual explanations did not suffice. My parents were loving and devoted. I was my father’s favorite, and I succeeded in everything I did. I excelled in chess. I graduated high-school at 16. I was ordained as a Rabbi at 20. I graduated from medical school at 29, and several years later, I was board-certified in psychiatry. I had a great career in psychiatry, authoring more than 80 books. I founded a major alcohol and drug rehabilitation institution. Yet that negative self-image kept on haunting me. My awareness of my accomplishments gave me only momentary relief.

My first significant relief came from an essay by Rebbe Simcha Zissel Ziev of Kelm. We know that G-d instilled two opposing forces in man, the yetzer tov, the inclination to do good, and the yetzer ra, the inclination to do wrong. It is generally assumed that the yetzer ra incites people to violate the wish of G-d as expressed in the Torah. Rebbe Simcha Zissel says that this is too narrow an understanding of the yetzer ra. Rather, the yetzer ra seeks to make a person dysfunctional by making him feel inferior and worthless. This can paralyze a person to whatever degree, and rather than incite him to commit a particular sin, the yetzer ra achieves its goal to render a person dysfunctional. Thus, when I think of myself as inadequate, I must realize that this feeling is the work of the yetzer ra, and I must dismiss it just as I reject its tempting me to violate Shabbat or eat non-kosher food.

It is futile to argue with the yetzer ra just as one cannot reason with a paranoid person, whose delusion that the FBI is recording his every move is not subject to rational disproval. The cure for a paranoid would be his recognition that his ideation is a delusion. Similarly, a person with a negative self-image could be relieved of his distress if he realized that the yetzer ra is implanting false ideas about him, and that he should not give them any credence.

It is not the role of a therapist to teach a client about the yetzer tov and the yetzer ra, but both the therapist and client should be aware of the source of self-degrading thoughts, above and beyond the traditional sources.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski is a psychiatrist and rabbi, and founder of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pennsylvania.
Tu BiShvat, the New Year for Trees, is a time for renewal. The same is true for the New Year in Tishrei. Inside every renewal is a new vitality, new manifestations in creation. Just as we say that Man is renewed on Rosh Hashanah and is blessed with an opportunity to adopt a refreshed outlook on reality, similarly the renewal of the entire universe – vegetation and the fruit of the trees – has significance for nature.

The Torah established everything according to natural processes: the day begins with the emergence of the stars; the new month begins with the new moon; and the New Year begins after the summer has ended, the days are shorter, and we see a change in nature.

Similarly, agricultural and other laws of the Torah are determined according to the climate of the Land of Israel. Furthermore, our Sages formulated the Amidah prayer according to the needs of the Land of Israel. For example, in בִּרְכַּת הַשָּׁנִים – the blessing of the years, in the summer, we say, “And give a blessing on the face of the earth” (as opposed to asking for rain, which we do in the winter). Since Israel needs rain in the winter and not in the summer, the universal prayer is directed to Israel, even if all of Europe or other places need rain in the summer.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that even if an entire country needs rain specifically during the summer, the Jews living there shouldn’t request rain in בִּרְכַּת הַשָּׁנִים but as a private petition (even if it is for an entire country) in the blessing שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּה (where one is permitted to add private prayers).

The ancient Romans had the wisdom to begin their new year in March because then everyone could see that the winter has passed and there was a change in nature. Afterward came idolaters who believed that the “holy spirit” entered an individual in April and left him at the end of December. Because of that, they arbitrarily set their new year in the dead of winter.

The Jewish way is more in tune with the Divinely-created cycles of nature. Tu BiShvat is the time for the renewal of trees because, as our Sages say, most of the year’s rains have fallen, the trees have absorbed the precipitation and now they are ready to grow again with new vitality.

Our task on Tu BiShvat is to see the constant renewal in life. One who thinks that everything is static doesn’t get excited about anything. Nature’s rejuvenation offers us motivation for our own renewal, the possibility of seeing things in a new way, adopting a new way of thinking, and this freshness awakens us man from our slumberous routine.

It is for this reason that Halacha, the system of Jewish laws for Jewish living, also means walking. That is the way to live fully. Not to be stuck in one place, not to grow, not to stop where one is, but to continually walk ahead. There is no middle path in this context. If we not walking forwards, we fall backward. We also live our lives in cycles, waxing and waning like the moon, but our eyes are always looking upwards, to renewal.

The Sefat Emet often mentions the new vitality a person is endowed with on Rosh Hashanah, as a gift to grow for the entire year, and the trees undergo a similar process on Tu BiShvat.

Rabbi Dov Lior served as the Chief Rabbi of Hebron and Kiryat Arba until late 2014.
5 Reasons to Celebrate Tu BiShvat

1. THE HOLIDAY OF ROOTS

Everything begins from the roots, from the past, from history. This story appears in “Eretz Aggadah” by Amos Bar: “It’s the early days of Tel Aviv, the first Hebrew city. The city was very small, and the streets – deep sand dunes, with no trees or gardens. One day, the residents of little Tel Aviv were told that the British Colonial Secretary, Sir Winston Churchill, was coming to visit. The Mayor was Meir Dizengoff, after whom today’s Dizengoff Street is named. The City Council convened to discuss how best to welcome the important guest. They decided to hold a reception on the street along which it was planned to plant a row of trees (today Rothschild Boulevard). But the street was still bare, just sand. No trees. The council members finally decided to plant some temporary trees. The council members decided to plant some temporary trees, to give it the look of a green and blooming boulevard. They found some tall trees outside the city, carefully uprooted them and – a day before the visit – stuck them into the sand along the Secretary’s route – lo and behold they had a boulevard! When the honored guest arrived, the residents of Tel Aviv crowded along the tree-lined street. The people pressed against the trees, and as the honored guest passed, the trees began to wobble and then fall, one after the other.

Chaim Yoavi-Rabinowitz was born in 1944 in Siberia, in a forced labor camp to which his parents had been exiled. They called him Chaim – life, because the chances of a baby surviving in those temperatures were low. In 1946, the family returned to Poland and made aliyah in 1951.

And this is what he remembers of his childhood Tu BiShvat: “I was six years old, in Lodz. The atmosphere among the Jews of Poland was tough. It seemed that the Communist authorities had well and truly sealed the gates of emigration to Eretz Yisrael. In school the Jews started to learn Polish, something they hadn’t done since the Shoah, a clear sign that the Jews left in Poland were stuck there, seemingly until the Messiah arrived.

On the eve of Tu BiShvat, the community managed to obtain a crate of oranges from Eretz Yisrael which were sold at premium price, one per family.

One snowy evening, my late father came home from work and decided to take me, a little six-year-old boy, to buy a precious orange from Eretz Yisrael. My late mother objected to her little boy going out on such a cold and wintry evening, but my father insisted. He took his Tallit bag and we set out. There we were, tramping through the snow, when Father gave me the ‘responsibility’ of carrying the bag now containing the one orange we had bought.

Upon arriving home, we placed the orange in a big bowl, in the center of the table. Our Jewish neighbors came to see the orange from Eretz Yisrael, and my pride knew no bounds. I invited my friends to see ‘the Orange from Eretz Yisrael.’

On Tu BiShvat eve, we sat around the table for a festive family meal. Father made the blessing “Who created the fruit of the tree” and “Shechechiyanu” and then did something shocking: he took a knife and cut the orange from Eretz Yisrael! I began to cry. How could he cut the only orange from Eretz Yisrael, the one I was so proud of? My father also added the prayer that Jews in the Diaspora were accustomed to say on Tu BiShvat night: “May it be Your Will, our Lord and God of our forefathers, that you take us up to our Land in joy, to eat from its fruits and be satiated by its goodness.” I remember my mother then bursting into tears. So great were the yearnings to leave the Exile and make aliyah to Eretz Yisrael.

I found my comfort in the orange peel, which I kept in a special cardboard box. The peels began to go rotten, but I kept them anyway.

A few months later, with the help of a bribe, we received the coveted permit to leave Poland. I wanted to take the orange peels with me, but Mother told me that in Eretz Yisrael we would have lots of oranges, and so the peels were left on Poland’s accursed earth.

So if today I have such a burning love for the Land of my forefathers, and if more than once I risked my life for it, it all comes down to that one orange from Eretz Yisrael.”

2. THE HOLIDAY OF LOVE OF THE LAND

On Tu BiShvat we do something pretty revolutionary – we talk positively about Eretz Yisrael. We don’t complain about a third election in a year, we don’t speak about corruption, division, politicians or any other problems, but we look at the Land in a positive, loving light.

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3. THE HOLIDAY OF EDUCATION

If someone were to ask us when to celebrate Tu BiShvat, the Holiday of
Trees, we would say when the trees look their best, at the height of their blossoming beauty. But we celebrate during the winter, when the trees are bare. Rabbi Ya’akov Edelstein found deep meaning in this: “Specifically on Tu BiShvat, in the winter, we mark the New Year for Trees. Most of the year’s rains have already fallen, the earth has absorbed the rain, and on a superficial level, the tree looks dead. When looking from the outside, nothing is happening. But it is precisely then that the tree is absorbing and planning its growth power for the entire year to come. We see what’s happening on the outside, but the reality inside is that this time of barrenness is the time that ensures the tree’s future development. So it is with our children too. We must believe in the flowers and fruits that will eventually emerge, and never stop praying and putting in the effort. And likewise with the Jewish people. Even when we see the people detached from Torah, complaining, dry and void of all blossom, that’s just external. Inside every Jew is a spark of holiness, and the light of faith will burst forth from those depths.”

5. THE HOLIDAY OF PRAYING FOR FRUIT

All these Tu BiShvat messages are particularly relevant to our times. On the face of it, we’re no longer dependent on nature. We live in cars, malls and planes. Technology detaches us from nature. Tu BiShvat is the day that reminds us not to forego the lessons that nature can teach us. Not to become lazy and spoiled. Everything happens so quickly and easily today. Hence the process of planting and sowing is a lesson in faith. In the important areas of our lives, we are asked to use the pace of nature, not the speed of the smartphone. We can’t educate children, or build relationships, or educate ourselves and build our own characters, without the slow rhythm of patience, waiting and love.

We are now in the United States, as World Mizrachi’s shllichim in North America. One of the great innovations we’ve seen here is “Amazon Prime,” a service that brings whatever your order to your door within 24 hours. It’s amazing but scary. Wonderful but dangerous. You can get used to a world in which you can get anything, here and now. You don’t need to wait, to put in any effort, or work hard. But life is not Amazon Prime. Meaningful things demand more than 24 hours. We need that balance of “Tu BiShvat Prime” – processes that are slow, long and authentic.

4. THE HOLIDAY OF MODERN MAN

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And may it Be Your Will, our L-rd G-d and G-d of our Fathers, that You help us and aid us to observe this mitzvah of taking the lulav, hadas, arava and etrog as it should be observed, in the correct time, on the holiday of Sukkot, that should come to us for a good and peaceful life with joy and goodness of heart, and order a very beautiful, clean and perfect kosher etrog for us.

And may it Be Your Will, our L-rd G-d and G-d of our Fathers, that You bless all types of trees and make their fruit grow and multiply, juicy and good, and bless the vines to extract many grapes, fat and good, so that the wine that comes from them should be readily available for all of Your people Israel to observe the mitzvah of kiddush and the mitzvah of havdalah on Shabbatot and Yamim Tovim, and may the verse be fulfilled in us and in all of Israel: “Go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for G-d has already approved your deeds.”

Amen!
Perfect Nature and Cruel Man?

You surely know about the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986. You’ve also probably heard about the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan during the 2011 tsunami. But if you have no particular interest in Chinese power plants, you probably haven’t heard of the disaster in Banqiao.

A hydroelectric power plant was established at Banqiao Dam in China to generate electricity from the water flow, which is the most environmentally friendly way to generate electricity. In 1975, a failure in this dam resulted in the deaths of 171,000 people. 11 million people then lost their homes in floods. This is compared to the Fukushima incident, which directly resulted in just a few fatalities.

Concerns about the environment must not be neglected and should be clearly and thoroughly thought out. But this sometimes brings us to surprising conclusions. For example, the benefits of nuclear power plants, which are relatively efficient and non-polluting, do need to be considered in spite of the dangers.

The Midrash says: “When G-d created the first man, He showed him the trees of Gan Eden and said: See all My work; all that I have created, I created for you. Be careful not to spoil and ruin My world for if you spoil it, there is no-one to fix it for you.”

This Midrash has become popular among Jewish environmentalists in recent years. It’s a pity it doesn’t really say what people think it says. The next line in the Midrash, which describes the results of the human breakdown, says: “And you cause death to the righteous Moshe.”

The Midrash is not warning us of disposable plastic utensils, but is rather adopting a classic Biblical warning: do not transgress the Word of G-d, because if you sin, you and your children will die, including the righteous among them.

Does this mean that the Torah permits the destruction of the world in a careless manner? G-d forbid. The Torah prohibits uprooting fruit trees, and in halacha there are warnings against hazards such as industrial air pollution. What is unique about the Torah’s approach to this subject? That it does not share the myth of perfect nature and cruel Man. It is not true that before there was Man, the cosmos existed in harmony, and it was only Man who destroyed everything. We know that the world has always suffered environmental disasters. It wasn’t plastic bags that destroyed the dinosaurs.

The Torah does not worship nature and does not see Man as a corrupt and destructive being. In fact, the Torah’s requirement to protect the environment is because it enables life for Man. This can be seen in the halachic prohibition of cutting fruit trees. Botanically, all trees which have flowers produce some sort of fruits, but if humans do not eat it, they are not considered “fruit trees.” The obligation to protect edible fruit trees, in particular, is not a permit to cut down other trees, but an important declaration that the crown of creation is the human being created in the image of G-d, and the world must be preserved primarily for him. In the words of the Midrash: “Everything I created, I created for you.”

Do not underestimate the protection of the environment. As a conservative, I identify with this basic intuition: our world is vulnerable, our nature is sensitive, and it must be protected from so-called “progress.” It is a little surprising to me to see progressives who apply this thinking only to caterpillars and glaciers, and not to family and human society. For Man also has a nature, and it is also in danger. Human society is also vulnerable, and it must be guarded against “progress.”

We should delineate two approaches to environmental protection. The first focuses mainly on humans, and tries to determine what is beneficial and what is harmful to our environment. Clearly, air pollution is harmful; destroying all forests will cause a disaster; effective solutions to excess waste must be found.

The second approach speaks in almost spiritual terms: nature is sacred, the cosmos is harmonious, and Man is an infection that threatens it. At the extreme end of this approach, you can even find acts of terror in the name of environmental protection. The FBI estimated that green terrorists caused $200 million in damage over a five-year period.

If this is not a matter of rational considerations but a new religion of nature worship, I already have my own religion, and it’s a much better one.

1 Kohelet Rabbah 7.

Rabbi Chaim Navon is a renowned author and educator
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Much has been written about the metaphor of Man and tree, but there is also a less well-known comparison by the Maharal of Prague: “Just as a tree is rooted in the earth, Man has roots in Heaven.” Thus, Man forms the connection point between Earth and Heaven, the horizon at which Heaven meets the Land of Israel.

We are charged with a mission – to be the link that connects Earth to Heaven. Throughout history, from time immemorial, there has always been a symbiotic link between the Jewish people and the soil of the Land of Israel.

This connection originated 3,000 years ago with the call to our forefather, Avraham, to “Go up... to the Land that I will show you” – a bond melded and shaped through dispersions in the Diaspora; a bond which has survived the pangs of longing and lies deep within the heart of every Jew, wherever they may be.

This unique bond is embedded in the connection between the Jewish people and its past, its traditions, its spirit and its Torah. Rabbi Moshe Bochko explains that our forefather Yaakov’s dream is the first expression of the task placed upon the Jewish people in this world: “A ladder... set up on the Earth... and the top of it reached to Heaven.” Man sets the ladder in place and thus links Earth and Heaven. Rabbi Bochko says that this connection occurs only in Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel.

As Binyamin Zeev (Theodor) Herzl once said: “We shall plant for our children in the same way as our forefathers preserved Jewish tradition for our sakes. Our lives are but an instant in the eternity of our people, and each moment carries its own obligation.”

In just those few words, Herzl laid the foundations that would link past and future, Heaven and Earth. He understood that the bond between the people and its Land was intertwined with the connection between the people and its spirit. It was this insight that led Herzl to found the Zionist Movement’s National Institutions. He appreciated that having one’s head purely in heavenly matters was insufficient, and how crucial it was to have one’s feet firmly on the ground.

The WZO (World Zionist Organization) Settlement Division’s work is inspired by the same values: to plant more roots and ever deeper – both in Earth and in Heaven.

One example of this connection is the Bein HaShitin project in the Arava region, operating three pre-IDF preparatory academies that have nurtured hundreds of young men and women. All of them have been inspired to dedicate a gap year before their IDF service to a period of in-depth values clarification, social engagement, and exploring their identity, in conjunction with hands-on agricultural labor that has been making the Arava region bloom. The program is attracting a wide range of young people from all over Israel – from the moshavim and the cities, native-born Israelis and olim, religious and secular – standing together and connecting with the soil, the task and the mission, transforming the region into a vibrant and vital location.

In northern Israel, the Yogev farming organization offers young women National Service alumni a framework in which they can engage in agricultural work in the Galilee. These young women assist farmers in different kinds of labor, from planting through harvesting, in a format that provides them with opportunities to study and acquire significant skills and tools for the future.

Another facet of this project is Adam VeAdama (Man and Earth), an amazing four-year high school program, which attracts teenagers from across all sectors of Israeli society. Here they have an opportunity to complete a full honors matriculation program, parallel to assuming responsibility for personal farming allotments where they clear rocks, plant, irrigate, weed and tend crops right through to the point of harvesting them themselves. These are outstanding young adults, the cream of our people – young adults who understand that Zionism still needs to be “hands-on,” even in 2020.

The Settlement Division is engaged in all these initiatives, and many others, and monitors them all year round. Without the people leading them out there in the field, with their feet planted on terra firma and their heads in the sky, these amazing projects would certainly never have existed, much less succeeded.

1 Devarim 20:19.
2 Bereishit 28:12.

Gael Grunewald is Head of the Rural Growth and Development Division of the WZO, former Director of World Bnei Akiva and one of World Mizrachi’s representatives in the National Institutions.
Rav Ze’ev Javitz (1847-1924) was born in Kolno to a distinguished and wealthy family known for its religious observance and adherence to the traditional Jewish way of life. He began writing at an early age and his first article of renown, Migdal HaMeah, synthesized his beautiful style of writing with his profound scholarship. It dealt with the history of Judaism, covering the 100 years from the death of Mendelssohn (1786) to the death of Montefiore (1886). Being a member of Chovevei Zion, he put his writing talents to use for the Zionist cause. In a famous article, BeDerech Tzeiti, he describes the First Aliyah of the Bilu Movement to Eretz Israel.

In 1888, Rav Javitz moved to Israel and settled in Yehud. On Tu BiShvat 1890, Rabbi Javitz took his students to plant trees in the agricultural colony of Zichron Yaakov. This custom was adopted in 1908 by the Jewish Teachers Union and later by the Jewish National Fund. He soon moved to Zichron Yaakov, where he taught and published widely on educational theory. However, his educational ideals did not find favor with Baron de Rothschild and he was forced to leave Zichron Yaakov after three years, moving to Jerusalem until 1897, when he left Israel altogether.

That same year, the First Zionist Congress took place and Rav Javitz joined the movement with great enthusiasm. Returning first to Vilna, Germany, and finally London, where he remained until his death in 1924, he became very active in the Mizrachi Movement from its inception. He edited the Mizrachi paper, HaMizrach, from 1903-1904 and served on its first Board of Directors. In this position, he was called upon to write the party’s first statement of purpose. He wrote: “Zion and Torah are two holy vessels which complement and need one another... There is no other force that can protect and strengthen the Zionist ideal except for the observance of true Judaism in all its aspects and in all its purity.”

Rav Javitz devoted the remaining years of his life, not only to the Mizrachi but to researching, writing and compiling a historical encyclopedia called Toldot Yisrael. It covered Jewish history from the time of the patriarchs until the Chibbat Zion Movement but was only published in its entirety after his death (14 volumes). He wrote many books on education and Midrash and is the author of Mekor Berachot, a book on blessings and prayer.

Rabbi Tzvi Shechterman founded Moshav Kfar Yavitz – named in memory of Rav Javits, in 1932. It is located in the upper Sharon region, near Tel Mond and 10 kilometers from Even Yehuda. Rav Shechterman purchased the land close to Arab Tel Kuram and Taibe, and planted grapevines and orchards in order to sell the produce to Jews in the Diaspora.

True to the Torah VeAvodah ideal, a pioneering group of new immigrants associated with Mizrachi was called upon to work the land, with a view to settling it. One of these laborers was Michael Hazani, who became a founding father of religious settlement in Israel.

The moshav was surrounded by Arabs and was the most under-siege-settlement during the Arab Riots of 1936-1939. During the Second World War, the workers’ group had to be dispersed and many were able to find placements in other settlements.

Today Kfar Yavitz is home to 120 families and its main income comes from agriculture: flowers, orchards, strawberries, squash and more.
When I was a child, every Tu BiShvat in Hillel Academy of Pittsburgh we each got a little brown bag with a dried fruit and nut mix, with the words, “These are the fruits of Eretz Yisrael.” I thought Israel had no fresh fruit. The little black Johnny Bread or bokser (carob) piece always broke my teeth. Decades later in Israel I bit into a sweet carob off the tree and instantly thought – how could I have grown up with such a terrible impression when this is so heavenly!

Today’s global market is challenging Israeli agriculture by offering fruits and vegetables from countries with cheaper water and labor, so Israeli farmers are constantly finding niches. White truffles in the Negev and the world’s best black truffle in the Golan are in development; and sabra, jojoba and argan oil products are for sale. The Mount of Olives is really the best soil for olives. Israel is now home to over 300 wineries, many of which win international competitions and are highly ranked by the world’s best judges. We are recreating ancient species found in excavations, and growing organic grapes packed with nutrients. Pomegranates for eating, medicine and cosmetics; an abundance of fig species with many uses; the “mother” of emmer wheat was found preserved here, and a small Ella Valley patch makes high-quality barley exported to Italy for pasta.

Every part of the date benefits Man – in food, clothing, shelter, furniture and more, and of course date honey and silan syrup. Two cities are known in our sources as the City of Dates – Zoar on the Dead Sea’s southeast side and Jericho on the northwest. This region’s microclimate is exactly the kind of agricultural niche Israel needs. Experts have now recreated the famed Afarsimon-balsam tree here, whose cosmetic products were worth more than their weight in gold.

The Jordan Valley is filled with extremely brave farmers living in challenging physical and political conditions. They are making the Land bloom with special products so you can enjoy Israel’s special fruits fresh or preserved!

You can spend several days exploring the Jordan Valley on Highway 90. Local dates and other products – even pineapples! – are in stores right off the road and in the various kibbutzim and moshavim.

Brown signs mark tourist sites, which you will find along the length and breadth of the highway following the Jordan River. Start north from Zemach Junction and drive south, or from Highway 1 turn north. Dates, figs and grapes grow alongside the road, and the brown signs invite you to enter the communities. You can also turn off to Mount Gilboa’s scenic route, and into the springs, streams and fields of the Jezreel and Bet Shean Valleys; the breadbasket of Israel, where Gideon secretly winnowed his crops to hide precious grain from the marauding Midianites invading from the desert to feed off the Land’s fertility.

Near the southern junction, take the Qasr al-Yahud turn east. In under five minutes, after a checkpoint, you will stand literally at the water’s edge, of the Yarden, the Jordan River. This whole area opposite Jericho, not this spot alone, was our crossing zone from the Plains of Moav into the Plains of Jericho as the Jewish people entered Israel 3,350 years ago. It was here we accepted responsibility for each other. And while some laws kicked in only years later after we settled in, our first obligations to keep the sanctity of the Land expressed in its produce began here. The spies went up the hills behind Jericho, where the twin Hasmonean-Herodian fortresses of Kypros and Dok stand, while the facing river bank and plain is where Moshe had to turn around and ascend Mount Nebo.

A little further north is the Sartaba signal-fire mountain, a triangular-like domed cone, from which they announced Rosh Chodesh, the start of the new month. Often “holes” near the top are visible from the road – huge Hasmonean water cisterns under the hilltop palace. A great hike for the hardy in cool weather – expect a two-hour walk up to the ruins and stunning views; 1 hour down – even children can do it.

Look east to the Jabbok Passage between the Gilead Mountains, with archaeological mounds rising in its alluvial fan plain – biblical Sukkot, Adam and Zartan. Highway 57 connects the plains east of the Jordan, where Yaakov stayed with his flocks for 18 months, to Shechem, Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval – this is the path Yaakov Avinu took back into the Land.

The Jordan River Valley is oft-ignored by visitors and even by natives, and used merely as a pass-through. Stop and take it in. Now in springtime the sides of the road are dotted with colorful flowers, which the summer tourists never see. Enjoy the blessings of the Land and its special fruits!

Rabbi Barnea Levi Selavan is Co-Director of Foundation Stone, running educational programs in Israel and overseas, and a licensed archaeologist and tour guide.
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In the 16th century, the Kabbalists of Tzfat compiled a Tu BiShvat Seder, which involves enjoying the fruits G-d has given us, particularly those native to the Land of Israel. Since the order and the contents of the Seder do not follow specific Jewish law, there is much room for flexibility and creativity for each family to conduct the Seder in their own way.

**Grains • חיטה ושעורה**

יִהְיֶה רַצְוֹנֵינוּ שַׁאֲבַדְתֵּנוּ לְאַרץ הַצְּמֶחֶת וְתַתּוּרֵם כִּחִיתָה׃

*May our love for the Land of Israel keep growing.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה’ אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי מְזוֹנוֹת.

**Grapes (Wine) • ענבים**

יִהְיֶה רַצְוֹנֵינוּ שָׁנִישֵׁב תַּחַת עַנְביֵה הַגָּפֶן בְּשֵׁלוּם;

*May we sit under our vines in peace.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה’ אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

**Olives • זֶית-שֶׁמן**

יִהְיֶה רַצְוֹנֵינוּ לְשָׁחְתוּר הַכֹּהֲנִים וּלְעַבְדֹתָם בְּבֵית הַמֶּקְדֶּשׁ בְּמִימּוֹנֵינוּ.

*May our Kohanim return to their service in the Beit HaMikdash in our times.*

Before reciting the following beracha, have in mind that this beracha is being recited for all the other fruits you will eat at the celebration. If you do not eat olives and will only be eating a different fruit, remember to recite the beracha before eating that fruit:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה’ אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, וְהַקּוּחַנִים שָׁחְתוּר וּלְעַבְדָּם בְּבֵית הַמֶּקְדֶּשׁ בְּמִימּוֹנֵינוּ.

**Dates • תמר**

יִהְיֶה רַצְוֹנֵינוּ שַׁפָּמֵר בֵּית הַבְּשִׁילָה בְּבֵית ה’.

*May we blossom like a date planted in the house of G-d.*
Figs • תאנה

יִהְיֶה רֶצון שְׁעֵרָה כְּפוּרִים הָאָמָנוֹתָו וְעָלָה מָזוּל הַאֲלָמָל וּלְדֵי

May we be elevated like a fig and rise up from strength to strength.

Pomegranates • רִמוֹן

יִהְיֶה רֶצון שְׁכַמְּבֵרָה מְצַוִּיתָוּ כְּרוֹמִים

May we have many mitzvot like a pomegranate.

Etrog • אתרוג

יִהְיֶה רֶצון שֶׁבּוְכָלָנוּ יִהְיֶה כְּלָל טַבּוֹ עָלָה

May we be full of goodness like an etrog.

Apples • תפוח

יִהְיֶה רֶצון שֶׁהָאָמְפֵהוֹתָו נְשָׁבֵהוֹת בְּטִמֵּי בָּצֵל שֶל הַכָּדוּשָׁה בַּדּוֹר הַזֶּה

May we be like an apple tree and always rest in the shade of G-d.

Almonds • שקד

יִהְיֶה רֶצון שֶׁנְמוֹרָה וְנְשָׁקֵדָה לְעֵשָׁוָת רַצֵּן

May we always hurry and be diligent to do the will of G-d.

Some also eat carob and tell the following Talmudic story (Ta’anit 23a):

“Rabbi Yochanan said: “This righteous man [Choni] was troubled throughout the whole of his life concerning the meaning of the verse, ‘A Song of Ascents: When the L-rd brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like dreamers’ (Tehillim 126:1). [Choni asked] Is it possible for 70 years to be like a dream? How could anyone sleep for 70 years?”

One day Choni was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked, “How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit?” The man replied: “70 years.” Choni then further asked him: “Are you certain that you will live another 70 years?” The man replied: “I found [already grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted those for me so I too plant these for my children.”

Choni sat down to have a meal and sleep overcame him. As he slept a rocky formation enclosed upon him which hid him from sight and he slept for 70 years. When he awoke, he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and Choni asked him, “Are you the man who planted the tree?” The man replied: “I am his grandson.” Thereupon Choni exclaimed: “It is clear that I have slept for 70 years.”

Remember to recite Al HaMichya at the conclusion of your Seder.
At the beginning of January, earth-shattering events occurred that completely disrupted the Middle East, caused massive anger in certain Arab capitals, and threatened war in the region. In other news, the Americans assassinated Iranian General Qassem Soleimani.

The non-Soleimani news that rocked the Middle East involved natural gas. On January 2, Greece, Israel and Cyprus signed an agreement to build a pipeline to transport natural gas 1,300 miles from Israel’s Leviathan natural gas field in the Mediterranean Sea first to Greece, then to Italy and from Italy into the heart of Europe. Scheduled for completion in 2025, the “EastMed pipeline” ultimately might provide 4% of Europe’s natural gas imports. It also would compete with two pipelines being built by Russia, the Nord-Stream 2 pipeline in the Baltic Sea to Germany and the TurkStream project from Russia to Turkey and then on into Europe.

Turkey reacted furiously to the EastMed project. The pipeline involves three countries with whom Turkey has strained relations at best – Greece, a historical enemy; Cyprus, whom Turkey invaded in 1974, carved out a rump state called Northern Cyprus recognized by nobody but Turkey and still occupies to this day; and Israel against whom Islamic fundamentalist President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has systematically destroyed what once were very close relations.

The Turks have threatened that they will stop any exploration of that part of the Mediterranean that does not include Turkey. Indeed, Turkey and Libya entered into a bizarre agreement in December that supposedly gave those two countries exclusive rights to explore a part of the Mediterranean Sea between their two countries. The Turks have gone so far as to chase Cypriot vessels away from exploring for natural gas in Cypriot waters. They also sent their own ships to explore in Cypriot waters. If Turkey tries this against Greece or Israel, things might not go so smoothly for the Turks.

Meanwhile, the first shipment of Israeli gas from the Leviathan field was delivered to Jordan on New Year’s Day, much to the chagrin of many Jordanians. Jordan has been receiving Israeli gas from the smaller Tamar field since 2017, but the Leviathan gas increases Israeli exports to Jordan dramatically. Jordan’s main political opposition, The Islamic Action Front, called the delivery of Leviathan gas a “black day in the history of Jordan, and a crime against the nation...” A memo was filed in Jordan’s parliament requesting that a law be drafted to ban the importing of Israeli gas, but previously the Jordanian constitutional court ruled that the Israeli-Jordanian gas agreement did not need parliamentary approval.

Jordan wasn’t the only country to receive Israeli natural gas on New Year’s Day. Egypt did as well. Israel and its US partner Noble Energy reached a $15 billion agreement in 2019 to supply 64 billion cubic meters of gas to Egypt.

Suddenly, Israel is a regional power in natural gas. This gives Israel substantial energy independence, and it provides Arab countries like Egypt and Jordan with a more stable supplier of energy than they had previously. Of course, Israeli energy exports stand traditional Middle East trading relationships on their head. Also, it gives the rejectionist front in the Arab world a new and very public target.

Simultaneously, Israeli gas exports place a key choice before the ruling classes of Jordan and Egypt. They can reject the Israeli gas and maintain their policy of keeping Israel at arm’s length with a very cold peace, but if they do so and maintain their ideological purity, they risk their own people rebelling against the resultant economic deprivation. That is already happening in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran. Conversely, they can take on their rejectionists and lead the Middle East into a new era.

As much as the impact of the Soleimani assassination, the decisions involving Israeli natural gas being made now in Egypt and Jordan will set the tone on the future of the Middle East.

A version of this article originally appeared in The Times of Israel.

Daniel B. Markind is an attorney based in Philadelphia specializing in real estate, commercial, energy and aviation law.
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– Rabbi Avi Weiss, Rabbi in Residence, Hebrew Institute of Riverdale – the Bayit

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The opening Mishnah of Masechet Rosh Hashanah enumerates four different times of the year referred to as “Rosh Hashanah,” the New Year. Each one represents a cut-off point when one year ends and the next year begins. The first of Elul is the cut-off point with regards to ma’aser beheima – the tithing of animals. The first of Tishrei is the New Year with regards to tithing grain and vegetables. The 15th of Shvat is the New Year with regards to fruits of the tree.

While all of these dates have halachic ramifications, none are celebrated as a holiday. The Talmud makes no mention of the Tu BiShvat celebration. It is only during the period of the Rishonim that we find some sort of special status granted to this day. Shulchan Aruch\(^1\) rules that one may not fast on this day, and that we don’t recite Tachanun.

Why is only the Rosh Hashanah for the fruits of the trees singled out for celebration? Furthermore, why did this day only take on a holiday aspect during the period of the Rishonim?

The Gemara\(^2\) explains why Tu BiShvat is viewed as the New Year for Trees even though it takes place in the middle of winter, when the trees have shed their leaves and the orchards are totally bare. It is at this time that the fruits begin to take form after the majority of the year’s rains have already fallen. Rashi explains that the rains of the first half of the winter generate growth for the upcoming year. These rains cause the sap to rise inside the tree producing the new fruits. This idea had a profound message for the Jews of that time – the celebration of Tu BiShvat gave them hope. While their situation in exile looked bleak and hopeless, G-d was preparing the seeds for their eventual return and rebirth.

Today we are living an existence that our ancestors could only have dreamed of – the Land of Israel, barren and desolate for so many years, has reawakened. Not only are our supermarket shelves filled with homegrown fruits and vegetables, but we export top-quality fruit all over the world. During the summer I manage the kitchen in a camp in Pennsylvania. Even in this remote village we receive produce stamped “Product of Israel.” Not only has the produce returned, but the people of Israel have also returned.

As we gather for this year’s Tu BiShvat Seder, let us reflect on the historical significance of what has happened. After 2,000 years of exile – when many of our persecutors and even members of our own people were convinced that there was no future for the Jewish people – we have miraculously returned to our homeland and are rebuilding the Jewish State beyond our wildest expectations. May we see the conclusion of this story occurring speedily in our days.

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2. Rosh Hashanah 14a.

Rabbi Morrie Wruble is an educator with over 40 years of experience in many yeshivot and midrashot. He is presently a Rebbe in Netiv Aryeh.
LESSONS FROM MY GARDEN

A few years ago, I started growing berries in my garden – strawberries, raspberries and blackberries. I kept my expectations low. Between the Gush Etzion cold, the Neve Daniel wind, Israel’s punishing summer sun, armies of hungry Middle Eastern bugs, and my own spotty record in the garden, I was hoping for a few edible berries. In the end, my crop exceeded all my expectations. And I’m not even talking about the berries.

I grew up thinking that Tu BiShvat was when Jews gnawed sadly on bukser (dried carob pods) from Eretz Yisrael. So I was thrilled when my own garden in Eretz Yisrael began to produce sweet, edible treats. Chazal tell us that there is no clearer sign of the redemption than Eretz Yisrael’s offering her delicious fruits to her returning children.1

That would have been more than enough for me. But the unexpected “bonus crop” was the lessons my garden has yielded about how to be a better person, a better Jew, and even a better teacher.

Commitment. Sometimes, planting means depositing a sapling in a field and then getting back on the bus and disappearing forever. But I learned what happens when we “set it and forget it.” I set up a system to water my garden automatically, but then I didn’t check whether it was still watering a few months later. Only once the plants were literally dying did I finally realize that the batteries had died.

We need to plant and then stay committed. In all growth in life, if we “set it and forget it,” we’ll find that while we were away, the batteries ran out and the weeds arrived uninvited. The garden we planted with such excitement and investment is long gone, replaced by a jungle.

Being wrong. My garden taught me how to be happy to be wrong. Time and again, I would decide that a plant was dead – and then watch, surprised and thrilled, as it shot out new leaves and beautiful flowers.

Not only did I learn not to give up on plants (and people) so quickly, I also learned to be humble about my opinions and ready to learn that I’m wrong. Being ready to be wrong is another way of saying being ready to learn, to grow, and to experience wonder.

We’ve come a long way since bukser. May we soon merit the full redemption… and until then, may we enjoy sweet fruit from our gardens and a generous crop of wisdom and insight.

1 Sanhedrin 98a.

Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Rabbi Eitan Mayer serves as Menahel at Midreshet Moriah
The Land of Israel is praised in various ways in the Bible. One of the most popular phrases is “Eretz zavat chalav uDevash” – a land flowing with milk and honey.

Most commentators understand that the ambiguous term devash refers to date honey – a fruit extract.1 Who does the Torah praise the Land for its date honey and not for its dates? This is most likely because dates in Eretz Yisrael are primarily valued for their abundance of honey.

However, there are places in Tanach where devash clearly refers to bee’s honey.2

Rashi3 notes that all Biblical devash is date honey. On the other hand, She’elot Uteshuvot Radvaz4 suggests that devash in Tanach can refer to either date honey or bee’s honey, while in rabbinic literature, it is always bee’s honey. Thus, according to Radvaz, in the phrase “Eretz zavat chalav uDevash,” the image of flowing honey can be either that of honeycombs melting in the hot Mediterranean sun or, as most of the commentators understand it, dates or figs dripping nectar.

In the Bible, milk usually refers to that of either a goat or a cow.5 Rav Reuven Margolis6 was troubled by several points: the inclusion of animal products in a list of agricultural products; the juxtaposition of milk and honey, a combination found nowhere else in Tanach; the inclusion of date honey, the last of the Seven Species, and the absence of wine in the praise. He notes that a more usual pairing in Tanach is wine (grapes) and figs. His creative proposal is that devash refers not to date honey but to fig nectar. This suggestion is not so farfetched since both honey and fig nectar are the sweet products of fruit, and often times devash in the Bible refers to any fruit extract. And chalav, Rav Margolis boldly suggests, is white wine, not the product of an animal’s udder. Rav Margolis cites the Targum to Shir HaShirim 5:1, where chalav is translated as white wine and demonstrates that in other contexts such a translation makes sense as well. Hence, to Rav Margolis, when stating “Eretz chalav uDevash,” the Torah is praising the Land of Israel as a land of grape and fig (products). Grapes and figs are also the first fruits of the Seven Species. Rav Margolis’s interpretation is also consistent with the statement the spies made upon their return from the Land: “We arrived at the Land... and indeed it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.” Perhaps the reference to “milk and honey” was to the grapes and figs the Torah records the spies brought back with them.

The Talmud7 relates that Reish Lakish said: “I saw the milk and honey flowing near Tzippori and it was 16 mil by 16 mil. ... Rabbah bar bar Chanah said that he saw the milk and honey of the entire Land of Israel and it was 22 parsea long by six parsea wide.”

Commenting on this, Rashi paints a picture of milk-laden goats eating lush dates that drip honey. The honey mixes with milk flowing from the goats and forms into a kind of stream. This is based on another Talmudic passage8 that states that Rami ben Yechezkel traveled to Beini Brak, where he saw goats eating under fig trees. The fig honey dripped from the trees while milk dripped from the goats, and the two ingredients mingled. Noting this, he proclaimed that this is “Eretz zavat chalav uDevash.” So too, Rav Yaakov ben Dostai reported walking from Lod to Ono ankle-deep in fig honey.

Bee’s honey or date honey, cow’s milk, goat’s milk or white wine, the Torah praises the Land for the natural fertility that exists when the Jews dwell there. “Eretz chalav uDevash” refers to the commingling of animal products and vegetation, of herders and farmers. The images conjured by “zavat chalav uDevash” did not only serve to “convince” the Jews of the goodness of the Land prior to their arrival, but are, in fact, reflective of the Land’s productivity.

In the Al HaMichya prayer, we beseech G-d to let us eat from the fruits of the Land and enjoy their goodness. May we all be privileged to do so!

Adapted with permission from Jewish Action, the magazine of the Orthodox Union (winter 2005).

1 Rashi to Shemot 13:5 and Devarim 26:2, based on the Sifri, notes this. This is also clearly the understanding of the Talmud in Berachot 41b. Targum Yonatan to Devarim 8:8 translates devash as “dates that make honey.”
2 See Shoftim 14:8, Tehillim 19:11 and Yeshayahu 7:22.
3 Berachot 41b.
4 962.
6 Hamikra Vehamesorah (Jerusalem, 5749), 62-64.
7 Megillah 6a.
8 Ketubot 111b.

Rabbi Ari Z. Zivotofsky is a Professor of Neuroscience as well as a tour guide in Ir David.
In tractate Rosh Hashana, the tractate which discusses Tu Bishvat among other Rashei Shanim (annual beginnings), we find the source for a relatively well known phrase, benei maron, which is used in prayer during the high holidays:

“On Rosh HaShana all creatures pass before Him like benei maron.” (RH 16A)

The Talmud on Daf 18A discusses this phrase:

The Gemara asks: What is the meaning of the phrase benei maron? The Gemara answers:

1) Here in Babylonia they interpreted it to mean: Like a flock of sheep [kivnei imarna].

2) Reish Lakish disagreed and said: Like the ascent of Beit Maron, which was very steep; one standing at the summit could discern all those climbing the mountain with a single look.

3) Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said another opinion: Like the soldiers of the house of King David, who could be surveyed with a single glance.

In the classic style of learning it would be enough to understand the simple meaning of the Talmud’s words and move on. However, with the access we now have to all areas of Eretz Yisrael there is a deeper level we can reach.

With regard to the interpretation offered by Reish Lakish above, Rabbi Steinsaltz teaches us that Beit Maron, the version of the text which we have, is referring to Mount Meron. Anyone who has visited the site knows it is a very tall mountain with a steep ascent, surrounded by vast planes. The combination of these two aspects enables one who is standing atop that mountain to clearly survey an immense area below in all directions.

It is clear the sages meant to convey this idea to people who can themselves have this unique experience and gain the feeling of awe that comes with it (Reish Lakish, who is the one quoted here, in fact lived in Tiberias which is about 15 miles away from Mount Meron.) One in turn will be able to sense the awe of Rosh Hashana, the day when God surveys all creatures at once as if standing at the top of Mount Meron. This practical experience was not possible for most Jews for nearly two thousand years, but we now live in a time in which we can go back to our roots and recreate the way the rabbis intended for us to study Torah.

Another tool which we have available to us today which can enhance our learning is the use of full color images. For those who have not yet been able to visit the site and for those who have and would like a reminder, a panoramic view of Mount Meron is displayed depicting the steep ascent and the planes below.

This is but one example of how we can combine real life experiences with the study of Torah in order to achieve a synergistic effect. It is not a new way of learning; it is a significant enhancement to the traditional method. When one studies Torah in this manner, i.e., by referencing worldly knowledge and encounters, as is clearly the intent of the sages as illustrated above, one will surely be influenced in the opposite direction, namely have the Torah impact their lives.

A few weeks after the historic Siyum HaShas events which attracted thousands of people around the globe, we see a growing interest in studying Talmud. It is clear from the pages that the Sages reference abundant aspects of life, making references to science, geography and even the practices of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations that surrounded them. In The Noé Edition Koren Talmud Bavli, we see how much Rabbi Steinsaltz’s broad scholarship helps us understand the words of the Sages and like we see in the sugya above, enhances our appreciation of the natural world around us.

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Rabbi Avishai Magence is Production Manager at Koren Publishers and served as image curator on The Koren Talmud Bavli.
OF TREES AND ALMONDS

EITZ AND ILAN

Let's look at the two Hebrew words for tree: eitz עץ and ilan אילן.

Eitz is a biblical word, appearing over 300 times. Rabbi Yehoshua Steinberg in his Milon HaTanach, connects eitz to a root, עץ, meaning "to bind, attach, strengthen," and is related to such other words as עץ עץ – "to close (the eyes)," עץ עץ – "to be strong, mighty," עץ עץ – "advise, give counsel," and עץ עץ – "give form, shape."

Ilan is originally an Aramaic word, only appearing in the Tanach in the Aramaic section of the book of Daniel. Dr. Ernest Klein writes that it is related to the Hebrew elon עון – "oak." Elon is related to ela עלא – also meaning "oak, ter-ebinth," and Klein connects all of them to the root עון – meaning "to be strong." This is similar to Steinberg's etymology of eitz, and it's not surprising – a tree was a symbol of strength.

Prof. Yechezkel Kutscher asks the question – "Why don't we call Tu BiShvat Chag HaEitzim instead of Chag Hallanot?" His answer is that in Biblical Hebrew eitz meant both “tree” and “wood.” But in the times of Mishnaic Hebrew, ilan had entered into Hebrew from Aramaic, and now we could have two separate terms – eitz for wood and ilan for tree.

This can explain why Rashi on Genesis 18:4 found it necessary to explain tachat haEitz as tachat hallan. He was trying to point out that the guests sat under a tree, and not under a wooden roof.

Modern Hebrew tends to prefer Biblical over Mishnaic Hebrew, and so generally uses the word eitz for tree.

SHAKED

Tu BiShvat is the new year for all of the trees, but it is very much associated with the almond tree. It is the time that the almond trees blossom, and therefore they star in Tu BiShvat songs, including perhaps the most famous, HaShkedaya Porachat – the blossoming almond tree.

Levin Kipnis, the Israeli writer of children's literature, probably coined the word shkediya in 1919. Originally, the word for the almond tree was shaked שקד – but the new word shkediya allowed a distinction between an almond (shaked) and an almond tree.

Hebrew also has a verb שקד – meaning “to work diligently, to labor, to strive.” Is there a connection between the verb and the almond tree? Many sources make a connection. Klein, for example, points out that the original meaning of the verb was “to watch, wake,” and the almond tree is so called “because it is the tree which flourishes (awakens) first.”

Earlier, this opinion was given by Rashi on Jeremiah 1:11-12. The verse there has a play on words:

"...What do you see Jeremiah?’ I replied, “I see a branch of an almond tree.” G-d said... ‘You have seen right, for I am watchful to bring my word to pass.’"

Rashi writes, “The almond tree hastens to blossom before all the other trees – so too will I hasten to perform my word.”

So after the winter, the blossoming of the almond tree on Tu BiShvat symbolizes the coming spring.

However, not everyone agreed with the connection between the verb שקד and shaked as “almond tree.” For example, the Ben Yehuda dictionary notes that shaked (the tree) does not appear in other Semitic languages aside from Akkadian (shiqdu), which doesn’t share the verb שקד. Therefore, the Hebrew shaked is borrowed from Akkadian, which probably got it from some other language.

Should this be a cause of concern? Shouldn't we assume that if the verse in Jeremiah ties the two together, they are related?

I don't believe it is. Wordplay in the Bible does not need to indicate an etymological connection – and can be more surprising, and therefore more powerful when it doesn't. In fact, the Rambam discusses the verse in Jeremiah:

“Compare makkal shaked, Jeremiah's almond staff. By the second meaning of shaked, it was intended to indicate the prophecy, 'For I will watch' (shoked), etc. which has no relation whatever to the staff or to almonds.”

So whether or not there's an etymological connection, Jeremiah's audience got the message – G-d’s punishment would be coming soon, like the blossoming of an almond tree.

1 Guide to the Perplexed 2:43.

David Curwin is a writer living in Efrat, and the author of the Balashon blog balashon.com • balashon1@gmail.com
Daf 30: תפילת רדור - TRAVELLER'S PRAYER

There is a prayer to recite when a person heads out to travel: “Yehi razon milanecha HaShem... she’to’lee cheinu Ishalom v’tatz’aideinu Ishalom...” (May it be Your will HaShem that You guide us in peace and lead us in peace...), as a request for safe passage throughout one’s journey.

Taking a short trip from home would not call for recitation of Tefillat HaDerech. In Talmudic times, when the roads were unsafe and before the advent of modern means of transportation, the blessing was mandated for journeys longer than a parshah (2.5 miles).

Chachamim formulated Tefillat HaDerech in the plural form — “she’to’lee cheinu Ishalom v’tatz’aideinu Ishalom,” so that the zechut (merit, benefit) of other people traveling throughout the world at that same time will be attributed to the individual reciting the prayer. The merit of the masses makes an individual’s prayer more readily accepted.

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