Happy Tu BiShvat!

Tu' biShvat שמח

ORDINARY HEROES
AN INSPIRING INTERVIEW WITH THE PARENTS OF ARI FULD
PAGE 8

IN MEMORY OF
ARI FULD
lover and defender of Israel
LYNN & JOEL MAEL AND FAMILY
Welcome to another edition of HaMizrachi – this one to coincide with the upcoming festival of Tu BiShvat. It is also in memory of Ari Fuld zt"l, whose murder in Israel shocked the Jewish world just after Yom Kippur this year.

I knew Ari. He was in the year below me in Yeshivat HaKotel. He was a remarkable human being, a fighter for Israel, a hero, defending us against our enemies across the internet world, standing up for Israel on Facebook, Twitter and inspiring thousands of young Jews of all backgrounds.

Sadly, like many of the killings in Israel, one tries to make sense of the murder and you ask yourself why?

As Rav Soloveitchik tells us in his seminal Kol Dodi Dofek, you can never answer the question Why did this happen? We are not G-d. We do not understand why these things happen, but the Rav stresses that there is another question we can answer: What do I do now?

Ari was a What do I do now person. Always doing. Always helping. Always fighting for his beloved Israel, his beloved Torah and his beloved Judaism. He was on the front lines. For us.

However, what I learn from him is this. And if you understand not just how he lived, but how he died, you too can learn a tremendous lesson.

When I saw the shocking footage of his death, I was horrified yet inspired. A cowardly terrorist stabs a man in the back. The man is bleeding to death and the terrorist runs off with a 30-inch knife ready to kill more Jews in the mall.

Remarkably, the dying man gets up. He doesn’t think about himself.

He makes a choice.

The decision to do something. Now. To save others from his fate.

You watch as he staggers to his feet, runs, jumps over a wall, aims, fires, stops the terrorist and collapses, only to die later from his wounds.

Ari Fuld made bold choices in life, dedicating his time and talents to Torah, Israel and the Jewish people.

He made an even more courageous choice in death. Saving others in the process.

All of his choices – including that last one – were geared towards goodness; towards making sure good triumphed over evil. To making sure that Jews all over the world knew about their heritage, their people and their Land.

When you read through this magazine you too will be reminded of the miracle of our return to Eretz Yisrael and the marvel of the rebirth of the Land itself, producing forests, vines, flowers and fruits in celebration of its children returning home.

Ari Fuld was one of those children.

In Parashat Shoftim, the Torah discusses the laws of warfare: כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה – “Is the tree of the field a man” – that it should enter the siege before you? According to Rashi, the simple understanding is that we can attack the enemy’s soldiers but a tree is not a soldier, so why should Jews feel the need to deprive anyone of the tree’s fruit?

The Maharal of Prague explains the verse in terms of an actual comparison of trees to people. Just as trees must grow branches, twigs, flowers and fruit to fulfill their purpose, so too are we put on this earth to be productive and produce moral, intellectual and spiritual fruit – the results of authentic human growth.

Ari Fuld was a tree cut down in his prime, but the fruits he produced in just 45 years are disproportionate to his short life. Just read the interview with his parents on page 8.

In the merit of hero Ari Fuld may we have the strength to carry on his mission of Torah, of Religious Zionism, of defending Israel and actively loving the Land and the people of Israel. And – as Ari would have wanted – may we build ourselves up individually and as a nation to show ourselves and our enemies who the Jewish people really are.

1 Deuteronomy 20:19.

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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.

Indeed, two great American gentiles attest to that very fact – Mark Twain and Walter Clay Lowdermilk, a soil conservation expert. In 1867, 11 years before the first modern agricultural settlement in Palestine, Twain visited the Land 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 worthless soil, had almost deserted the country. No landscape that exists that is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to Jerusalem…”

About 70 years later, in 1939, Lowdermilk arrived in Palestine searching for soil and climates similar to the California Dust Bowl he was aiming to develop. Nothing prepared him for what he saw. A miracle wrought by the Jewish pioneers of Palestine who had little or no background in agriculture:

“Streams across the coastal plain would choke with erosional debris from the hills to form pestilential marshes infested with dreaded malaria... this state of decadence is not normal... rural Palestine is becoming less and less like Transjordan, Syria and Iraq and more like Denmark, Holland and part of the United States.”

Lowdermilk was so impacted that he and his wife settled in Israel in the 1950s, contributed to the building of Israel’s national water carrier, and a Technion department is named after him. A true lover of Zion.

What would Lowdermilk say today? Israel has done the seemingly impossible – 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 lush fruit-yielding area despite the arid climate; changing a treeless country into forest-full landscapes by planting over 250 million trees over the last 120 years...

How can we explain this phenomenal transformation? The answer evidently lies less in the rational, physical realm, and more in the mystical and metaphysical. The Torah repeatedly refers to the promise of the Land as “an everlasting possession.” How can it be everlasting if we have spent so many long centuries outside it?

Rabbeinu Bechayei, on that verse, answers: “This is great sign for Israel that from the day they were exiled from it, no other nation has been able to inhabit and settle it, but it remains destroyed and desolate, until her fledglings return.”

There is a reciprocal relationship between the Jewish people and the Land; an inexplicable love affair between a people and a place, unparalleled in the annals of human history. Just as the Jewish people have never forgotten the Land, so the Land has never abandoned its children. It remained loyal, never allowing others to cultivate her soil.

Tu BiShvat is the time to celebrate that ongoing miracle.

I conclude with more Lowdermilk wisdom: “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.”

1 Innocents Abroad, Mark Twain, 1868.
2 The Promised Land, Lowdermilk, 1944.
3 Genesis 17:8, as part of the covenant of Brit Mila (circumcision): “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.”
4 Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa, 1255-1340.
5 See Footnote 1.
At first glance, Tu BiShvat, the new year for trees and fruit, seems to be of merely technical significance; the calendar marker pertaining to fruit-oriented yearly mitzvot. Yet on Tu BiShvat, we observe customs reminiscent of a holiday, e.g. we skip tachanun and avoid fasting.

What are we celebrating?

The answer can be better appreciated in the context of our historical relationship with the Land of Israel. G-d destined Israel for the Jewish people from the moment of Creation. Our ancestors showed their appreciation of Eretz Yisrael by planting and developing it, and the Torah presents fruit as the Land’s reciprocal response to their efforts. When we inhabit and develop the Land according to G-d’s commandments, the Land produces for us and gives us a strong economic backbone to enable a secure State. Indeed, the first book of Kings describes the Jewish people’s security in Israel as “each man under his grape and fig tree.”

Our relationship with the Land of Israel is even clearer when we were exiled. The book of Leviticus predicts that the Land will stop producing when the Jews are exiled from it. This prevented other nations from usurping our place and served as a reminder to us and to the world of our eternal, immutable relationship with Eretz Yisrael.

Furthermore, Jews in exile always reaffirmed their relationship with and belief in the future fruitfulness of the Land of Israel by celebrating and eating its fruits on Tu BiShvat.

In the Al HaMichya blessing we say after eating grain products or one of Israel’s seven species, we ask G-d to return us to the Land where we will be able to eat its fruit and be satiated from its goodness.

Once we leave exile, the Torah commands us to plant fruit trees upon arrival in Eretz Yisrael. This emulates G-d, who ‘planted’ the world’s initial trees and our forefathers, who are each praised for having improved Eretz Yisrael by planting within it.

Like our ancestors, when Jews began returning to the Land in the 19th century, they began planting. The Land responded by once again producing fruit and, Baruch Hashem, it has continued to offer its blessings – fruit, wines, and more, with the best still to come.

But that’s not all. Rebbi Abba, following the Prophets, refers to this renewed fruit production as the clearest sign of Redemption. That is why Rav Kook saw Israel’s fruit production as proof that the Redemption had begun in his time. He wrote, “It is a mitzvah to completely enjoy the refreshed holy sweetness of Israel’s fruits... We need to inform the whole world, to those suffering in exilic darkness, that the conduit of full life infused with blessed light and the sweet holiness of our desirous land has begun to reopen... (By producing fruit) the sweet Land seeks its children... calling out to them to return to their mother’s bosom...”

In light of the above, our enjoyment of Israeli fruits on Tu BiShvat is far more profound than just physical pleasure or supporting Israel’s economy. Indeed, the Yerushalmi asserts that anyone who settles in Israel, speaks Hebrew, eats Israel’s fruit in a state of purity, and recites the Shema twice daily is guaranteed a place in Olam Haba.

The Bach explains that we yearn to eat Israel’s fruit because it is infused with the holiness of the Land. And the Ben Ish Chai says that eating Israel’s fruits helps us appreciate the quality of G-d’s gift of Eretz Yisrael to us.

That alone would be reason enough to celebrate Tu BiShvat.

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1 Mishna Rosh Hashanah 1:1-2.  
2 Ibid, Bartenura.  
3 Midrash Tanchuma Reeh 8.  
4 5:5.  
5 26:32.  
6 See Magen Avraham, Shulchan Aruch 131:6,16.  
7 Leviticus 19:23, as understood by Midrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim 8.  
8 Sifri Devarim 8. See also Midrash Rabba, Bereishit 39:8.  
9 See also Chatam Sofer (Sukkah 36a), who equates producing Israel’s fruits with wearing Tefillin!  
11 Sanhedrin 98a.  
12 Igrot HareAya 3:155.  
14 Shekalim 14b.  
15 Orach Chayim 208.  
16 See Responsa Torah Lishma 418, where he uses this appreciation to explain the importance of touring Israel to eat its fruit.
On Shabbat Shira (which always coincides with the week of Tu BiShvat), we read Shirat HaYam – the Song of the Sea, praising G-d for miraculously saving us from the charging Egyptian army. The haftarah reading is Shirat Devorah, a similar national military song after vanquishing the Canaanite forces.

As we sing in Shirat HaYam of independence and eventual ‘planting’ in the Land:

"You will bring them and implant them on the mount of Your heritage, the foundation of your dwelling place that You, G-d have made." We hear a connection to Tu BiShvat – the time for planting and calculating the growth of trees in Eretz Yisrael.

But when we read the haftarah, the Land imagery is more direct and the blessings of Eretz Yisrael resonate loud and clear. The narrative begins with Devorah, a prophetess who sits under a palm tree near Beit-El.

Our initial association is with another Devorah, Rivka’s nursemaid, who was buried under a tree in Beit-El as Ya'akov returns to his homeland. Hence, the name Devorah conjures up images of milk (associated with nursing) and honey (Devorah means bee in Hebrew, as well as her sitting under the date palm).

This of course reminds us of the special blessing bestowed upon Eretz Yisrael as a ‘Land flowing with milk and honey.’ This expression appears 16 times in the Torah and five times in Nevi’im (Prophets). Perhaps from the outset, after 20 years of Canaanite oppression, this is an allusion that the blessings of the Land will finally be restored through Devorah’s Divine inspiration.

As we continue the story, this message is further enhanced. We hear of the miraculous mayhem that led to the defeat of the Canaanite chariots near Mount Tabor, followed by Yael’s heroic assassination of Sisera, the Canaanite general, by offering him milk to drink. She thereby merits the praise of Devorah and Barak in song - “By women in the tent will she be blessed.” How? By providing for peaceful settlement in the Land through the women of milk and honey!

The Chatam Sofer explains that the Land of Israel is blessed with milk and honey to remind us that just as Torah is compared to milk and honey because it enhances the body and soul with all its words, so does the fruit of the Land nourish our entire being. Indeed, the last letters of the words ‘зем’גלול דבש’ (Shabbat). Israel’s produce is so bountiful that every day of the week here is like Shabbat!

How appropriate that we enter Tu BiShvat to celebrate the Land of Israel’s blessings – trees, fruit, milk and honey et al – after singing the songs of milk and honey on Shabbat, praising and thanking G-d for the marvels and miracles of Eretz Yisrael!

Shabbat Shira: SONG OF MILK AND HONEY

1 Exodus 15.
2 Judges 5.
3 Exodus 15:17.
4 The Ashkenazi custom is to begin from chapter 4; the Sephardi custom is to begin directly with the song in chapter 5.
5 See Hadar Zekeinim on Genesis 35:8.
6 Genesis 35:8.
7 Reflective of both opinions in the Mechilta of Rashbi (13:5) regarding the interpretation of “Land of Milk and Honey.” Rabbi Eliezer maintains that both the milk and honey are from fruits; the honey from dates. Rabbi Akiva posits that the blessing of milk is from animals and the honey from bees.
8 Only once – in the narrative of Datan and Aviram (Numbers 16) – is it mentioned in reference to Egypt.
9 Similar allusions to honey may be found in the parasha as well, for example, Exodus 15:27 – “And they came to Elim, where there were 12 springs of water, and 70 palm trees; and they encamped there by the waters.” And 16:31 – “And the house of Israel called the name thereof manna; and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.”
10 Interestingly, in both Exodus 14:24 and Judges 4:15, the same expression is used – ‘יָהָם הַשָּׁבָּת’ “Land of Milk and Honey,” and G-d confounded.”
11 Judges 4:19 and 5:24-25.
12 Chiddushei Chatam Sofer, Gemara Chulin 71b.
13 Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:3.

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TEN LEVELS OF Sanctity

The Sifrei Zuta, in its first gloss to Sefer Bamidbar (5:2), discusses the mitzvah to send the temei'im (impure) outside the various machanot (camps), stating “There are 10 levels of sanctity.” The Mishna similarly lists these 10 levels in ascending order of kedushah (sanctity), starting with Eretz Yisrael and concluding with the Holy of Holies. There are slight discrepancies between these two presentations, and Rav Menachem Ziemba Hyd examines them in his Otzar HaSifrei.

Rav Soloveitchik was fond of discussing the first level of kedushah listed in the Mishna—that of Eretz Yisrael: “Eretz Yisrael is holier than all other lands. And what constitutes its holiness? That we bring from it the [barley used for the] omer-offering, the [first fruits offered as] bikkurim, and the [wheat used for the] shetei haLechem [two loaves on Shavuot], which we do not bring from all other lands.”

It seems strange that of all the dinim that make Eretz Yisrael unique—the mitzvot התלויות בארארי agricultural mitzvot dependent upon the land (teruma, maasur, shemitta, yovel, leket, shikcha, peah, challa)—specifically these three obscure dinim are the ones chosen to express the uniqueness of Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Ziemba and Rav Soloveitchik explained that the Sifrei Zuta and Mishna are not merely outlining the special kedushah of Eretz Yisrael per se. In this context, Chazal express the notion that there are 10 levels of kedushat haMikdash. Its most intense level is in the Kodesh HaKodashim (Holy of Holies). The kedusha then spills over to the other areas, until it fills the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael itself, which possesses the 10th level of kedushat haMikdash.

Upon the dedication of the first Beit HaMikdash, Shlomo HaMelech offered the tefilla, “And they shall pray to You by way of their Land You gave to their forefathers, and [by way of] the city You have chosen, and [through] the Beit HaMikdash I built for Your Name.”

The requirement to face Eretz Yisrael during tefilla, which then ascends to G-d “by way of the Land,” is based on the fact that the entirety of Eretz Yisrael contains an element of kedushat Beit HaMikdash. The Rambam (Hilchetot Tefilla 5:3) seems to hold that it is a Torah requirement for one outside the Land to face Eretz Yisrael when praying.

Similarly, the Gemara in Ketubot (111a) teaches, based on the pasuk, וְכִפֶּר אַדְמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ וְכִפֶּר אַדְמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ וְכִפֶּר אַדְמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ—“And His land shall atone for His Nation” (Devarim 32:43), that whoever is buried in Eretz Yisrael achieves kappara (atonement) as if he were buried under the mizb’ach (altar). Kappara is achieved specifically through Eretz Yisrael’s relationship with the Beit HaMikdash, just as the Beit HaMikdash is where one brings korbanot (sacrifices) for kappara.

Another din (law) that reflects the kedushat haMikdash aspect of Eretz Yisrael is that maaser beimeha (animal tithes) and bechor beimeha tehora (firstborn kosher animals) are not offered as korbanot if they come from outside Eretz Yisrael. Similarly, the Mechilta holds that the allowance, during certain periods in history, to offer a korban on a bama (altar outside of the Beit HaMikdash) was likewise only applicable in Eretz Yisrael.

The Mishna added a third din to demonstrate that Eretz Yisrael contains an element of kedushat haMikdash—that only the fruits of Eretz Yisrael are obligated in bikkurim. The Mishna must hold that bikkurim is not only one of the mitzvot התלויות_bmikdash, but is rather part of the avodah of the Beit HaMikdash, and the fruits must therefore grow on land that possesses kedushat Beit HaMikdash.

This is the point of dispute between the Mishna and some versions of the Sifrei Zuta, which do not include the din of bikkurim along with the omer and shetei haLechem. The latter maintain that bikkurim is one of the mitzvot התלויות_bmikdash. Therefore, while it is true that the fruits of bikkurim may only come from produce grown in Eretz Yisrael, this din does not prove anything regarding the kedushat haMikdash aspect of Eretz Yisrael. This aspect of the kedusha of Eretz Yisrael can only be proven through the dinim regarding the omer and the shetei haLechem. [See Nefesh HaRav, pp. 77-78; Eretz HaTzvi, p. 97.]

1 Keilim 1:6-10.
2 Melachim I, 8:48.
3 According to Rabbi Akiva, Bechorot 53a, Temura 21b.
4 Pesichta, Parashat Bo; see Kli Chemda, Parashat Chukat, siman 4.
5 This essay can be seen in a more expanded form in the sefer Rav Schachter on the Parsha.

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LUXURY CRUISES / EXOTIC TOURS / ITALIAN ALPS / AFRICAN SAFARI / SUKKOT HOTELS / ISRAEL TOURISM
Ari Fuld, 45, was murdered four months ago at the Gush Etzion Junction, at the entrance to a supermarket. As he was bleeding from a mortal wound, he found the strength to run after and shoot his attacker, saving other Jewish lives in the process. The Editor of HaMizrachi recently spent time with Ari’s parents, Mary and Rabbi Yonah Fuld, at their home in Jerusalem.

Mary: When the army mistakenly discharged Ari, he wouldn’t give up until they let him back in again. He harassed them, pleading, begging, until they allowed him into the paratroopers. He was with them in the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

And it was the same when they sent him his discharge papers at age 40. He just tore them up. He wasn’t going to give up the privilege of being a soldier in the IDF so easily.

Mary: When Ari came out of that war, he said to me, “Mom, now I’m going to do what’s important.” And he sat in yeshiva every day, from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon, when he went to teach karate.

Yonah: Another one wrote, “I hate to say Ari Fuld was my karate teacher, it’s so diminishing. Ari Fuld taught me to love Torat Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael. He taught me how to be a better human being, how to relate to people and... listen to this... he said, “I’ve been to yeshiva my whole life, I went to Israel for two years, I learned, I went to yeshiva college, but it was Ari Fuld who taught me how to daven.”

Once a father came to Ari after karate class. “Ari, I apologize, I didn’t give my boy his Ritalin today. I’m so sorry, it will never happen again.” Ari says to him, “Ritalin? Stand here.” And he takes the boy and asks him to go through the kata movements. The boy does everything perfectly and Ari says to the father, “See that? Don’t you ever give him Ritalin when you send him to me!”

Yonah: His teaching was based on a method called Tora Dojo. Nothing to do with Torah although it has a Jewish orientation. Tora means tiger in Japanese.

Mary: A guy came to the shiva, and told us he used to beat up people in the street. His parents sent him to Tora Dojo because they thought it had something to do with Torah, and Ari taught him. “Your son changed my life,” he said. “I stopped being a bully. Ari taught me how to fight, and how not to fight.”

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Mary: Another man comes to the shiva. He says, “Many years ago I took classes with Ari. I told him I didn’t have money to pay him. And he said don’t worry about it, we’ll work it out, just come. And all the years I came, and he did so much for me.” And then he reaches into his pocket and pulls out an envelope. “Here’s a check for the back money I owe him.”

Yonah: It was never about money though, never. And never about ego. And that’s what we’ve been hearing for four months now. We never knew the impact he had on tens of thousands of people. One person after another: “I met Ari and my life changed.” Or “I never met Ari but he changed my life.” Over and over again.

Mary: A soldier came to us, big guy. He gets down on his knees and says, “Ari changed my life. I was 15 years old, left high school in Wisconsin and came to Israel to find out something about my Jewish roots. I wanted to enlist in the army but they wouldn’t take me because I was huge. I met Ari somewhere and told him I was thinking of going back to the States to join the US army. ‘Are you crazy? Are you going to fight for something that’s not yours? Fight for something that’s yours! You’re going to lose weight. I’m going to call you every week and you’re going to lose weight.” He lost 70 pounds and the army took him.

Mary: One more thing about his learning. He always walked around with a Gemara in his hand. He had a fire burning in him. He didn’t sleep. Every Thursday night he would go to mishmar (all-night study) at Netiv Aryeh; Rav Bina would give a shiur till late and Ari would take the boys to the Kotel, dance and sing and share divrei Torah. Sometimes he went on to learn at the shiva, dance and sing and share divrei Torah. He gets down on his knees and says, “When we got a toy he was the first one to take it out to play with, and if you ask all the nieces and nephews what they remember about him, they’ll say he threw us up in the air and played and wrestled with us.”

Yonah: That was him. A great family man. His wife and children meant everything to him. He also had a wonderful sense of humor, and an impish childlike streak. Like his son, Yakir, said at the funeral, “When we went to the movies, he would get a toy he was the first one to take and give to another child.”

Mary: Yes. He was a regular guy. Just a regular guy from the States. A mensch. There was a show on TV here once a week, where Yariv Oppenheimer, head of Peace Now, would debate Ari, and it often got very heated. But Yariv came to the shiva and told us that “no matter what went on on-set, we went upstairs afterwards, had a drink together, schmoozed, and Ari was always a real mensch.”

Yonah: He just cared for every human being. He was selfless, really selfless. He just gave and gave and gave.

Listen to this story one of his students wrote us: “I was in Ari’s 6th grade class. We had a school hike, 5th and 6th grade together. We had to go through deep water or jump across something. And everybody did it except for one boy, who was too afraid. We all tried to encourage him and hold his hand, but he wouldn’t do it, he was terrified. Ari, who was not his teacher, said let me help you. He went deep into the water, stood there and told the boy to step on his feet. And he stepped on Ari’s feet and crossed over…”

It seems a lot of people stepped on Ari’s feet as they overcame obstacles in their lives.

Mary: He did everything with enthusiasm, passion, whether it was karate or singing, blowing the shofar, learning. Everything. He even kissed the ground here every time he came off the plane. How many people do that these days?

Ari created a tsunami in this world, that’s the only thing I can say. A tsunami of passionate, positive Jewish, Zionist, human action.

Besides our personal loss, which I can’t even describe, I just feel like there’s now an empty black hole in the world. In Am Yisrael…

Yonah: Yeah, we’re ripped apart inside, and he’s not coming back. We’re not waking up from this one. But all those people that are with us, supporting us, telling us Ari stories or whatever, it has to be a comfort somehow. It’s uplifting, inspiring and as rational human beings, we have no choice but to move ahead. We’re here in Israel, we have what to live for, and we’re going to keep on going.

Mary: When the Prime Minister was here just before the levaya (funeral), he was trying to understand how Ari had had the strength to run after the terrorist after being stabbed. He said it must have been the last blood in his body. My son Doni – who looks exactly like Ari – said, “With all due respect to the Prime Minister, it wasn’t the last blood in his body that allowed him to do that. It was his neshama (soul).”
When buying fruits and vegetables abroad, is it better to buy Israeli produce or to actually avoid buying it, because maybe terumot and ma’asrot have not been taken?

The Rambam writes (Hilchot Terumot 1:22) that fruits exported overseas are exempt from terumot and ma’asrot. The Ra’avad disagrees and says there is a deRabbanan obligation. Other Rishonim also rule that terumot and ma’asrot must be taken from Israeli exports (e.g. Rosh, Sefer Year’im, Sefer HaChinuch, Rabbeinu Yona).

The Rambam’s position invites deeper analysis. Terumot and ma’asrot must be taken from fruit in Eretz Yisrael after the action that makes them ready for use (like picking them from a tree for example). It seems from the Rambam’s wording that there is no such obligation if the produce is being exported.

However, the Ridbaz, the Mishne LaMelech, the Mabit and most Acharonim write that it is simple logic that if the fruits already have an obligation to be tithed in Eretz Yisrael, they should retain that obligation outside of Israel too. According to them, nowadays even the Rambam would agree that it is an obligation, because the action that made them ready for use was performed here in Eretz Yisrael.

The Maharsham (1:72) wrote that even according to those stringent about fruits obligated to be tithed in Eretz Yisrael, if the owner originally intended to export them, they would be exempt. This theory was also mentioned by Rav Kook (Mishpat Kohen 46), and Rav Shaul Yisraeli (Chvat Binyamin, 1:3), even though he himself was particular to separate terumot and ma’asrot but without a bracha. Rav Ovadia Yosef was also lenient (Yabia Omer 10:46), while the Chazon Ish (Demai, 15:4), the Achezer (Kovetz Iggrot 309) and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Ma’adanei Aretz, Terumot 1:22) all ruled that the fruits – even if they were always intended for export – are obligated to be tithed.

**Practical Halacha**

As mentioned above, most Rishonim and Acharonim hold that one should take terumot and ma’asrot but without a bracha. Nevertheless, the Aser Te’aser (21), Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, and Rav Ovadia Yosef all suggest that leniency has support. Even those who are stringent can suffice with the Chazon Ish’s abridged wording of the separation, i.e. make a photocopy of the wording (and place a coin next to it, upon which Ma’aser Sheini and Neta Reva’i will be mecholel – redeemed. A 5-shekel coin will suffice for 50 times), take a little more than one hundredth of the produce and say, “I hereby declare that these are terumot and ma’asrot according to the terumot and ma’asrot wording in my possession,” and then place this one hundredth in a bag and in the garbage.

**The Value of Eating Israeli Fruits**

There is a special merit in eating fruits from Eretz Yisrael. And a special sanctity. Thus wrote the Bach (Orach Chayim 208:8), saying that since the fruits are influenced by the higher sanctity of the Shechina in Eretz Yisrael, so their consumption is automatically not a normal consumption:

“Is it not true that the sanctity of the Land, influenced by the higher sanctity of the Land, is also impacted by its fruits, which imbibe the holiness of the Shechina dwelling in the Land... and therefore it is obvious that we insert, ‘and we shall eat from its fruits and be satiated from its goodness,’ in this bracha [al HaMichya], because by eating its fruits we are nourished by the sanctity and purity of the Shechina.”

This principle was repeated by Rav Kook (Orot HaKodesh 3, p.295): “The food of Eretz Yisrael is innately holy and is only physical in its external appearance.”

This is particularly important for those who do not live in Israel. For when one lives in a place void of the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael, one should at least try to connect to the holiness of the Land as much as possible. Eating fruits from Israel provides some connection to this sanctity and reinforces agriculture in Israel. Observing the mitzvah of separating terumot and ma’asrot also connects a person to Eretz Yisrael.

One should make the effort to buy Israeli produce, and enjoy the merits of eating the fruits of Eretz Yisrael. Ideally one should separate terumot and ma’asrot (without a bracha), easily and simply as described above. Yet even if one doesn’t take terumot and ma’asrot there is a halachic base for that as well.

1 At current exchange rate.

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon is Head of Mizrahi’s Shalhevet Educational Advisory Board, Chairman of the Halacha Education Center and Rabbi of Machon Lev.
W hat did Bnei Yisrael (the Children of Israel) see at the Red Sea that caused them to sing?

“This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him” – Rabbi Eliezer says: a maidservant at the sea saw what Ezekiel and Isaiah did not see, as it is said “and through the prophets I conveyed allegories” (Hoshea 12:11), so they did not see but through visions, as it is said: “the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of G-d” (Ezekiel 1:1), and because they saw seraphs and chayot hakodesh (celestial creatures) to their right and to their left, therefore, they did not recognize the glory of their Creator.

But when G-d Almighty disclosed himself to them on the sea, this was not through an angel and not through a seraph and not through chayot hakodesh. Therefore, when they saw with their souls and their hearts, and they recognized the glory of their Creator, it is as if they saw with their eyes, and even babies and suckling infants could see the glory of their Creator, and they pointed to Him and said “This is our G-d’ ...” (Isaiah 25:9).

According to the midrash, Bnei Yisrael (the Children of Israel) experienced a special Divine revelation at the parting of the sea, during which they attained extreme clarity of the Divine Presence, to the extent they felt they had seen G-d Himself. What was so special about the parting of the Red Sea? We know that it was not the first miracle they had seen at that time. They were of course witnesses to the Ten Plagues that G-d had miraculously brought upon Egypt.

It seems that the splitting of the sea was the peak, the culmination of their exodus from Egypt. After each one of the plagues – and even after the killing of the firstborn – the Egyptians recovered and continued to enslave Bnei Yisrael, or chase after them. The Egyptians drowned at the Red Sea and would never be able to enslave the Jews again. So this was really the first time Bnei Yisrael sensed total freedom and hence they burst out in song.

As long as a person is enslaved to external forces and lives in constant fear and insecurity about his future, he is not free and cannot sing songs of happiness and gratitude. The sense of liberty gives a person inner freedom, which expresses itself in song.

The Song of the Sea (Shirat HaYam) does not only mention the victory over the Egyptians, but also the amazing control over the water: “And with the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were piled up, straight as a wall stood the running water; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea” (Exodus 15:8). The word sea appears eight times in the song. From this we understand that the splitting of the sea was just as much a victory over the sea as it was a victory over the Egyptians. The song emphasizes both elements.

In pagan thought, the sea was uncontrollable, threatening the powers of the gods who fought against it with all their might. Contrary to this belief, the splitting of the sea depicts G-d as a power effortlessly controlling the sea. G-d’s ability to control the water, to part it, to dry the seabed, to create walls of water, surprises Bnei Yisrael (who had lived in a pagan world until now) and shows them very clearly who is the true G-d controlling all forces of nature. Seeing G-d’s special powers so clearly turns belief into certain faith, as stated in the midrash: “when they saw with their souls and their hearts, and they recognized the glory of their Creator, it is as if they saw with their eyes.”

Such a certain, clear faith raised Bnei Yisrael to the highest level of spirituality, causing them to sing and praise G-d. So this is the moment they declare unequivocally: “The L-rd shall reign for ever and ever.”

1 Sechel Tov, Buber, Beshalach, Chapter 15:2.

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Aft er walking through water, there was no water.

In Parashat Beshalach, we are told how, immediately after the miracle of the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, the Israelites entered into the wilderness of Sinai. For three long days they had nothing to drink, so they complained to Moshe and questioned why Hashem was inflicting this suffering upon them. Having looked forward to entering the Promised Land, they felt that they were now condemned to an uncertain life in the wilderness.

Then, they came to Marah, a place blessed with an abundance of water. בָּרָה, כִּי מָרִים הֵם (Exodus 15:23). The Maggid of Mezeritch explains: for three long days, the Israelites were full of bitterness, criticizing Moshe and questioning Hashem's actions. מְרִים הֵם – the Maggid explains that this phrase, “because they were bitter,” does not refer to the water, but to the people. It was the people’s bitterness which caused the water to taste bitter when they drank it; it was their attitude which impacted on what they were drinking and the subsequent taste it had.

There is a children’s story of a bird that flew far and wide in search of fragrant heavens and sweet-smelling friends, but wherever it went it could not find either, until another bird pointed out that there was some dirt stuck underneath the nose of this bird, which is why everything and everyone had a foul smell.

There are two Hebrew words which have the same lettering: onlyg – עֹנֶג and nega – נֶגָּע. Oneg is pleasure, while nega is a plague. They are spelt with the same letters: nun, gimmel and ayin. In עֹנֶג, the nun comes before the g and the ayin, whereas in נֶגָּע it comes after the other two letters, indicating that everything depends on our ע – our eyes that see. How we view a situation makes all the difference.

Two people can experience an identical phenomenon; for one it is a pleasure, for the other it is a plague. When we are embittered, everything we experience can seem to be bitter.

In one week’s time, on January 27, we will be marking Holocaust Memorial Day; the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. It would be totally understandable for us to feel embittered, saddened and miserable, bearing in mind the horrific events that our people has experienced in the last century. However, this Shabbat is also called Shabbat Shira, our Shabbat of Song. On this Shabbat, we will sing the Song of Moshe in the parasha and Shirat Devorah – the song of Deborah in the Haftarah.

וּמִי כְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בָּאָרֶץ (Samuel II 7:23). Isn’t the Jewish people phenomenal! In the wake of so much suffering we sing songs and continue to build our homeland. Instead of being negatively disposed, we are positively minded.

We don’t forget our suffering – we mark it, remember it, memorialize it. However, at the same time we make the most of what we have and, rather than feeling full of bitterness, the world around us becomes sweet.

A Thought for Tu BiShvat

What is the difference between sowing and planting?

When I sow, I uproot the old and sow the new in its place. When I plant, I don’t replace anything. I plant a tree and strive to give it sufficient light and water to produce fruit year after year.

Am Yisrael has no need to uproot anything. We are the branch of G-d’s tree. עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהָרֶץ – “A tree of life, for all who grasp hold of it.”

The Torah is our divinely-inspired, ever-relevant recipe for life. It is both timeless and timely.

In our societies, we chase after the newest, the freshest, the latest, the coolest. But we Jews have a Torah. Yes, it might be ancient, but it is timeless, because G-d has endowed us with a tree of life that always – regardless of time and place – will provide us with the fruits of purpose, meaning and happiness in life.

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Most of the major commentators on the Tanakh and Talmud lived far away from Israel. While they held extraordinarily profound understandings of the biblical narratives, they simply did not have firsthand knowledge of Israel’s physical landscape (with the exception of very few who did manage to reach its shores). Consequently, for many generations, all those who have used these commentaries may find verses referencing the natural world perplexing, boring or even irrelevant. Indeed, over 2,000 years in the Diaspora has taken a toll on our familiarity with and connection to the natural wonders of the Land of Israel – its terrain, wildlife, flora, fauna, geography, and agriculture.

Fast forward to the 21st century, a time when archeological excavations take place throughout Israel and when we can explore the Land firsthand and encounter the magnificence of its natural landscape.

To address this welcome phenomenon, Koren Publishers have released a number of works that feature the natural life of Eretz Yisrael as it relates to our ancient texts. Together with the prolific Torah scholar Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, Koren shares a mission to connect learners around the world to the Land of Israel via Jewish texts and to revitalize the centrality of our Land to the people of the Book.

Rabbi Steinsaltz, who studied biology at Hebrew University, incorporates his vast knowledge of and passion for the natural world into his commentaries on the Torah, Tanakh, Mishna and Talmud. Working with a cadre of scholars, researchers, and design experts, The Noé Edition Koren Talmud Bavli and new Weisfeld Edition Steinsaltz Humash combine color images, fascinating explanatory notes and contemporary design, as they bring the ancient world of our ancestors to life.

Koren has also released The Israel Humash, an all-Hebrew edition with crisp Hebrew font, newly digitized, clear Rashi script, and a special section dedicated to the flora, fauna, vegetation, and animal life in the Torah. These images and brief explanations – groundbreaking in their scope – are the result of a collaboration with Professor Zohar Amar of Bar Ilan University, who contributed his expertise in biblical botany. Modern, 3D maps of the Middle East and color illustrations help make learning Torah more relevant and captivating than ever.

Koren is proud to publish essential resources that can help students of all ages discover and appreciate the natural wonders of our beloved Promised Land.
ISRAEL’S BORDERS, ISRAEL’S BLESSINGS

History can be boring, interesting, or fascinating. It is also critical for understanding the present in light of the past.

Here we are discussing the history of the National Institutions in Israel and the role of the Rural Growth and Development Division (RGD) in one of those institutions, the World Zionist Organization (WZO).

The four National Institutions are the WZO, Keren Kayemet LeYisrael (KKL), Keren HaYesod and the Jewish Agency. World Mizrachi has elected representatives in each of these organizations.

The WZO was established by Herzl himself and serves as the aegis for the other organizations. Its mandate is education, promoting Aliyah and settling the Land. The RGD is the operational division responsible for populating the Land in Yehuda and Shomron (Judea and Samaria), the Negev and the Galilee.

But it’s much more than demographic growth. Our activities include planning, preparing and developing new residential areas and communities, accompanying communities in crisis (whether social, economic, growth, etc.), planning and installing infrastructure, maintaining public buildings, and more.

The progress of the State of Israel involves three stages. The first is the return of Am Yisrael to its Land and the establishment of an independent State, as the Ramban comments on the verse “And you inherited the Land and settled in it” (Numbers 33:53) – “We have been commanded to inherit the Land that G-d gave to our forefathers, to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov, and we will not leave it in the hands of our peers from other nations or leave it desolate.”

The second stage is determining Israel’s borders and preserving national lands. Israel’s borders have never been determined by a physical border or fence but by people and communities who lived far out and developed agriculture, tourism and industry away from the center of the country. As Joseph Trumpeldor said, “In the place where the Jewish plow plows the last furrow, there will our borders be.”

And the third stage is the continued development of the country, improving the standard of living, enhancing rich and varied community life and placing the emphasis on connecting the peripheries to Central Israel. In our eyes, the value of settling the Land – upon which Israel was established 70 years ago – is as important now, at the start of 2019, as it was back then.

One example of this third stage is Kibbutz Kerem Shalom, near Gaza. It was a HaShomer HaZair kibbutz, which for years yearned for new blood. Now it is opening its gates to other populations such as religious groups, hence becoming a mixed community for religious and non-religious alike. We even took part in the dedication of a new shul there, which represents a very significant milestone in this paradigm shift. And even during recent rocket attacks, 13 new families moved into the kibbutz as part of a project initiated by the RGD.

Another example is the community of Natur in the Golan Heights. Not so long ago it was a kibbutz numbering 17 members. They hadn’t managed to develop the place and were on the verge of despair.

Enter the RGD, together with the Golan Regional Authority, who joined forces to restore some vitality and hope to this beautiful place. The rehabilitation program included massive refurbishment of buildings, bringing in new groups of people, improving and laying new water and electricity infrastructure, creating additional agricultural areas, and more.

The plan worked! Today there are approximately 100 families living in Natur, with almost 350 children and a long waiting list for housing...

On one of my recent field trips, I met families who had made Aliyah from France. I myself had the privilege of making Aliyah from there when I was 18. I was in Bruchin, a community in the Shomron, and I saw families who had made that move. They had left the Diaspora and its attendant comforts and come to live in the State of Israel. Not to be taken for granted at all. And the way the locals had been helping and supporting them since their arrival moved me no less, with young and old doing their utmost to ensure that their fellow Jews would acclimatize in the best possible fashion.

That day reminded me that Zionism is still based on three solid pillars: settling the Land, education, and Aliyah. And those are precisely the areas we are engaged in on a day-to-day basis. Am Yisrael Chai!

Gael Grunewald is Head of the Rural Growth and Development Division of the WZO, former Executive Secretary of World Bnei Akiva and one of World Mizrachi’s representatives in the National Institutions.
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A sk any Israeli what we do on Tu BiShvat, and you will be told, “Plant trees!” referring mainly to the organized tree-planting events that attract hundreds of thousands of participants each year. Because this custom is so widespread, Tu BiShvat is actually an official vacation day in Israeli schools.

However, many people may be surprised to learn that planting trees in Eretz Yisrael was not always seen as meritorious. In fact, at one time it was considered a great pioneering accomplishment to cut them down! As strange as this may seem today, it is clear from several biblical passages (for example, see Kings II 2:24 and Micha 5:7) that much of Eretz Yisrael was once covered with thick forests, menacing places inhabited by dangerous animals. So cutting down trees was a positive act of development, as it reduced the dangerous areas and freed up land for human settlement. We even read (Joshua 17:14-18) that when the tribes of Ephraim and Menashe complained to Yehoshua that the territory they’d been given was too small, he replied, “Nonsense! You have plenty of land; it’s just that much of it is a forest. Go cut down the trees and settle the land!”

In contrast, nowadays the JNF plants over 300,000 trees in Israel’s forests every year. How did the situation change so drastically?

The answer begins with a biblical prophecy: “If, with all this, you [still] do not listen to Me...I will destroy your cities and make your temples desolate... and I will make the land barren” (Leviticus 26:27, 31-32). History saw these verses fulfilled very literally – the Jewish people were driven from Eretz Yisrael and, over several centuries beginning in the Middle Ages, it became desolate and depopulated.

Still, some forests remained. But then, in the 19th century, the Ottoman government needed huge quantities of wood for the Hejaz railway line they were building from Damascus to the Arabian Peninsula (1300 km long). The forests of Eretz Yisrael, a nearby but neglected corner of their empire, provided a convenient source. Most of the trees were cut down, decimating the remaining forests and turning some of them into swampland, making the country even more desolate.

When the first Zionist pioneers arrived in the 1880s, they realized that reforesting the land would have to be a priority. These efforts were stepped up during the British Mandate, and new species of trees were introduced, including the eucalyptus (imported from Australia because it grows quickly and consumes large quantities of water, making it helpful for draining swampland), and the Aleppo Pine.

With the establishment of the State of Israel, the JNF embarked on a massive afforestation campaign, eventually planting over 200 million trees to create 280 forests that have changed the landscape from the Upper Galilee all the way down to Eilat. By doing so, whether they realized it or not, they were helping to fulfill a different prophecy: “And you, O mountains of Israel, give forth branches and produce fruit, for My people Israel, who will soon be coming” (Ezekiel 36:8).

However, the forests one sees all over Israel today are very different from the ones described in the Tanach. They are generally dominated by the above-mentioned Aleppo Pine trees, which were chosen because they grow quickly and don’t need a lot of water or maintenance, thus allowing for quick afforestation. These pines have become so ubiquitous that they are mentioned in the opening line of Naomi Shemer’s “Yerushalayim shel zahav,” and have even been given the local name “Jerusalem Pine”!

With the passage of time, though, it has become clear that pines may not have been the best choice. These trees aren’t native to the area, and are highly flammable, which is one of the reasons that Israel suffers from forest fires. Therefore, the JNF has begun to plant a variety of different trees. And when parts of a forest are destroyed by fire, they often refrain from replanting them. Instead, the forests are given the opportunity to regenerate naturally, ultimately producing typical Mediterranean woodlands dominated by local species like oak and pistacia.

The contemporary custom of planting trees on Tu BiShvat to help rehabilitate and redeem the land is a beautiful expression of the joy of a people reunited with its homeland.

Rabbi Alan Haber, a member of the Mizrachi Speakers and Tour Guides Bureaus, is a teacher and a licensed Israeli tour guide.
ne of the reasons that our Sages require our making brachot, is to help us realize the debt of gratitude we owe to G-d for creating the world and giving it to us to benefit from and enjoy.

To that goal, we have a set of brachot for different food and drink and guidelines as to when brachot are to be said. Every halachic detail makes us think about what we are doing, lest we take G-d’s gifts for granted. We are to be guided by certain priorities. Which specific food is honored with a bracha, and in what order are brachot recited when more than one is called for?

In addition to what specific bracha to say (we will focus on HaEitz and HaAdama), there is also the issue of priorities. Which specific food is honored with a bracha first? And in what order are brachot recited?

Let us take three fruits as examples – two at a time, and then all three together. Dates: HaEitz, dried apricots: HaEitz, strawberries: HaAdama.

One more piece of information we need: the personal order of how much you like each fruit (chaviv). In our example, we like apricots the best, strawberries second, and the dates are in third place. If this doesn’t describe you, then just play along.

Final caveat: there are differences of opinions within the halachic details we are presenting – we need to follow the Shulchan Aruch for this to work. (Actually, for this not to work.) Confused? Read on.

Okay, ready? Two at a time. Dates and apricots. Dates are from Shivat HaMinim (one of five fruits in the Seven Species in the verse – Deuteronomy 8:8 – that Eretz Yisrael is blessed with. Dates therefore get the honor of the HaEitz even though you like apricots more and the apricots are covered by the bracha on the dates.

Apricots and strawberries. HaEitz on the apricots first because you like them more and then HaAdama on the strawberries. (Had you liked strawberries more than apricots, HaAdama on strawberries would go first, even though most of us grew up thinking that HaEitz always goes before HaAdama.)

Dates and strawberries. HaAdama on the strawberries first. Then HaEitz on the dates. Chaviv gets the first bracha. Then comes the other bracha on the less-liked fruit.

Objection! With dates and apricots, Shivat HaMinim ‘won’ over chaviv. Why not with dates and strawberries too?

Good question. With dates and apricots, only one bracha is going to be said, because they are both fruits. So the special fruits get the bracha. With dates and strawberries, two brachot are going to be said, meaning dates will have its bracha. Chaviv tells us which goes first.

Now we are ready to juggle all three fruits and present our fruity conundrum.

Dates, apricots, strawberries. Three fruits, two brachot. And remember, we like apricots the best, strawberries second, and the dates are in third place. So what do we eat first?

Dates, because of Shivat HaMinim. No, sorry. Strawberries have priority over dates (because you like them better).

Okay. So strawberries go first. No, sorry again. You like apricots better so they go before strawberries.

Okay. Apricots it is then! No, sorry. Dates go before apricots because of same bracha – HaEitz, but with precedence given to Shivat HaMinim.

Okay, dates. Sorry, we tried that already.

A number of years ago, this conundrum was presented to several rabbis. In my opinion, the best answer was that of Rabbi Reuven Aberman z”l. He said that if the prevalent ruling gives you an impossible situation, check other opinions and see if they fare any better.

Let’s take a look at Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 211. Subsection 1. If one has many fruits in front of him, all of the same bracha (fruits/HaEitz) and among them is one of the five fruits of the Seven Species, the bracha is said on the Shivat HaMinim fruit even if your favorite fruit (chaviv) is one of the others...

In subsection 2, the Shulchan Aruch does a rare thing. He quotes the Rambam by name, with an opinion he (Shulchan Aruch) doesn’t rule by; namely that whether the bracha are the same or different (HaEitz and HaAdama), regardless if there is/are fruit from the five of the Seven, the bracha always goes on what you like best, chaviv.

Conundrum solved! Apricots get the first bracha (HaEitz) covering the dates too, and strawberries get a HaAdama.

And the big lesson? Always think before you make a bracha and appreciate that our Sages wanted us to be genuinely thankful for the bounty G-d provides for us every single day.

Phil Chernofsky

Phil Chernofsky is Educational Director of the OU Israel Center in Jerusalem and Editor of Torah Tidbits
into the crushing vats… and we all sang: ‘Awaken oh People of Israel. Your youth has returned to the Land. Your redemption is near.’”

· In 1890, Baron Edmond de Rothschild’s new winery in Rishon LeZion took in its first harvest. David Yudelevich, one of the workers, described the scene in his journal: “The bell rang at 4 am to wake up the army of young and old, men and women and children, armed with pruning shears. The carts overflowing with grapes began streaming into the crushing vats... and we all sang: ‘Awaken oh People of Israel. Your youth has returned to the Land. Your redemption is near.”

· Israel now has more than 300 active wineries, producing close to 40 million bottles of wine a year! More than 60,000 dunams (15,000 acres) of land are currently under grape cultivation as vineyards.

· “New vineyards with classic varieties... has transformed Israeli wines, as has modern technology and internationally trained winemakers.” Hugh Johnson, Pocket Wine Book

· “The country’s entire wine industry has gained global recognition.” Tom Stevenson, Sotheby’s Wine Guide

Wine

Water

· Israel is a revolutionary superpower in water desalination technology and markets desalination facilities to many other countries (some indirectly).

· Some of the largest desalination plants around the world (which produce more than 100 million cubic meters a year) are located in Israel.

· Approximately 90% of the wastewater generated in Israel is reused, mostly for agriculture, making it the world’s leading nation in water recycling. Spain recycles 20% of its wastewater, making it the second largest nation for water reuse. The USA currently recycles only 1% of its wastewater.

· 50% of drinking water for the Israeli population (2017) is desalinated water.

· In 1955, Dr Harry Zvi Tabor developed black stripping that gathers solar energy and connects it to a contraption to collect heated water, the Solar Water Collector.

· In 2008, Amir Peleg launched Takadu, a software platform that allows cities, regions and countries to monitor their water infrastructure and to detect leaks and burst pipes, saving millions of gallons of water.

· Israel’s natural resources include potash, copper ore, natural gas, phosphate rock, magnesium bromide, clays and sand.

· There are close to one trillion cubic meters of natural gas in Israel’s five offshore fields. 40% of Israel’s electricity production is currently fueled by natural gas from one of them, Tamar, alone.

· The high salinity of Israel’s waters allows it to be a leading exporter of magnesium bromide, a useful mineral found in numerous sedatives and anti-convulsant medications.

· The Dead Sea is estimated to contain at least 1 billion tons of bromine.

· Israel has the world’s third-largest quantity of oil shale (behind the US and China).

Agricultural Innovation

· Each year, Israel exports approximately 45 million tons of potash, a fertilizer, making it the fourth largest exporter of the product after Canada, Russia and Germany.

· In 1965, Simcha Blass and Kibbutz Hatzerim began to mass-produce the world’s first modern drip irrigator, which helps individual farmers, regions and countries to conserve more water.

· In 1983, Mario Moshe Levi and Yaakov Nakash launched Bio-Bee and natural pollination, without harming the environment.

· In 1997, Jaap van Rijn created a unique zero-discharge system to recycle water from fish farms. He revolutionized the world’s ability to reproduce fish anywhere using extremely limited amounts of water and without harming the environment.

Natural Resources

· This land had been ‘dry’ for thirteen centuries, ever since the Moslem conquerors in the seventh century ripped all grape vines out of the ground. Part of the Jewish people’s return to its homeland in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries has involved the reintroduction of quality grape-growing and wine-making.

· In 1890, Baron Edmond de Rothschild’s new winery in Rishon LeZion took in its first harvest. David Yudelevich, one of the workers, described the scene in his journal: “The bell rang at 4 am to wake up the army of young and old, men and women and children, armed with pruning shears. The carts overflowing with grapes began streaming into the crushing vats... and we all sang: ‘Awaken oh People of Israel. Your youth has returned to the Land. Your redemption is near.”
**Marvels of The Land of Israel**

and the ingenuity of its people

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**Fruit and Veg**

- Every year, Israel exports more than $2 billion worth of produce and is among the world’s top developers of better-looking, better-tasting, disease-resistant and more nutritious varieties of fruit and vegetables.

- The seedless Beit Alpha cucumber was introduced in 1936. Its descendants — including the Yokneam pineapple and Ogen melon (later the Galia melon) — also set a global commercial standard.

- Orangetti spaghetti squash was the first hybrid Israeli vegetable grown in the United States under its own name.

- Ben Dor Fruits and Nurseries’ grapefruit-pomelo hybrid is marketed overseas as Sweetie. It’s sweeter and less acidic than a grapefruit, smaller than a pomelo and much easier to peel.

- The development of the mini seedless red pepper began at the Israeli seed company Zeraim Gedera. Angello, the first seedless bell pepper in the world, won the Fruit Logistica Innovation Award in 2012.

- In 1980, Chaim Rabinovitch and Nachum Keidar genetically modified a tomato into a miniature version called the cherry tomato.

- The Nano watermelon, a product resulting from three years of development by Origene Seeds, Hishtil Nurseries and Itai Gal, a farmer from Moshav Ein Yahav, is sweeter than its larger ancestor, a slightly different color and no heavier than 6.6 pounds.

- The Anna apple was developed by horticulturist Ephraim Slor and named after his daughter. Most apple varieties need a winter chill to thrive, but Anna ripens in the early summer and grows in hot climates such as Indonesia, southern California and southern Texas.
Look out of your window. Do you know – do you really understand – what you’re seeing? In far too many areas in Israel, people have been gazing out their windows, taking in the stunning views of the Holy Land, without realizing they are looking at a new battleground for the future of the Jewish Homeland.

Ever so quietly, without the roar of battle or the clamor of war, the Jewish people are losing significant parts of the Land of Israel. Cement mixers have replaced tanks, bricks have replaced bullets, and innocent-looking civilians, including children, have replaced soldiers, but their goal remains the same: through illegal construction and land seizure, their aim is to take over significant chunks of the country, acre by acre, town by town, with the assistance of massive funding from anti-Zionist organizations, within Israel and abroad.

Regavim (Hebrew for mounds of earth) was conceived in the darkest days of 2005, as Gush Katif was emptied of its Jews and Peace Now was waging a successful legal campaign against a host of Jewish communities. Three young Jewish idealists looked out of their windows – one from his home in Samaria, one from his office window in the Binyamin region, and one from the window of an IDF jeep in the Negev – and realized that the Land of Israel was gradually disappearing before their very eyes. Together, they combined their expert legal and fieldwork skills to confront the forces undermining Jewish sovereignty and delegitimizing the Jewish State.

Ever since, they have been singlehandedly waging the legal battle to preserve Israel’s most precious resource: the land itself.

The three, Yehuda Eliyahu, Meir Deutsch, and Betzalel Smotrich (now a Member of Knesset), began submitting “mirror petitions” to the High Court of Justice, turning the very methods used by anti-Zionist organizations against them. Day after day, week after week, year after year, a small but dedicated staff of fieldworkers and attorneys have documented, researched, and prosecuted the abuses of Israel’s resources and sovereignty that threaten the very foundations of the Jewish State.

Exposing Strategic Land Seizure
This is a “big picture” operation, as the detailed information collected in the field comes together to create a broad, comprehensive approach.

Thus, in Judea and Samaria, Field Coordinator Yishai Hemo traverses the countryside, investigating and documenting illegal construction – carried out in areas under full Israeli jurisdiction, but without permits or planning, in violation of international
law and the Oslo Accords, as well as Israeli law - but the individual cases are only a part of the larger goal. "By ‘connecting the dots’ between seemingly-random Palestinian outposts throughout the region, we unmasked the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) plan, supported by the European Union’s ongoing violations of international law, to build a de facto Palestinian state in Area C according to the Fayyad Plan," says Hemo.

“This year, we exposed the PA’s systematic program of strategic land seizure through mass-scale agricultural activity, funded by Arab and European countries. Taking advantage of the outmoded system of law in force in Judea and Samaria, the PA has begun to redraw the map and stake Palestinian claims to huge areas that the Oslo Accords placed under full Israeli jurisdiction. Our detailed study of the problem was presented to the Prime Minister, members of the cabinet, ministers and MKs. At the same time, we filed several Supreme Court petitions, launched a media campaign, and took MKs on fact-finding tours of endangered areas in Judea and Samaria.

Our “Roots of Evil” report has served as the basis for a series of hearings in the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee; as a result of our intensive efforts, the Ministry of Defense has finally acknowledged the problem, and has drafted recommendations to combat this strategic threat. The Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria, the official body responsible for law enforcement, has turned a blind eye as the PA, with the help of tens of millions of Euros provided by the EU and others, has expropriated tens of thousands of acres of state land – land that is now permanently lost to the Jewish State."

Protecting Israel’s Environment
In its fight to protect the land itself, the organization has become a major force in environmental protection. In 2018 alone, Regavim opened 50 new environmental abuse case-files: “We petitioned against unlicensed, polluting garbage dumps and illegal quarries that are scarring the countryside, water pollution caused by dumping of raw sewage, destruction of the landscape, and more,” says Hezi Eyal, Field Coordinator for the Northern Region. "In some cases, our activity had immediate results; in others, we battle on. Our research on the illegal automotive scrapyards that are blighting the north of Israel revealed that there is no official government authority responsible for enforcing the law in cases of environmental crime – and the crimes involved are many: illegal scrapyards are polluting our soil and water, flooding the used-parts market with sub-standard, undocumented merchandise, and fostering a hotbed of organized crime. Our report on these scrapyards will serve as the basis for continued activism in the Knesset and the courts in 2019."

“The idea is to empower the government to exercise its power,” says Meir Deutsch, who recently assumed the role of Director-General. “We use the information we gather to create an overview of the problem. We research the history and the legal issues that impact what we see out in the field today, and map out the problem using every resource we can get our hands on: archival material, land deeds and official documents, historic photographs, up-to-date aerial and drone photography, state-of-the-art GIS maps, and more. When we have the facts, the next stage begins. We process and digest all of this information and build our case, file official complaints with the relevant authorities, and closely monitor enforcement activity. When necessary, we take it to the next stage. Our legal department petitions the court for an injunction or work-stop order.”

The process doesn’t end there, though. The follow-up often takes longer than the case-building or prosecution, and some active cases have been in the courts for a decade. In the interim, Deutsch and his colleagues use the information and experience to piece together a larger picture of the underlying issues, and to formulate solutions. With hard facts and incisive analysis, they take any and every procedural and legal measure necessary to compel those responsible to enforce the law. And when the law is insufficient or unclear, they focus their
efforts on lobbying and participation in Knesset hearings, and have become a major contributor to important pieces of legislation that strive to fill the gaps that allowed the problems to arise in the first place.

It’s painstaking, exacting work on a shoestring budget with a small but dedicated staff. The odds against their success seem insurmountable; the magnitude of the challenges stupendous. Yet they have sued the United Nations for violations of Israel’s sovereignty in Jerusalem, forced the European Union to halt illegal construction in the Adumim region, rewritten Israel’s Planning and Construction Law, and more.

Some of their recent successes are already having a tremendous impact. Amichai Yogeved, Southern Region Field Coordinator, explains: “Let’s take Israel’s land-use policy in the Negev as an example. After investigating and documenting the massive problem of illegal Bedouin settlements, we presented our comprehensive plan for the Negev to the government in 2017. Since then, “The Negev Challenge,” our vision for the future of this region – which comprises two-thirds of Israel – has become the basis for strategic planning in the Negev.”

Polygamy in the Bedouin Sector
“An important outgrowth of our activity in the Negev is this past year’s report on the practice of polygamy in the Bedouin sector. Polygamy is illegal in Israel; nonetheless, the State of Israel has turned a blind eye to the widespread – and growing – practice of polygamy among Bedouin in the Negev for decades. As a result, the Bedouin population in the Negev is the fastest growing population in the world, doubling in size every 15 years. This phenomenal rate of growth has made the resolution of the Negev’s housing and regulation crises far more difficult, and has created an untenable situation of lawlessness, underprivileged, and political disenfranchisement among Israel’s Bedouin citizens.”

Regavim spent years sounding the alarm about this phenomenon, which is inextricably entangled in domestic abuse, violation of the rights of women and children, staggering financial and social burdens on Israel’s economy, and the radicalization of the disenfranchised, neglected, and underprivileged children born into this reality; this past year, at last, their efforts brought about a significant shift in the government’s policy. “New Ministry of Justice directives, based on our recommendations, have begun to address the problem, as part of our overall vision for Israeli sovereignty throughout the Land of Israel.”

Naomi Kahn, Director of Regavim’s International Division, sums it up: “Our activities extend from the ground – literally – all the way up to Israel’s legislative and judicial elites, from “Protecting the Eternal,” a joint project that safeguards Israel’s archaeological treasures, through “The Adam v’Adamah Center for Zionism, Jurisprudence, and Society,” which promotes the formulation and dissemination of pro-settlement legal doctrine among jurists, academics, media and public figures, and the general public. All of this depends on the partnership and support of Jews from around the world who share our love of Israel. Each and every one of them shares the responsibility, the vision, and the success – and we welcome others to join our fight to protect Israel’s resources, preserve Israeli sovereignty, and secure our shared birthright – for our children, grandchildren, and beyond.”

1 According to the UN World Population Study, Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics, and data supplied by the National Insurance Institute of Israel. The full report may be viewed at http://bit.ly/2LzMeSl or on Regavim’s website (www.regavim.org).

To learn more, or to invite a Regavim representative to your community, contact Naomi Kahn at n.regavim@gmail.com

Birds-eye view of illegal Bedouin settlement in the Negev
In Praise of Conflict Management

The urge to “do something,” to devise a proper and permanent answer to Israel’s Palestinian predicaments, is well rooted in our culture. It flows from a Western tradition (and in recent centuries, a pragmatic American notion) of problem solving. When bad things happen, the urge becomes stronger, as does the chorus of voices berating the present leadership and high command for their lack of strategic vision and plans for bringing the conflict to an end.

For some, the preferred design would involve the use of overwhelming force to destroy, say, Hamas’ hold on Gaza. They would also seek an unequivocal victory over the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, and counsel the government to dismantle the accords altogether and return to pre-Oslo verities.

Others call either for a resumption of negotiations on Palestinian terms, or for a non-negotiated unilateral withdrawal from significant parts of Judea and Samaria. This would reassure the Palestinians, and the world, that the prospect of a Palestinian state has been rendered irreversible.

Here and there, alternative plans – as yet vague or unworkable – are put forward by fertile and creative minds, including notions of a “federal” state and other inventive constitutional solutions. All belong to the broad category of conflict resolution strategies.

But what if the urge to “solve the problem” is misguided? Under present circumstances in the region (and the world), sober policies aimed at conflict management are a more rational and even moral choice. They are not a cowardly cop-out of spineless politicians and overly-cautious military tacticians.

Sometimes, the bid to solve profound and painful problems leads to tragic results, due to the “law of unexpected consequences.” Israelis have had a measure of this in previous decades. From Sharon’s adventure in Lebanon in 1982 to Oslo in 1993, grand transformative designs have turned out to have deadly flaws hidden in their inner mechanisms.

The same can also be said of the American intervention in Iraq in 2003. Things went wrong, and in ways not fully or even dimly anticipated by the grand strategy designers.

Grand designs should be measured against their resilience to such built-in risks of failure; even more so when dealing with a region as volatile and unpredictable as the Middle East. When this is the landscape to be navigated, our captains should not be faulted for being cautious before they sail into the storm.

Conflict management does not come without a cost. It can be interpreted as a sign of weakness and it angers many, who pin the blame on the government and/or on the IDF for not hitting the Palestinians harder. It brings anguish to others, who want to see their millennial hopes for peace translated into action.

Nevertheless, it is the right direction for Israel at this time, requiring a careful balance between doing too much and too little.

Even in Gaza, despite the recent drive by Hamas to breach the fences, the potential is there for a conflict management bargain that would make life better – if Mahmoud Abbas’ negative tactics could be overcome. The alternatives – various options for forcing the issue by major new initiatives or military action – could turn out to be very costly for both sides.

The urge for a solution is understandable. But sometimes, the humorously inverted dictum – “don’t just do something, stand there” – may turn out to make more sense than setting in motion a chain of unpredictable consequences. This is especially true when Israel faces a very real prospect of escalation in the north and of having to act – in this case, a wise precaution – to prevent the establishment of an Iranian strategic presence in Syria.

None of this should be read as an endorsement of the present situation in perpetuity. All it means is that at this specific junction in Israel’s history and in the region, overwhelming question-marks pile up against any major transformative project.

Wisdom may well require a policy of gaining time; awaiting the possible emergence of more conducive circumstances for policy initiatives down the road – while doing what must be done to bring down the cost of conflict.

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Mizrachi inspires people with a sense of commitment to the Torah, the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

Mizrachi is the global Religious Zionist movement, spreading Torah Eretz Yisrael across the world and strengthening the bond between over 1,000 Jewish communities and the State of Israel. Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for merkaz ruchani (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez.
A

As Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, the Torah describes their travels:

וְיָסֹב אֱלֹקִיִּם אֶת הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם סֻף
וַחֲמֻשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.

They travelled through the desert, and they went up חֲמֻשִׁים, which is a difficult word to translate.

Rashi tells us that חֲמֻשִׁים means armed and ready to conquer the enemy nations they would encounter.

The Targum of Yonatan ben Uziel suggests:

וְכָל חַד עִם חַמְשָׁא טַפְלָא סְלִיקוֹ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרִים,

Each family went up with five children.

That’s pretty amazing, for every family to be of the same size?

The Targum Yerushalmi posits

מְזַיְּנָן בְּעוּבְדָא טָבָא סְלִיקוֹ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּרִיקִין מֵאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם,

They were armed with מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים (good deeds). This also requires elaboration, given that just the day before, on the 14th of Nissan, Chazal understand that we were naked from mitzvot, based on the verse in Ezekiel 2

וְאַתְּ עֵרֹם וְעֶרְיָה

so G-d had to provide us with דַּם פֶּסַח וְדַם מִילָה (the blood of Pesach and the blood of circumcision), and now we are full and laden with mitzvot?

Maybe the secret is the Rashi we are familiar with on חֲמֻשִׁים:

וְלָמָּה הֵבִיא עֲלֵיהֶם חֹشֶׁךְ, שֶׁהָיוּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר רְשָׁעִים, וְלֹא הָיוּ רוֹצִים לָצֵאת, וּמֵתוּ בִּשְׁלֹשֶׁת יְמֵי אֲפֵלָה כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִרְאוּ מִצְרַיִם בְּמַפָּלָתָם וְיֹאמְרוּ אַף הֵן לוֹקִין כָּמוֹנוּ.

"And why did He bring darkness upon them, because in that generation there were evil people in Israel, and they didn’t want to leave, and they died during the three days of darkness so that the Egyptians wouldn’t witness their downfall and say that they are being afflicted like us.”

Four fifths of the nation died. Rav Yosef M’Salant, in his Be’er Yosef, suggests that only the adults died, but their children lived. They weren’t old enough to be punished. Millions of orphans. Who took care of them? Who watched over them? The rest of Klal Yisrael. Each took four other sets of children.

אֲבָל הַיְּלָדִים שֶׁל אֵלֶּה הָרֵשָׁעִים נִשְׁאֲרוּ בַּחַיִּים, ..וְאִם כֵּן, הָיוּ אַרְבַּע חֲלָקִים שֶׁל יְלָדִים קְטַנִּים מִכְּלַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁנִּשְׁאֲרוּ בְּלִי הוֹרִים,.א”כ בְּוַדַּיֵּי הָיוּ מוּטָלִים כָּל אֵלּוּ הַטְּפָלִים, יַלְדֵיהֶם שֶׁל אַרְבָּעָה הַחֲלָקִים שֶׁמֵּתוּ - עַל חֵלֶק הַחֲמִישִׁי שֶׁיָּצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם.

"But the children of those evil ones remained alive... and if so, there were four parts of small Jewish children who were left without parents. If so, it is obvious that responsibility for all these subordinates, the children of the four parts that died, was on the fifth part who left Egypt.”

Now we understand the pshat (plain meaning) of the Targum Yonatan ben Uziel. Not five children per family, but each had five sets of children, their own plus four more. That is also the pshat of the Targum Yerushalmi – laden with מעשׂים טובים.

Let us appreciate what they did, says the Be’er Yosef. It is somewhat common to take other people’s children on short trips, or for a play date. It often even makes it more fun. But on longer trips, on trips without snacks and amenities, without provisions, that’s a totally different story.

ואל שדכרו להם במדבר ברוך נחרת אצל שדכרו כאן
ואל ממל שועווה לא הלך יהודה אצלו...

“But when walking a long way in the desert, with no knowledge of the destination, they wouldn’t easily be persuaded to take a strange child with them”

Yet they did. Those were the good deeds. They considered them as their own children. And that’s a deeper meaning of זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ , “I recall for you the kindness of your youth,” the kindness you did with הנערים (young)!?

So we all left Egypt with five families, with the neighbor’s children. We cared for each other’s children as if they were our own. This is our legacy, this is our heritage, and this is our mandate. Next week, we will read כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד as one person with one heart. We cannot let this be a one-time event, but rather a motto to live by. One family, one heart, one nation. We are all G-d’s children, and together we must care for all of our children.

1 Exodus 13:18.
2 Ezekiel 16:7.
3 Jeremiah 2:2.
4 Rashi, Exodus 19:2.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner is a Rebbe at Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh and Rabbi of the Nofei HaShemesh community.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner
The oranges, eggplants and tomatoes of the Land of Israel are bearers of a Divine message: G-d has re-juiced the Land so that all His children can come home and live in plenty. Here is their Tu BiShvat call to action; a “letter from a tomato”:

“We, the vegetables and fruits of the Land of Israel, want Jews to know what a dramatic transformation has been wrought over the past century in our subterranean world.

After the destruction of the Second Jewish Commonwealth in 70 CE, all plants in this land received a directive from Heaven to stop growing. A slumber was slapped on the Land of Israel. We would only be allowed to rev up our biological engines and begin producing anew when the Jewish people would return and upon direct instruction from the Almighty.

We were very sad to see our people going off into exile, but we heeded the word of G-d. We also knew that He had forewarned of this in Leviticus (26:32), telling the Jews that if they messed up, exile would ensue and that He ‘would make the land desolate.’ Furthermore, we were told not to respond with any enthusiasm to Israel’s enemies. Over the centuries there were many foreign occupiers: Romans, Byzantines, Moslems, Crusaders, Turks and more. They all invaded but we did not react to their attempts to bring us to life. The land remained barren.

There were moments when we thought our misery was coming to an end. We thought our children were coming home. For example, in the 12th century, we heard reports that ‘they are coming.’ 300 Tosafists came from the Rhineland, but no more.

False alarms continued. Nachmanides arrived in 1267, Ovadia of Bartenura in 1492, Yehuda HaChassid and his followers in 1700, then the students of the Baal Shem Tov and the students of the Vilna Gaon. But we received no green light from G-d to begin growing again.

So, we, the fruits of the Land of Israel, waited and waited. We hoped and prayed for the return of this land’s indigenous people.

Then, toward the end of the 19th century, rumors again began to race beneath the surface of the earth. Birds flying overhead and clouds cruising the skies said: ‘They are coming.’ And then the great command came directly from G-d: ‘O mountains of Israel, shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to My people Israel; for they are at hand to come’ (Ezekiel 36:8). Grow! Respond to the work of their hands! Make Israel great again.

You should have seen the joy beneath the surface. There hadn’t been such activity in millennia. We awoke from hibernation, stretched our roots and smiled. We were directed to turn arid and nearly dead Israel into a verdant, fruitful, agricultural world superpower.

And the Lord further instructed us: ‘Don’t check the tzitzit of these returning Jews. It makes no difference whether they are religious or not. They are My children and they are coming home. Grow even in the shemita year, even using the heter mechira.’ Grow, impart your bounty, grow!’

We did so in abundance. We gave forth almond, apple, apricot, banana, barley, cabbage, cherry, chickpea, date, fig, grapefruit, guava, kiwi, lemon, lychee, mango, melon, peach, pear, plum, radish, squash, watermelon and so much more!

And oh, what fantastic vineyards we have given to modern Israel, from which world-class and holy wine is being vinified! Isn’t this just amazing?”

Rabbi Abba taught (Sanhedrin 98a) that “There is no greater sign of redemption than the agricultural re-blooming of the Land of Israel” (אֵין לְךָ קֵץ מְגֻלֶה מִזֶּה). Rabbi Yoel Sirkis (Bach on Tur Orach Chaim 208) wrote that the Shechina, the Divine Presence, enters the Jewish soul through the agricultural produce of Eretz Yisrael.

The far-sighted Jerusalem educator Rabbi Sholom Gold (from whom I have adapted the bulk of the talking tomato narrative above) offers this razor-sharp religious advice: “If you want to speak to G-d, go to the Western Wall. But if you want to see Him, go to shuk Machane Yehuda.”

1 A special halachic leniency for the sabbatical year.

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Rav Kook spoke extensively about the fact that agriculture in the Land of Israel is not solely for economic purposes, but rather functions on a much higher, spiritual level:

"The building of the Land, the basic foundation, agriculture, exists among all nations; it is a simple economic and vital factor. But this is the nation which is the Holy of Holies, and its land and language, and all its values, are holy. Because the entire nation personifies the sacred expression of humanity, so all of its agriculture too is saturated with holiness."

In other words, agriculture is the essence of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael. The Jewish people are a nation of farmers and their work is holy. After the exile, when non-Jews wished to distance those Jews who remained in the Land, they forbade them to work in agriculture. When the Jewish people do not work in agriculture, they are not keeping Torah laws such as tithes, first fruits, leaving something in the fields for the poor, etc. This detaches them from the source of their spiritual vitality and they become a nation like all other nations.

Education is another foundation upon which a country’s economy rests. The author of Chovat HaTalmidim says that the Hebrew word for education – חינוך – comes from the word חנוך – completion (חנוכת המזבח – the completion of the altar, חנוכת בית – the completion of one’s home). It is, in fact, the completion of a task, or the rendering of a tool as ready for its purpose. Educating a person is therefore bringing out his or her potential and powers, realizing their inner skills, and guiding them to use them for the benefit of others.

Education and agriculture appear to be very different fields (pun intended), but of course agriculture is also about sowing the seeds, bringing out the potential.

In recent years, a number of initiatives in Israel have been combining education and agriculture. High school students work in the fields and orchards in the morning and continue their Torah and academic studies in the afternoon and evening. The farmers certainly benefit from these enthusiastic and motivated young workers, even if they only work a half day.

And the children? Well, there are many children who cannot sit for a whole day in the classroom. They yearn for the outdoors. And a student who has worked half a day picking bananas or pruning loquat trees will come to class much calmer, motivated and full of a sense of satisfaction. Such a youngster, who perhaps has not experienced much joy in his or her academic studies, will suddenly discover skills, strengths and successes through their agricultural labor. Their self-worth and confidence rise, and the results they see in the fields give them a sense of pride and achievement that overflows into the classroom.

The soil of Eretz Yisrael becomes a source of educational success and spiritual healing, not to mention the values and discipline it instills in the youth, which will serve them well as they grow older.

Indeed, Rav Kook explained that there would be a higher and more innovative level of Torah study in Eretz Yisrael, which will be more advanced than in the exile and carry a corresponding level of faith. This then will lead to a visceral understanding of the spiritual dangers of materialism, which will make us yearn for a return to the labors of the land, but in a different, more exalted way than our ancestors. Our lot will no longer exist of sorrow and the sweat of our brow but rather an abundance of blessings and the taste of the Garden of Eden.

I think we are on the way, because when you ask these 15-16 year-olds why they are prepared to get up so early every morning and work so hard, they all give you the same answer: satisfaction, meaning, pride, teamwork, and a sense of achievement every single day.

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1 Ma’amarei HaReayah, Yom HaBikkurim, Zman Matan Toraiteinu.

Elazar Granot is the principal of an agricultural yeshiva high school in Israel
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Among my many failings is the fact that I do not have a green thumb. Plants and I do not agree and sometimes I feel that the plants I have in my home are just downright hostile to me. The care of these plants and the reason they have survived so long has always been due to the distaff side of my home. I very much enjoy flowers and plants and I see in them some of the bountiful goodness and pleasure the L-rd has arranged for humans in this world.

So I persist in watering and caring for the plants in my house despite my bumbling efforts to keep them sprightly or at least alive. The only exception to this seemingly endless tale of frustration is the orchid plants. They require very little care and that is what they receive. Their flowers are absolutely magnificent and their presence has a soothing effect on my rabbinic nerves.

And the greatest thing about orchid plants is that after they shed their flowers they do not die but they remain dormant, sometimes for more than a year, and then suddenly revive themselves and begin to produce the bulbs that will then yield their beautiful flowers.

I love to watch this process for it gives me a sense of revival and resilience. There is a great human lesson to be learned from the orchid plant and I am grateful to have that opportunity. The Torah itself indicates that humans have much to learn from nature – both the animal and plant kingdoms – and that only a fool would ignore these lessons built into G-d’s creation.

I have an orchid plant in my home that has been dormant for well over a year. The woman that helps clean and keep my house orderly proposed that I dispose of it since it obviously was no longer going to revive itself and produce flowers. I told her that it had done so in the past and that I would hang onto it, if only for sentimental reasons.

The plant must have heard that wake-up call and a couple of weeks later, it showed the first signs of reincarnation. It sprouted bulbs and recently gave birth to the first beautiful orchid flower. I was deeply touched by the event for it highlighted the continuity of life, one of Judaism’s most basic values.

We all pass through difficult and sad times. In the words of Proverbs, we all, “fall seven times.” But we are commanded to rise again to continue, for the challenges and difficulties of life are inescapable. The strength and resilience G-d built into human beings must be exploited by continuing to do acts of kindness, mercy and justice. Watching my orchid plant bloom again brought this attitude home to me… a mere flower served as both challenge and comfort.

I realize that even orchid plants do not bloom forever. All things in this world are finite. Yet this awareness does not dampen my enthusiasm at seeing my orchid plant blossom and give bloom once again. The plant does not seem to be overly concerned about its ultimate future and demise. Meanwhile, it does what it is supposed to do – produce beautiful flowers for human enjoyment.

That is also a great lesson to those haunted by a sense of mortality and finiteness. In Proverbs again, King Solomon, in describing the great woman of valor, states “she is able to laugh even to the last day.” We do not see anything humorous about the last day. But the deeper meaning is that while we have not yet arrived at the last day, we have to pursue our mission and task in life, do what we have to do, with enthusiasm and joy rather than doom and foreboding.

The gift of life and resilience the L-rd has planted within us is what makes life so magical while giving it the scent of eternity. I am very grateful to my orchid plant for this opportune lesson.
Tu BiShvat is rich in symbolism. For example, Rav Shimon Raphael Hirsch says that Tu BiShvat celebrates the beginning of spring while still in the first half of the winter! This message is so significant. It teaches us that the gentle awakening of spring begins its hidden work in the middle of the bleak embrace of winter; silently, softly and hidden from view. The fresh new sap flows through the trees in readiness for the coming of spring. Under the torn, cold bark, fresh life is pulsating. The winter is no graveyard. It is the source of life.

As Rav Hirsch so poetically describes it, “…Men and nations are bent by sorrow, pain and grief. They had harbored beautiful dreams of their future, proudly wearing the crown of their efforts, intoxicated with the unlimited power of their might and deeds. A violent force robbed them of their fruits and the storms of life smashed their flourishing hope and joy, destroying the glitter of their society, breaking the halo of their power and might and leaving them poor and defenseless. Not a single blossom is within sight. No greenery heralds the coming of a new future. But we misunderstand! We fail to look within ourselves, to realize the Source from which all help emanates and where hope, strength and life blossom.

And so on this day we must leave our homes shaken by winter storms and tempests. We should behold the trees on their birthday with the objective of self-inspiration.

Let us remember those days of beauty when we were decorated with fruits, leaves, branches and twigs, and let us note that winter robbed us of our fruit and colorful leaves. The storms and cold broke branch after branch, twig after twig, leaving the trees enshrouded in ice and snow.

But if we look carefully enough, we will be able to ignite our hopes and dreams by celebrating our silent rebirth in defiance of nature’s onslaught. The old leaves and fruits are surely gone but the blossoms of the future are within our grasp.

...The twigs and branches broken by the storms were already dry, brittle and lifeless but their inner core remained alive and fresh. They will always weather the storm, just as our people will survive the terrors of historical night. Our strength is found not in the transient part of the trees, the rustling crown or adornment of branches, twigs and leaves. Our eternal foundation is a place that weather and storms cannot reach.”

Says the Admor of Chortkov, "Israel is that tree. During this long winter of exile, the tree is often exposed. Its leaves have fallen and storms of tragedy and war have almost uprooted us. Yet from this very darkness – perhaps because of this darkness – the blossoming of Israel will surely come. The redemption will indeed arrive.”

We know that spring will follow winter. Because of winter. Our faith teaches us we just can’t have one without the other.
Few texts have had a deeper influence on Western civilization than the first chapter of Genesis, with its momentous vision of the universe coming into being as the work of G-d. Set against the grandeur of the narrative, what stands out is the smallness yet uniqueness of humans, vulnerable but also undeniably set apart from all other beings.

The words of the Psalmist echo the wonder and humility that the primordial couple must have felt as they beheld the splendor of creation:

“When I consider your heavens,
The work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars,
Which you have set in place.
What is humanity that you are mindful of it,
The children of mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them little lower than the angels
And crowned them with glory and honor.”

(Psalms 8:3-5)

The honor and glory that crowns the human race is possession of the earth, which is granted as the culmination of G-d’s creative work: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.” This notion is fortified in Psalm 115: “The heavens are the Lord’s heavens, but the earth G-d has given to humanity.” While the creation narrative clearly establishes G-d as Master of the Universe, it is the human being who is appointed master of the earth.

Grappling with the challenging notion of humans as divinely-ordained owners and subduers of the earth, we come face to face with the fundamental questions of our place in the universe and our responsibility for it. A literal interpretation suggests a world in which people cut down forests, slaughter animals, and dump waste into the seas at their leisure, much like we see in our world today.

On the other hand, as Rav Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel, writes, any intelligent person should know that Genesis 1:28, “does not mean the domination of a harsh ruler, who afflicts his people and servants merely to fulfill his personal whim and desire, according to the crookedness of his heart.” Could G-d have really created such a complex and magnificent world solely for the caprice of humans?

Genesis 1 is only one side of the complex biblical equation. It is balanced by the narrative of Genesis 2, which features a second Creation narrative that focuses on humans and their place in the Garden of Eden. The first person is set in the Garden “to work it and take care of it.”

The two Hebrew verbs used here are significant. The first – le’ovdah – literally means “to serve it.” The human being is thus both master and servant of nature. The second – leshomrah – means “to guard it.” This is the verb used in later biblical legislation to describe the responsibilities of a guardian of
property that belongs to someone else. This guardian must exercise vigilance while protecting, and is personally liable for losses that occur through negligence. This is perhaps the best short definition of humanity’s responsibility for nature as the Bible conceives it.

We do not own nature – “The earth is the L-rd’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalms 24:1) We are its stewards on behalf of G-d, who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity.

The mid-nineteenth century commentator Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch put this rather well in an original interpretation of Genesis 1:26, “Let us make the human in our image after our own likeness.” The passage has always been puzzling, since the hallmark of the Torah is the singularity of G-d. Who would G-d consult in the process of creating humans?

The “us,” says Hirsch, refers to the rest of creation. Before creating the human, a being destined to develop the capacity to alter and possibly endanger the natural world, G-d sought the approval of nature itself. This interpretation implies that we would use nature only in such a way that is faithful to the purposes of its Creator and acknowledges nature’s consenting to humanity’s existence.

The mandate in Genesis 1 to exercise dominion is, therefore, not technical, but moral: humanity would control, within our means, the use of nature towards the service of G-d. Further, this mandate is limited by the requirement to serve and guard as seen in Genesis 2. The famous story of Genesis 2-3 – the eating of the forbidden fruit and Adam and Eve’s subsequent exile from Eden – supports this point.

Not everything is permitted. There are limits to how we interact with the earth. The Torah has commandments regarding how to sow crops, how to collect eggs, and how to preserve trees in a time of war, just to name a few. When we do not treat creation according to G-d’s Will, disaster can follow.

We see this today as more and more cities sit under a cloud of smog and as mercury advisories are issued over large sectors of our fishing waters. Deforestation of the rainforests, largely a result of humanity’s growing demand for timber and beef, has brought on irrevocable destruction of plant and animal species.

We can no longer ignore the massive negative impact that our global industrial society is having on the ecosystems of the earth. Our unbounded use of fossil fuels to fuel our energy-intensive lifestyles is causing global climate change. An international consensus of scientists predicts more intense and destructive storms, floods, and droughts resulting from these human-induced changes in the atmosphere. If we do not take action now, we risk the very survival of civilization as we know it.

The Midrash says that G-d showed Adam around the Garden of Eden and said, “Look at my works! See how beautiful they are – how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.”

Creation has its own dignity as G-d’s masterpiece, and though we have the mandate to use it, we have none to destroy or despoil it. Rabbi Hirsch says that Shabbat was given to humanity “in order that he should not grow overweening in his dominion” of G-d’s creation. On the Day of Rest, “he must, as it were, return the borrowed world to its Divine Owner in order to realize that it is but lent to him.”

Ingrained in the process of creation and central to the life of every Jew is a weekly reminder that our dominion of earth must be l’shem shamayim – in the name of Heaven.

The choice is ours. If we continue to live as though G-d had only commanded us to subdue the earth, we must be prepared for our children to inherit a seriously degraded planet, with the future of human civilization put into question.

If we see our role as masters of the earth as a unique opportunity to truly serve and care for the planet, its creatures, and its resources, then we can reclaim our status as stewards of the world, and raise our new generations in an environment much closer to that of Eden.
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The Gemara\(^1\) recounts the famous midrash: "This one said I won’t go first into the sea, this one said I won’t go first into the sea. Nachshon Ben Aminadav jumped into the waves... therefore the tribe of Yehuda merited to become the leader of the people.”

This heroic act of Nachshon and those who followed him (even before Moshe Rabbeinu told them to enter the water) consolidated the tribe of Yehuda’s leadership for posterity. However, this was not the first courageous act of leadership by the tribe of Yehuda. What made this event so unique? The midrash discusses this exact question:

"The students asked Rabbi Tarfon – let the master teach us: why did the tribe of Yehuda merit the monarchy? He said, what do you think is the answer? They answered, “what benefit is it that we kill our brother” [Genesis 37:26] (when Yehuda convinced the brothers not to kill Yosef). He answered, that is only enough to atone for the sin of selling their brother. They suggested, “for she is more righteous than me” [Genesis 38:26] (when Yehuda admitted his wrongdoing with Tamar). He answered, that is only enough to atone for the sin. They said, “I will remain in place of the boy” [Genesis 44:33] (when volunteering to take the place of Binyamin in prison). He answered “He made himself a guarantor, is this not the obligation of a guarantor? “Rather, when they stood by the sea etc...”

What exactly is the midrash saying? What was so special about Nachshon Ben Aminadav’s leap compared to the earlier acts of leadership? Furthermore, the Mechilta states, "The one who sanctified my name at the sea will be the ruler of my nation.”\(^3\)

What does sanctifying G-d’s name have to do with leadership, and why was this sanctification different from the earlier examples?

As we dive deeper, the waters become even murkier. In describing the splitting of the sea, the Torah uses the word חומָה – wall, once with a vav and once without – חָמָּה (anger).

The midrash explains that when Am Yisrael crossed the sea, the angels asked: "How could G-d perform a miracle for people who served idols in Egypt?" In response, the water became angry and wanted to drown the Jewish people.

The midrash recounts that G-d testified that they only served idols in Egypt due to the harshness of the slavery. Another answer in the midrash is that He saved them due to their future merit of accepting the Torah and fulfilling the mitzvah of Tefillin.

Can we reconcile these two answers?

While Nachshon and the tzaddikim after him were up to their necks in water, there was no anger from the angels. Because these were people who hadn’t served idols in Egypt. After the sea split and the rest of the nation entered – many of whom were unworthy – only then did the angels grow angry at the seeming injustice. However, what they failed to understand was that the actions of the other Jews were also steeped in faith.

The sea could have collapsed on them at any moment. By entering, they showed that they really didn’t believe in idolatry. It became clear that they wanted to accept the Torah and fulfill the mitzvot. The midrash’s two answers are thus complementary.

The earlier events involving Yehuda may have demonstrated a great deal of responsibility, self-sacrifice, and the inner strength to do the right thing. However, a leader is one who not only overcomes his own challenges but helps others overcome theirs too. A leader helps others to believe that they too can become tzaddikim; that they too can be uplifted and act nobly. Nachshon and the tribe of Yehuda caused the nation to believe in themselves, to recognize their own inner strength. This is true leadership and the ultimate Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of G-d’s Name).

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1 Sotah 37a.
2 Yalkut Shimoni, Beshalach Remez 238.
3 Mechilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Beshalach Parasha 5.
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If you were a Jew in the time of the Mishna, Tu BiShvat would mean the beginning of a new calendar year and identifying the previous year’s fruit.

If you were a kabbalistic Jew in Tzfat in the 16th century, Tu BiShvat would be an opportunity to connect to the mystical worlds symbolized by the different parts and fruits of the trees.

And if you were a Jew in the renewed Zionist movement, a pioneer, or a child lucky enough to grow up in a sovereign state of Israel, Tu BiShvat is the time for planting.

It’s the time you get to play G-d. To walk in his ways. Because the first thing He does after the completion of Creation is to plant a garden of trees in Eden.

Let us walk through that garden and take a closer look at those trees. Here in the center is the Tree of Life, and over there is the Tree of Knowledge... everything is so gorgeous. As it says, G-d grew every tree “pleasing to the sight and good for food.”

But this is where Rabbi Hirsch makes his major leap: “Joy in the beauty of nature and growing plants, brings us to enjoyment of ethical beauty as well. If a society doesn’t care for what is beautiful, a person in that society will also grow up wild. Man’s joy in aesthetic harmony is closely related to his joy in ethical harmony.”

We can understand that disregard for what is beautiful and delicate, like stomping on a bed of flowers, is lowly and bestial. But does the appreciation of beauty and aesthetics actually encourage a society to be moral? One cannot help but think of Rabbi Hirsch’s 19th century Germany, and where it ended up. The words that come to mind are from Natan Alterman’s “Of All the Nations”:

Great is the worry for sculptures and art / Lest artistic treasures be destroyed in the blast.

But the artful treasures of infant-heads / On the walls and the roads to be bashed.

Rabbi Hirsch’s idea sounds like wishful thinking. Yet we do often sense, especially when faced with a stunning sunset for example, that there is something grand here, far deeper than meets the eye. Something divine, a reflection of G-d, that if truly appreciated, could indeed advance one’s spirituality, and maybe even one’s morality.

Perhaps the way to realize the divine aesthetic experience – yet not go astray like Germany did – is to heed the Rambam’s wisdom:

“How may one discover the way to love and fear Him? When man reflects on G-d’s deeds and His great and wonderful creatures and will behold through them His wonderful, matchless and infinite wisdom, he will spontaneously be filled with love, praise, and exaltation and become possessed of a great longing to know the Great Name... as some sages said on the subject of love: “Out of it you will recognize the One who spoke, and the universe was called into existence.”

The call is to see natural beauty not as “still life with flowers” but to open up to its vibrant riches and divine soul, and then, with a heart full of awe and love, take one step further, and ask what does this mean to me. More precisely, what does it require me to do?

The famous mishna that berates a person who stops his learning to appreciate the beauty of a tree, is describing someone for whom these are really separate experiences. Torah doesn’t integrate into the everyday journey, and beauty stands alone, sterile, detached. The Rambam, Rabbi Hirsch and Tu BiShvat itself all call us to integrate our worlds and let them grow and fertilize each other.

1 Genesis, 2:9.
2 On Genesis 2:9.3.
3 Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 2:1-2.
4 Avot 3:7.

Rabbanit Rachelle Fraenkel is a Torah educator at Nishmat and Matan
How does one arouse the power of growth? Through bracha, blessing. Bracha upgrades all of reality and particularly your own private reality. To know how to bless is to know how to add a new dimension to reality.

When you hold an apple and eat it without a bracha, what are you eating? An apple. With Vitamin C, Vitamin A and other nutrients. But when you hold the apple and make the blessing בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ, “Blessed are You, our G-d, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the tree”, you will then not only be eating an apple but consuming joie de vivre, health, charm and success, and not just for your body but for your children too, for the bracha expands all of your surroundings. That is why they are called בְּרָכוֹת הַנֶּהֱנִין, blessings of enjoyment, or benefit, says Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe. Everybody benefits from your bracha. And the Mesillat Yesharim writes (chapter 1) that when a person makes a blessing, their entire environment is raised with them.

In other words, when you make a bracha at home, suddenly your son in school remembers a correct answer in his test. Your husband suddenly feels a rush of energy at work. A car brakes to avoid a child on your street. The bracha you make perpetuates the good in the world, elevates it and adds to it. As Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes in Nefesh HaChayim, ברי is not an expression of request as we are accustomed to think, but an expression of increase and multiplicity.

When do we receive joy and happiness? In the bracha of שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בִּדְבָרוֹ – that everything came into being with His word, because this is the bracha that contains everything. We all know people – and maybe ourselves sometimes – who have everything yet are not happy. Many people are married, but not happy; have children, but are not happy; make a good living, but are not happy.

We receive the main novelty inherent in the month of Shvat from the bracha over the fruits of Eretz Yisrael, the Land beyond time – “the eyes of G-d are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” When you eat fruits from Eretz Yisrael, you are consuming a part of Divine Providence, G-d’s benevolent and watchful eye.

How does one make the bracha?

Hold the fruit in your right hand. Look at it when you make the blessing. And put your intention into the bracha: “I hereby intend to increase light and happiness in the world!” Why?

Says Rabbi Wolbe: All darkness in the world comes from the lack of blessing. Therefore, when you say “Blessed are You,” the word You causes G-d to be present where you are, as you acknowledge Him. And then, instead of darkness, you will feel the light of His face and His blessing upon you.

And then you eat and win the lottery! As it says in Birkat HaMazon (Grace After Meals), G-d sustains you with charm, kindness, welfare, mercy and with many nutrients and vitamins, including:

- Vitamin A – Ahava (love)
- Vitamin B – Bitachon (security in G-d)
- Vitamin C – Celebration
- Vitamin D – Dibbur (speaking) about blessing, abundance, redemption and renewal

In other words, it is the bracha, the blessing – not the eating – that gives us health and life itself!

May we all be blessed.

1 Alei Shor Vol. 2.
2 Devarim 11:12.
3 By Rabbi Eliezer Papo, published in 1824.

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi is a popular Israeli teacher, speaker and writer
Believing Jews combine their efforts to promote and achieve their needs through human activity (hishtadlut) and their reliance on Divine protection (bitachon). Relying on G-d is one of the characteristics typifying human completeness. There are two types of such reliance: first, simple trust – a person expects a miracle to happen exactly when he needs it, and second, constant security – to trust G-d to help us each and every day, as we perform our human activities.

Since the Exodus from Egypt, Divine Providence over the Jewish people has not been uniform. During the 40 years in the desert, Bnei Yisrael survived on miracles, with almost no human intervention. After they enter Eretz Yisrael we see contradictory situations. Sometimes the people’s efforts are praised, while at other times their natural actions are considered a disadvantage. For example, in the war at Ai (Joshua, Chapter 8), just after they entered the Land, Israel was required to fight, to make the human effort, but according to G-d’s instructions.

Later, during the war against Midian (Judges, 7:2), Gideon is told: “The people with you are too numerous for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me,’” so the war had to be won through a miracle.

When is hishtadlut necessary and when should it be limited? Our own hishtadlut is dependent on the moral situation of the nation at the time, as our purpose is to bring G-d’s light into the world. So when the individual or the nation are on a higher moral level, belief in G-d and keeping mitzvot are the most natural thing and so miracles are unnecessary, because we recognize G-d’s Hand in the natural happenings of the world.

This is a higher level of completeness, when one can use one’s intellect and physical and mental powers to the full, yet feel that G-d is with him every step of the way. That is when a Jew recognizes that “Your miracles... are with us every day.” This recognition brings one closer to completeness than a one-time miracle that occurred because of one’s lower spiritual level.

But human efforts do not always lead to these results, because we sometimes tend to get caught up in material concerns. Then, not only do we fail to recognize G-d working through our own efforts, but we run the risk of believing the success we achieve is the result of our own efforts, which then detach us even more from acknowledging Divine supervision.

That is why when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, they were at the 49th level of impurity, because they had yet to internalize faith and needed to be brought closer to G-d through miraculous events. They were not able to recognize a reality controlled by Divine supervision and needed miracles to prove G-d’s presence in the world.

Only after 40 years of Divine revelation, after the nation had increased its faith in G-d, was the time ripe for human leadership, activity and involvement in all areas of life, because the people had already been trained in ‘knowing’ G-d, through constant nature as well, as it says, “Raise your eyes on high and see Who created these.”

Therefore, when Bnei Yisrael first entered Eretz Yisrael and fought the war at Ai, they were already well-versed in miracles. Now was the time to learn to be involved in their own successes, because it was a greater completeness for them as individuals and as a nation to be responsible for their own success, while trusting in G-d. This was His Will, as He had commanded Bnei Yisrael to complete the mission on their own, through hishtadlut in Torah and mitzvot.

But, during the times of the judges, the spiritual level of the nation had plummeted and they had forgotten their G-d and Savior. They were not able to recognize Him working through nature. Hence Gideon was asked to limit natural efforts and rely on clear Divine intervention.

1 From the Modim prayer in the Amidah.
2 Isaiah 40:26.

Rabbi Ya’akov HaLevi Filber was a close student of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, and the founder of the Yeshiva LaTze’irim
At every possible occasion," wrote Rabbi Ze’ev Gold, “I tell the story of the remarkable lesson I was privileged to learn from our great master, the gaon and holy Rav Kook, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing.”

Rabbi Gold (1889-1956), a leader of the Mizrachi movement, once accompanied the Chief Rabbi to the community of Magdiel in the Sharon area.

The rabbis were invited to plant saplings in an official ceremony to inaugurate a new forest.

As Rav Kook was handed a sapling to plant, Rabbi Gold was amazed to see the rabbi’s reaction. His face shone like a burning torch, and his entire body quivered with excitement. He did not use the hoe he had been given, but knelt down to the soil and dug a hole in the earth with his bare hands.

Hands shaking, he reverently placed the sapling in the ground, while murmuring his gratitude to G-d for the privilege of planting a tree in the Holy Land.

On the trip back to Jerusalem, Rabbi Gold turned to the Chief Rabbi. "Why did you exhibit such deep emotions when you planted a tree into the ground? Nowadays, thank G-d, hundreds of trees are planted every day in the Land of Israel!"

“As I held that young sapling in my hands," Rav Kook replied, “I remembered how the Sages elucidated the verse, “Follow the Eternal your G-d... and cling to Him” (Deuteronomy 13:5). They asked:

Is it possible for flesh and blood to ascend to the heavens and cling to the Shechinah, about Whom it is written, “For the Eternal your G-d is a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24)?

Rather, understand the verse as follows: At the beginning of creation, the Holy One engaged in planting, as it says, “G-d planted a garden in Eden” (Genesis 2:8).

Similarly, when you enter in the Land of Israel, you should first engage in planting, as it is written, “When you will come into the Land, you shall plant all types of fruit trees” (Leviticus 19:23). (Vayikra Rabbah 25:3)

“When I grasped that tender sapling in my hands and prepared to plant it in the holy earth,” Rav Kook continued, “I contemplated these words of the Sages. I felt as if, at that very moment, I was clinging to the Shechina, and I was overwhelmed with feelings of awe and reverence!”

(Adapted from Zehav HaAretz by Rabbi Ze’ev Gold, 1982; Mo’adei HaRe’iyah, pp. 222-223.)

1 The town of Magdiel was founded in 1924. Rav Kook objected to the name Magdiel, as this was the name of an Edomite chieftain (Genesis 36:43). Even worse, ancient Jewish tradition identifies Magdiel as Rome, the nation which conquered the Land of Israel and destroyed the Second Temple (see Rashi ad loc, from Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer). This did not, however, prevent Rav Kook’s participation in the tree-planting ceremony in the town.

It was rumored that Rav Kook had predicted that the name Magdiel would not last. And in fact, in 1964, the town of Magdiel was combined with its neighboring towns, and the new municipality was renamed “Hod Hasharon.”

Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook related that, soon after this event, he received a letter from a resident of Netanya. For many years, the author of the letter had studied his father’s books, which he found very inspiring. But when he heard a rumor that Rav Kook predicted the neighboring town of Magdiel would “be erased from the map,” he found this so disturbing that he stopped studying the rabbi’s writings.

Following the 1964 municipality change, the Netanya resident offered his apologies. He now understood how Rav Kook’s prediction was fulfilled, as only the name Magdiel was erased from the map, with Hod Hasharon taking its place. He expressed his sincere regrets, promising to once again study the Rav’s writings.

Rabbi Chanan Morrison is the author of several books on Rav Kook’s writings www.RavKookTorah.org
On Tu BiShvat eve, the custom is to make blessings over fruit from Eretz Yisrael. But what bracha to make?

The Mishna says:

כֵּיצַד מְבָרְכִין עַל הַפֵּרוֹת? עַל פֵּרוֹת הָאִילָן
Or vice-versa. If the bracha is מְבָרְכִין עַל הַפֵּרוֹת, one says, ‘...Who created the fruit of the tree? For example, during Tanach times, the word for a tree is עֵץ. In fact עֵץ is the word for both the plant that grows and the raw material used for making furniture. The only place that the word עֵץ appears in Tanach is in the Aramaic chapters of Daniel, but it is not a word in Biblical Hebrew.

Vocabulary became greater and there were other linguistic differences too. For example, during Tanach times, they said לָשֶׁבֶת (to sit) but the Mishna uses לְיַשֵּׁבֶת (in the context of sitting in a Sukkah). The Tanach uses לְיַשֵּׁב (to give), while the Mishna uses לָתֵת (as in giving an accounting). Our ancestors in Tanach would say עַשָּׂלָה חִנָּפְת (Jerusalem, to the desert), but by the time the Mishna was compiled it had become לִירָשָׁלַיִם and לָתֵת.

And in terms of vocabulary, we use Tanach terms, so we say that astronauts fly to the יָרֵחַ (moon), but at the start of every month we recite בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ or בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאִילָן, using the word word for moon, לָשֶׁבֶת, as used at the time of Chazal (the last centuries BCE).

Similarly, in the Tanach it was reported that the man נָשָׂא חָסִיר (destroyed the wall). Exactly the same action is described in the Mishna as הרס את הקיר. During the time of King Solomon, they would sail in יְרוּשָׁלַיְמָה (ships), but by the time Jonah the Prophet appeared, they had already begun using the word יְרוּשָׁלַיְמָה.

In Tanach, the word for a tree is עֵץ. In fact עֵץ is the word for both the plant that grows and the raw material used for making furniture. The only place that the word עֵץ appears in Tanach is in the Aramaic chapters of Daniel, but it is not a word in Biblical Hebrew.

During the time of Chazal, a differentiation was created: the growing plant was called עֵץ אִילָן while the word עֵץ was limited to defining the material alone.

Therefore, when Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, compiler of the Mishna, sat in his office – either in Beit Shearim or Tzippori, he said to his secretary – who no doubt typed it on the computer-equivalent at that time – “Please write this down: Mishna, Tractate Brachot, Chapter 6, Mishna 1: “What blessing do we make on fruits?”

עֵץ פְּרִי הָאִילָן.

Of course he says עֵץ אִילָן because he lived at the time of our Sages, but now, as editor of the Mishna, he has to determine what the bracha will be for eternity.

When one is asked to give a blessing, or a speech – perhaps on behalf of the parents at school, perhaps at work or in other forums – one dresses a little smarter and one also chooses words that are perhaps a little more flowery that one would normally use, i.e. words that are older, more classical. Hence it was decided that the blessing over fruit would be וּבּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאִילָן, because that was the word used in the Tanach, even though they were living at a time when יְרוּשָׁלַיְמָה was the accepted coinage.

“But Dr. Kor,” I hear you say. “That’s just like the English. We also separate wood from trees. They probably just copied the English.”

No, kind sir. We were the first. We certainly did not take a leaf out of the English book. Because Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi lived hundreds of years before the first buds of the English language began to emerge.

Here it is appropriate to mention British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli’s famous retort to a Member of Parliament, Daniel O’Connell, the Irish Roman Catholic leader, who attacked Disraeli’s Jewish ancestry. Disraeli – who became an Anglican at age 12 yet remained proud of his Jewish roots – allegedly replied, “Yes, I am of Israelite birth, and allow me to remind you that while the ancestors of the right honorable gentleman were savages swinging on the trees on an unknown island, mine were priests in King Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem.”

1 Brachot 6:1.

Dr. Avshalom Kor is an Israeli linguist and expert on Hebrew grammar and semantics.
In this week’s parasha, Beshalach, the Children of Israel sing the beautiful Shirat HaYam (Song of the Sea) after miraculously crossing the Red Sea. However, despite the miracles and the euphoria, they also begin complaining and criticizing.

For example, the masses confront Moshe Rabbeinu after the journey has barely begun: “Are there not enough graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the desert?” Why have you brought us to this place? And shortly afterwards they complain about thirst: “And they complained against Moshe saying: What should we drink?” Just a few verses later, they express their yearning for their ‘good life’ in Egypt, missing the “pot of meat,” and they claim that Moshe and Aharon took them out to the desert in order to “kill this entire congregation through hunger.”

But that’s not all.

As the parasha continues, the people are again thirsty and ask: “Why did you take us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and cattle in thirst?” At this point, even Moshe the leader expresses despair. “And Moshe cried to G-d saying: What should I do for this people? Just a little longer and they will stone me.”

When the situation is so dire, we are perhaps not surprised to read the next verse: “And Amalek came and they fought with Israel.”

In other words, when the people are tired, upset, skeptical, negative, angry, and lack faith, Amalek identifies the opportunity and attacks. And so too today. The enemy knows when to come. Indeed, the enemy coming shows us that we are our own worst enemy.

Internal unity, shared identity and a common vision aren’t just clichés. They are part of a profound concept of national security.
QUESTION: What's public transportation like in Israel?

YANIV ANSWERS:

Well, busses are the number one mode of travel. Last year, bus passenger trips totaled 750 million, with 20 companies – led by Egged – operating more than 6,000 buses. Handy debit cards are the newest mode of payment, as cash is rapidly being phased out. Buses are outfitted with Wi-Fi and individual smartphone chargers, and are particularly convenient for students and the elderly – for whom the front seats are reserved with a sign quoting the Biblical verse, “Before the aged you shall rise,” asking younger people to give up their seats!

In my pre-Aliyah days, I recall how I used to visit an aunt who had made Aliyah after WWII. Each week she would take me to visit a different relative by bus. On one particularly steamy day, we found ourselves waiting with about 12 other passengers under an old shelter at the first stop of a bus line. The next bus was due to begin its route in a few minutes and was just 40 feet away, still running to keep the air conditioning toiling away against the hot sun as we, its future passengers, waited most impatiently. Eventually, the driver finished his smoke and got on the bus. We were watching him the whole time so we all knew what to expect. He would drive an empty bus for about 20 seconds, line up with the curb railings, open his door and allow 14 passengers to get on the bus, out of the heat into the cool, and sit in one of the 50 available seats. Even if each of us would stretch out over three seats, there would still be empty spots.

I, a naive young American, anticipated an orderly queue. Wrong. Before the bus’s front wheel made a complete rotation, the waiting people swarmed into the small area between the railings and overflowed beyond the curb. Caught in a crushing stream of coalescing, sweaty humanity rushing to the spot pinpointed through ITP (instinctive trajectory plotting) as where the front door was expected to open, I found my face pressed against metal, pinned between the moving bus and the single-minded collective. The pressure behind me was exceptionally forceful. I turned to see my short, 55+ year old aunt pushing me hard and screaming, “Keep moving! Push! We need to find a seat!” Ahh… family memories. Good times.

Yet my favorite travel choice is the sherut, Israel’s original version of the “shared-ride” concept that is fast replacing taxi service all over the world. Call me crazy, but I just love sitting 2-3 inches away from perfect strangers who are discussing their most intimate secrets on their cell phone, from their latest medical diagnoses to their kids’ marital problems. But be careful about pluralizing the word “sherut.” I once saw a guy directed to half a dozen bathrooms – as he kept asking where the sherutim were located – before he finally found the minibus.

Israel’s rail service is also fast improving; Jerusalem’s light rail is already widely used, while Tel Aviv’s is well under construction. And, at long last, the new Jerusalem-Tel Aviv train route, 10 years in the making, has finally been inaugurated and is expected to turn an interminably slow, meandering voyage into a rapid, under-30 minute ride from door to door. And there are even plans for a bullet train from Tel Aviv to Eilat – dubbed the “Med-Red line” - which will cut travel time between Israel’s center and its resort town to less than two hours.

But let’s not forget walking! It’s free, healthy, hassle-free and still the very best way to see this beautiful country. And just walking in Israel – unlike anywhere else in the world – is a mitzvah after only six steps!

Feel free to send me any other perplexing questions you have: yaniv@mizrachi.org
Many nations have attacked and oppressed Am Yisrael throughout its history. Yet Amalek is singled out as Israel’s arch enemy. What was so terrible about Amalek’s attack that requires a battle “for all generations”?

“And Amalek came, and attacked Israel at Refidim...”¹ From this verse alone, it would seem as though all of Bnei Yisrael are encamped in Refidim when Amalek attacked. However, when we consider what took place during the previous event (i.e. the story of "massa u ‘meriva"), a very different picture emerges: “And Bnei Yisrael traveled from the desert of Zin... and encamped in Refidim, and there was no water for the people to drink... and they quarreled with Moshe...” (17:1-3)

To solve this water shortage, G-d instructs Moshe to take his staff and hit the rock. However, where is that rock? “G-d said to Moshe, pass before the people, take with you some of the elders, and take the staff... I will be standing before you at the rock at Chorev; strike the rock [there] and water will issue from it...” (17:5-6)

The rock is not in Refidim; it’s at Mount Sinai! Imagine the situation: the entire nation, after suffering days of thirst in a hot desert, must now first quench its immediate thirst, and then move its camp to the new water source. Those who still had strength probably went first, to bring supplies back to those too weak to travel. One could also assume this journey was not very organized, with the stronger men advancing to set up the new campsite, leaving the “weak and tired” behind.

It is precisely now that Amalek attacks: “Amalek came, and attacked Israel at Refidim...” (see 17:8). But who is in Refidim? Only a remnant of the camp – the weak and tired.

Our interpretation thus far has been based on conjecture and reading between the lines. However, in the parallel account, we find these missing details: “Remember what Amalek did to you baderch (on your journey) when you left Egypt, for he surprised you baderch [i.e. while you were traveling] and cut down all the stragglers at your rear, while you were famished and weary...”²

Amalek capitalizes on Bnei Yisrael’s disadvantage. Even in war there are accepted norms of conduct; men fight men, armies engage armies. Amalek’s attack is outright unethical, even by those standards.³

Further support of this interpretation may be drawn from the conclusion of the verse: “...v’lo yarei Elokim” – and he (Amalek) did not fear G-d. This phrase – yarei Elokim (fear of G-d) – in the context of unethical (or immoral) behavior, is found numerous times in Chumash. For example, Avraham offers Avimelech the following explanation for lying about his wife: “And Avraham explained (to Avimelech), for I said (to myself) there is no yirat Elokim in this place, and therefore they will kill me (to take my wife).”⁴

Similarly, Yosef, pretending to be an Egyptian official, tells his brothers he will release them from jail, allowing them a chance to prove they are not spies. He prefixes this with the phrase: “... et Ha’Elokim ani yarei...”⁵

Again we understand this as a description of ethical behavior.

The Torah also describes how the midwives feared G-d by not obeying Pharaoh’s command to kill the male babies.⁶

All of these examples support our interpretation of v’lo yarei Elokim by Amalek as reflective of their unethical behavior, waging war on the weak and unprotected. Therefore, a possible answer to our original question is that the Torah singled out Amalek as Israel’s arch enemy not merely because they were the first nation to attack Israel, but due to the unethical nature of that attack.

In this sense, one could possibly suggest that zecher Amalek (the remembrance of Amalek) could be understood as a generic term describing any aggressive nation that acts in a similar unethical manner, and not necessarily a genetic term, describing any descendant of those people who attacked Israel at Refidim.⁷

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1 See Exodus 17:8, after 17:1-7.  
3 See Rashi and Ibn Ezra on Deuteronomy 25:18.  
4 Deuteronomy 25:18.  
5 Genesis 20:11.  
7 Exodus 1:21. See also the shiur at www.tanach.org/breishit/vayera.doc, which discusses this phrase in greater detail.  
8 For a deeper examination of this topic, see www.tanach.org/shmot/bshal2.htm.

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag is an internationally acclaimed Tanach scholar and online Jewish education pioneer
Hotel bathrooms have enlarged mirrors, which make every little spot look like a crater, every freckle a major rash. For some reason, we tend to look at those who are close to us through a similar mirror, and their minor defects look like mountains to us.

A carpenter once told me that people sit for hours with a color palette and debate exactly which shade of light cream they want their closets to be. “If I ended up making their closet any other light shade, there is no chance they would notice.” Similarly, we use the color palette to measure people. When we meet someone who is very much like ourselves, we are quick to pull out the palette: no way we’re alike. I’m cream and he’s off-white.

As I teach in several girls’ colleges, my students in college A often ask me how they are different from the girls in college B. I usually say there are minor differences, but they should consider the following: if we were to cut the cake of humanity into 1,000 slices – the girls from both colleges would fit into the same slice. And even if we were to cut the same cake into 10,000, 100,000, or even 1,000,000 slices – they would still be in the same slice. The differences are miniscule in comparison to the commonalities.

This tendency to emphasize differences between similar people is often true about Israeli society as a whole. In recent years I hear more and more about the terrible rifts and unprecedented gaps in Israeli society. Yet I don’t see this in reality. Today I see Israelis becoming more and more like each other, all lining up on one continuum.

For example, when we complain about our children’s religious continuum, we must also remember the other side: the secular community is also spread out along the same line. Last year, the Festigal [a children’s show held on Chanukah] was not held on Shabbat for the first time ever, because singer Omer Adam refused to perform on Shabbat. This year too. The Ha’aretz daily publishes regular complaints about more and more restaurants removing pork from their menu. I saw a large pile of Chanukiot at the entrance to a Yo chananoff supermarket, and it wasn’t only the religious who were buying them. And if you say “well, they’re only lighting candles for their children,” I say “Excellent. So these children are growing up in a Jewish home. And one day they too will light a Chanukiah and build a Sukkah for their own children.”

When we talk about each other, we become hostile, but when we stand next to each other, we have never been more alike. Maybe we should not say “but,” rather “because.” Exactly because we are getting closer to each other, the differences seem more dramatic. Jews in Israel today are similar to students at the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva, who will get into a lengthy discussion with a stranger on the fundamental differences between themselves and students at the Har HaMor Yeshiva, when actually they are as alike as two sideburns.

More and more Haredim are studying at universities or serving in the IDF. It is clear they are closer and more similar to us than their parents were. But that is exactly why they cause much more discontent. The Haredim in Mea She’arim are out of sight and out of mind. But the Haredim in the college libraries are an eyesore. That is why the enlightened fanatics fight without remorse against those who want to maintain their Haredi identity in the army and academia, with gender separation for example. The closer one gets, so the differences are more annoying.

Who sees the truth? Our enemies. In the most atrocious Hamas propaganda clips, IDF soldiers have the body of a soldier, the uniform of a soldier, the gun of a soldier – but a Haredi head, curly sideburns, a black hat and a beard. Our enemies see from afar what we find difficult to see from close up: how similar we really are.

(Rabbi Chaim Navon is a renowned author and educator.)
AND THE DOVE FOUND REST
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