



Branches that Grow

My new role as Executive Vice President of RZA–Mizrachi that began two months ago has aroused conflicting emotions: excitement at new beginnings and mourning at a sense of loss.

On the one hand, these past months have seen such a time of renaissance and renewal for our Movement. Rabbi Hart Levine has joined our team, charged with establishing Mizrahi NextGen to engage and inspire a new generation of American Jews to share in the responsibility for the future of Israel and the Jewish nation. Shira Kaplan, our inaugural *Chalomot* Young Leadership Fellow, is producing our new podcast, *Voices of Our Nation*, with accompanying videos sent out weekly in our *Shabbat B'Shabbato* e-newsletter and posted on social media. And Rabbi Aron White, our man on the ground in Yerushalayim, is spearheading the Tzurba M'Rabanan learning program and the rollout of our *mizrachi.tv/rza* platform that has engaged dozens of communities since its launch on Chanukah.

But these past months have also brought us great loss. Along with the precious individuals the pandemic has taken from us, the whole Jewish community is reeling from the passing of so many of our leading figures, whose guidance and leadership shaped the Jewish world as we know it: Rabbi Norman Lamm ל"צ, former honorary President of RZA–Mizrachi, whose brilliant *drashot* brought Torah messages to every facet

of modern life; Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz ל"צ, whose tremendous scholarship opened the worlds of Gemara and Jewish spirituality to thousands; Rabbi Gedaliah Dov Schwartz ל"צ, former Rosh Beit HaKavod of RZA–Mizrachi, who was a tower of Torah and *halachic* leadership; Rabbi Dovid Feinstein ל"צ, whose halachic authority guided our community, continuing the legacy of his father, Rav Moshe ל"צ; Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ל"צ, who brought Torah to the wider Jewish community and world in an unprecedented and dignified way; Rabbi Yehuda Herzl Henkin ל"צ, who played such a key role in the flourishing of women's Torah learning; Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld ל"צ, who was a pioneer of Orthodox Jewish life in America and an unabashed champion of Religious Zionist values, and more. And as we were about to go to print, my own community of West Hempstead, NY was shocked by the loss of our Mara D'Atra, Rabbi Yehuda Kelemer ל"צ, a 'rabbi's rabbi' who was renowned for his acts of *chesed*.

Celebrating new beginnings and mourning are in conflict, but our tradition teaches us to address both together, in a holistic way. As Jews and as Religious Zionists, we know our Movement has roots that ground us, and branches that grow. We must attend to both: connecting ourselves to the legacy of those who came before, and encouraging those who will bring new growth and life to our community. Our Torah is an *Eitz Chaim*, a tree of life, with deep

roots and new branches – and we must continually learn from those who are no longer with us, and continually energize those who are shaping our Movement today.

Tu BiShvat captures this duality – it is a day that marks the boundary for *terumot* and *ma'asrot*, when we focus on

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gathering in the fruits of the past year, and also a day on which we traditionally plant new trees.

Over the coming months, in the USA edition of HaMizrachi, we will be looking at both our past and future. Each edition will feature teaching from our leaders who have passed on and on whose shoulders we stand, along with words from new voices, who will inspire us to advance our Movement toward new vistas of impact and influence.

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