



A Timeless and Timely Message for Tu BiShvat

As a kid in North West London Jewish Day School back in the early '80s, I remember shivering when we planted a tree on Tu BiShvat. I found it surprising that a day celebrating trees and their growth was held during the winter. Surely it would have been better to wait till the spring, when there are seemingly much better conditions for a tree to blossom.

Of course, as we know, the date of 15th Shevat has nothing to do with the weather in London. It's about *Eretz Yisrael*. However, my question still stands, as Israel is in the northern hemisphere and Shevat is still in the winter. Why is Tu BiShvat not in Nissan or Iyar – the springtime?

This particular answer relates very powerfully to our current state of lockdown.

As we know, so much of Israel's agriculture is based on rainfall. Most of

Israel's rainy season is over by the 15th of Shevat and therefore this date is considered the New Year for Trees. Rashi explains that by this time, the ground has become saturated with the rains of the new year, causing the sap to start rising in the trees, which means the fruit can begin to bud.

The Talmud Yerushalmi adds that until Tu BiShvat, all trees survive on the water from the previous year. After that date, the trees derive their life source from the water of the new year.

The Meiri gives another answer which explains my 'freezing Tu BiShvat.' He explains that the 12 months of the year are divided into four seasons. The winter months are Tevet, Shevat and Adar. The 15th of Shevat is therefore the midpoint of winter. On this day, we are beginning to turn the corner, now closer to the end of winter than the beginning. We can begin to plant

and build for the future, despite the seemingly harsh conditions around us.

We are now in the middle of the hardest lockdown. At least in the first lockdown, when schools were closed etc., we were able to enjoy the beautiful weather. Not anymore. However, we can see and hear about the first 'buds' of our recovery as the vaccine begins to be rolled out across the country and the world. We can also begin to think more positively about the future, despite the seemingly harsh conditions around us.

Therefore, Tu BiShvat this year comes at a time when we most need to hear the positive message of emergence from winter and a renewal of the world.

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