



Investing our Hearts in the Mitzvot of Israel

Obviously, Tu BiShvat is no more than a means for calculating the laws related to those *mitzvot* whose fulfillment is connected to the soil of the Land of Israel: tithes, heave-offerings, *orla* (the “uncircumcised” fruit of a young tree), and, perhaps, the Sabbatical year. However, on an instinctive national level, Tu BiShvat holds an honorary position.

On this day, the heart would become filled with warm feelings of affection and a great longing for the Land of Israel: its commandments and landscape, its fruit and young trees, its past and future. It is possible that in the Diaspora, where we were unable to fulfill the *mitzvot* of the Land of Israel, there was a need to invest this day with added emotion in place of the commandments we lacked. Yet even in the Land, we are not free from putting our hearts – not just our heads – into this day.

On the contrary. In the Land of Israel, the need for affection is that much greater, for it also gains actual expression in our entire being. Heart and head, affection and obligation, the commandments of the soil and our natural inner bond with the Land of Israel, are one.

Indeed, this is a profound approach. Love for the Land is not merely an appreciation for its landscape and historical sites; not merely the Land’s development and transformation from wasteland to paradise. Love for the Land means a deep inner dialogue with its sanctity, its values and its unique hidden qualities.

This is the Land chosen by G-d, to which He gives special attention and

for which He harbors love. He chose to rest His presence here and decreed that certain commandments be performed here. It is not just any piece of land. It is the Holy Land, and its holiness finds expression in concrete ways.

According to the Ramban, all of the commandments in the Torah, even those not dependent upon Israel’s soil, are vitally connected to the Land of Israel. Even the Rambam, who does not share this opinion, tells us that central and fundamental aspects of the Jewish religious experience would collapse, Heaven forbid, without the Land of Israel. For example, the entire Hebrew calendar and holiday cycle is dependent upon the Land of Israel. The seasons of the year in the Land of Israel are what determine the character of the Jewish holidays and significant times and obligate every Jew wherever he or she might be, even if the particular season in the foreign country does not fit the festival. Like Australians celebrating Pesach, the Spring Holiday, in the Fall.

This is quite fitting though, for it teaches such a Jew that he is not in his natural environment. The complete fulfillment of our Torah and our national institutions: law, kingdom, priesthood and prophecy, can only be brought to fruition in the Land of Israel. All of our spiritual aspirations, hopes and desires can only fully bear fruit in this Land. “Whoever lives outside of Israel is comparable to one who has no god.” A person’s spiritual world in Chutz LaAretz, however full and rich, is lacking by definition.

Tu BiShvat – the festival of the reawakening of the trees of the Land of Israel from their wintertime slumber – is also a festival of the reawakening of the Jewish people.

In the past, the blossoming of the trees in the Land of Israel led to the reawakened hopes of the nation to return to become planted once again in its Land. With our actual physical return to our homeland, we have also set about sinking our spiritual roots into its fertile soil. All of the Land-dependent commandments have sprouted and reawakened, and with them, the Torah of the Land of Israel has begun to flower once again. No more detachment from nature, from the earth and from national self-sufficiency, but full and complete life which embraces labor, moral and social duty, the nation, the first inklings of a Kingdom of Israel, and a combination of both physical and spiritual strength.

The New Year of Trees is a New Year for the tree of the nation, for the spread of its roots in the soil of the Land and the rising of its crown to the heavens above.

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