



# Putting the Tu back into Tu BiShvat

**T**he Talmud's comparison of Moshe and Yehoshua (Bava Batra 75a) is well-known – like the moon is to the sun, so too was Yehoshua to Moshe. What is less known is the Talmud's strongly negative assessment of this, "What a shame, what an embarrassment!" There are different explanations of this, but I believe the biggest reason for the moon's "shame" is that its reflection of the sun is almost always partial. Although it appears full for one or two nights a month, it completely reflects the sun only for an instant. Likewise, Yehoshua was generally only able to partially reflect the greatness of Moshe's Torah.

This may help explain why so many important dates on the Jewish calendar occur during a full moon. To begin with, the two major *chagim*, Sukkot and Pesach, are on the 15th of the month. (While we are used to speaking about three *regalim*, Ramban notes that Shavuot is really the end of Pesach just like Shmini Atzeret is the end of Sukkot.) Exactly two months before these holidays, we find Tu B'Av and Tu BiShvat respectively. Before we can explain why this is the case, we need to understand the place of the sun and moon in Judaism.

The moon's association with femininity in Judaism is well known, partly

due to the popularization of Rosh Chodesh observances for women. (It is actually an association found in many other cultures as well.) Even the feminine side of G-d – the *Shechina* – is associated with the moon. The flip side of that association, of course, is that masculinity is associated with the sun.

But there is something else associated with the feminine, and that is the Jewish people. Throughout Tanach – and most famously in Shir HaShirim – G-d is described as the suitor who seeks His beloved bride, Israel. But due to the bride's lack of complete clarity about her feelings, it is hard for the couple to unite. While she loves him, her ambivalence prevents her from acting with decisiveness. Like the moon, then, she is only in perfect harmony with her suitor for an instant. The rest of the time, she is either in partial harmony or not at all. Hence Pesach and Sukkot are days when the Jewish people are meant to be in complete harmony with G-d. That, in turn, is embodied by the moon's total reflection of the sun on the 15th.

What about Tu B'Av and Tu BiShvat?

While G-d and the Jewish people are compared to a man and a woman,

my suggestion here is that such a focus is the point on these two days. On Tu B'Av, matches would be made between Jewish men and women, who would go on to build a home together and have children. It is notably only the harmony of male and female that has the creative power of bringing children into the world.

This productive creativity, however, does not only exist among people; it even exists in plants. That this harmony exists throughout G-d's creation is noted on Tu BiShvat – the determination of which arbor year a fruit belongs to depends upon its blooming. Marking the productive harmony in nature provides an opening through which to think about – and prepare for – the harmony we are to experience with G-d two months hence.

Therefore, on Tu BiShvat, nature provides a cue for us to reflect on the beautiful productivity that comes from being in harmony with G-d. But like any cue, it only works if we pay attention.

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