

Wednesday evening January 19 - Thursday January 20



**Celebrating
Tu B'Shvat
at
KCT**

5771

Tu B'Shevat . . .

. . . טו בשבט

The Holiday, the Trees, the Fruit, the Traditions, and the Seder

Making it a Personal and Meaningful Day

Tu B'Shevat [טו בשבט] is a rather well known but little observed Jewish holiday. All children who attended Hebrew school remember the little paper bag with dates, figs, and bokser that was given out on Tu B'Shevat. According to the Mishna, the fifteenth day of Shevat is the Rosh Hashanah for the trees [ראש השנה לעלנות]. Unlike the "real" Rosh Hashanah there is no special liturgy for the day, no special worship service, not even a designated Torah reading or Haftarah. Perhaps more like Pesach than Rosh Hashanah, there is a specific home ritual that features a Seder with four cups of wine and specific foods selected for the occasion.

It was believed that Tu B'Shevat marked a division in the agricultural year. All fruit that was harvested between Rosh Hashanah and Tu B'Shevat resulted from rain that had fallen the previous year; however, fruit harvested after Tu B'Shevat resulted from rain that had fallen subsequent to Rosh Hashanah.

The Tu B'Shevat Seder is a relatively new ritual in the Jewish world compared to the Pesach Seder. It originated among the kabbalists of Sefat in the 16th century. The followers of Rabbi Isaac Luria saw mystical significance in the yearly agricultural cycle. They would gather once a year to eat from the fruit that grew on the trees in the Land of Israel. In addition to eating the fruit, their ritual included the appropriate blessing for each fruit and contemplating the inner, secret, mystical meaning that each different fruit or type of fruits possessed. The Tu B'Shevat Seder enjoyed great popularity in the Sephardic communities, but was only recently embraced by Askenazic world. Much like a Pesach Seder, the Tu B'Shevat Seder includes four cups of wine, a telling of the "story", torah study and eating the appropriate foods.

KCT will be holding a Tu B'Shevat Seder on Wednesday evening, January 19th at KCT. If you wish to attend, please RSVP to Doug Lee at social@kct.org Since seating is limited, you MUST reserve in advance in order to attend.

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What follows on these pages is an "E-Shiur" about Tu B'Shevat that was prepared by Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Director, Conservative Yeshiva, Jerusalem. An E-Shiur is an opportunity to do serious study on line. The way to use this study material is to first read the study guide **Tu BiShvat – How Green is Our Judaism?** Within this guide, there are parenthetical references to the **Source Sheet**, which provides additional opportunity for study and thought.



Tu BiShvat – How Green is Our Judaism?

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Director, Conservative Yeshiva, Jerusalem

This E-Shiur is made possible by a grant from Temple Zion Israelite Center, Miami, Florida

It is dedicated to the memory of the 44 people who lost their lives in the Carmel Forest fire.

The 15th of the month of Shvat, *Tu BiShvat*, has enjoyed a real growth in popularity in recent generations. It is probably "celebrated" on a wider scale today than ever before. Jews all over the world, many totally secular, will eat a variety of fruits and nuts, 15 if possible, or even take part in Tu BiShvat Seders. Every Jewish child in Israel has a Tu BiShvat program at school. The Jewish National Fund arranges for tens of thousands of saplings to be planted in Tu BiShvat activities every year.

A Very Minor Holiday

There is no reference to Tu BiShvat in the Bible. It is first mentioned in the Mishnah, Rosh Hashana 1:1 [Source 1 + Note/Question], where four "new years" are designated. These are really "key dates" for administrative, economic or agricultural matters, like we have "the fiscal year," "the tax year," etc. The Mishnah's fourth case, "the New Year for the tree" (*rosh hashana la'ilan*) fixes the "determining date" for fruits from trees for tithes (10% tax), both the "first tithe" for the Levites and the "second tithe" for one's Jerusalem pilgrimage or payments for the poor, as well as for the sabbatical year (*shmita*) (more in Note).

Regarding the date of the "trees' New Year" there is a *machloket* (dispute): Beit Shammai says the first of Shevat; Beit Hillel the 15th, and their view is followed. The Talmud [Sources 2 + Questions] explains the date as the dividing line between the rains of the past and coming years or between the sources of sustenance for the trees. On the operative level, a tree's fruit belonged to the produce of the past year if the tree's blossoms appeared before 15th Shvat, regardless of when the fruit was actually picked.

Not exactly the stuff holidays are made of, even minor ones, like Purim and Hanukah. Granted the practical importance in an agricultural society, it does not have religious elements in the traditional sense. And in fact, the only impact of Tu BiShvat on non-agricultural ritual is that *Tachanun* (the penitential prayer) is not said and fasting is not permitted.

While there were old traditions in many communities of eating fruits and reciting Psalms on Tu BiShvat, the kabbalists "upgraded" it in 16th century Tzfat. They composed a special service modeled on the Passover Seder, including four glasses of wine. This has been expanded over the years, with texts about fruits and nuts, discussion of their metaphoric meanings for or about *Am Yisrael*, songs, and much improvisation. As the Zionist movement grew, from the late 19th century on, the Jews returning to *Eretz Yisrael* started planting trees, to replace natural forests that had been destroyed over the centuries. And growing awareness of dwindling resources and other environmental dangers has led many to give Tu BiShvat an ecological dimension.

Ecology Right from the Start

From the first moment, God put mankind in charge of the world. On the sixth day, "He created male and female and told them to be fertile and multiply, **fill the earth and master it and rule over all the living things**" (Gen 1:28). This is a broad mandate, seemingly unlimited. But there was another message when God placed *Adam HaRishon* in *Gan Eden* in chapter 2. Instead of the leisure we often imagine for "Paradise," God gave Adam work to do. "The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, **l'ovda ul'shomra, to till/work it and to tend/guard it**" (Gen 2:15). The *right to control* and *the duty to work* the world imply the power to utilize resources, develop technology and industrialize, but there is a concomitant obligation,

ul'shomra, "and to protect it." Several of the classical commentators read *l'shomra* as commanding humanity to act against pollution and destruction [Sources 3 + Question]. The vulnerability of the natural world to dangers from God's creatures, including humans, is built in from the beginning, as is our duty to safeguard it.

Our Relations with Trees

Man's first brush with trees was not auspicious; the young couple was thrown out of *Gan Eden* for eating from the one tree they had been told not to touch. But the Torah shows specific concern for trees, prohibiting, during the siege of enemy cities in wartime, cutting down trees which provide food (Deut 20:19-20), likely the first case of a "protected species." Jewish law treated this as a general rule, not just limited to the war situation [Sources 4 + Question].

But since this was a poor society and trees were important for many reasons, the Mishnah and Gemara fixed minimum quantities of fruit that various trees must yield to still be considered "fruit-bearing". Such distinctions were not theoretical; they could have serious impact on a land-owner's plans for the use of his trees. [Source 5 + Notes/Questions]

How Much Immunity Does Fruit Give?

In rabbinic legislation the immunity fruit trees enjoyed from being cut down was less than Deuteronomy verse might suggest, no doubt a concession to commercial realities. Not only could a tree be cut down once it no longer produced the minimum required, but Rabina, a 5th century Babylonian rabbi, introduced a test of relative value that changed the game: If the tree's value for other purposes (e.g., its wood) exceeds the value of its fruit, it is permitted to cut it down. Use of the tree for such other purposes is not considered "destruction." [Source 6 + Questions]

From the Trees to the Forest

Indeed it is from the prohibition to cut down fruit-trees in Deuteronomy 20 that the broader mitsvah of *bal taschit*, that we should not wantonly destroy things, is derived. The verse goes on to ask: כִּי הָאֲדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה? – is the tree of the field a person? Of the many meanings given for this enigmatic phrase, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (Germany, 19th C), quoting the *Sifrei*, says trees are essential to mankind's existence: חַיֵּי שֶׁל הָאָדָם אֵינָם אֶלָּא מִן הָאֵילָן – The life of humanity is only from the tree.

Thus the tree has become a symbol of Nature itself, and therefore it is fitting that its "holiday" be an occasion to remember our duty *l'shomra*, to protect the world we live in and its natural resources. People would do well to listen to Mishnah Avot (4:3): "Do not underrate the importance of anything...everything has its place under the sun." Almost two thousand years ago Ben Azzai hinted to the delicate ecosystems which enable life on this delicate planet to survive. And the rabbis were well aware of the tragic consequences of failing "to protect" them – there will be no one to fix what we break [Source 7].

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, the most central figure in saving the Jewish tradition after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, stated clearly the priority he assigned to the planting of trees; it is not abandoned even to allow one to greet the Messiah [Source 8 + Summary Questions]. The lure of messianic desires and "higher duties" should not deter us from caring for the world we live in. May this Tu BiShvat remind us all of that.



Tu BiShvat – How Green is Our Judaism? SOURCE SHEET

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Director, Conservative Yeshiva, Jerusalem

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SOURCE 1 – The "Minor Holiday" called Tu B'Shvat

Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1

There are four New Years. On the first of Nisan is the New Year for Kings and for festivals; on the first of Elul is the New Year for the tithe of animals; Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Shimon say, on the first of Tishrei. On the first of Tishrei is the New Year for years, for Sabbatical years, for Jubilee years, for planting, and for vegetables.

On the first of Shevat is the New Year for trees according to the School of Shammai. The School of Hillel says on the fifteenth thereof.

משנה ראש השנה א,א

ארבעה ראשי שנים הם :
באחד בניסן ראש השנה למלכים ולרגלים.
באחד באלול ראש השנה למעשר בהמה.
רבי אלעזר ורבי שמעון אומרים, באחד בתשרי.
באחד בתשרי ראש השנה לשנים ולשמטין וליובלות,
לנטיעה ולירקות.

באחד בשבט, ראש השנה לאילן, כדברי בית שמאי.
בית הלל אומרים, בחמשה עשר בו.

Note: the first and third "new years" are used primarily to determine when we start counting, for various purposes, e.g., the year of the reign of the king, counting for the Sabbatical year of the land (*shmitta*) and Jubilee year, etc. The second and fourth fix the dates for "tithes," the 10% annual taxes on newborn livestock and on produce from the land for the Levites (first tithe), and for pilgrimage trips to Jerusalem or for local poor people (second tithe, *ma'aser sheni*, and the tithes for the poor, *ma'aser ani*) according to a seven year cycle. In the last (4th) case, *rosh hashana la'ilan*, tree-fruit that budded *before* the determining date may not be tithed for tree-fruit that budded *after* the date and vice versa (akin to income and expenses today, from before or after December 31). The same is true for determining whether the fruit is produce of the *shmitta* year and needs to be treated accordingly.

Question: Do these dates have any religious significance? For a very different set of key dates, see Mishnah 1:2 (not included here).

SOURCES 2 –The Agricultural Significance of the 15th Shvat

Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashana 14a: R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Oshia: Because by then the greater part of the year's rain has fallen.

ראש השנה יד ע"א - אמר רבי אלעזר אמר ר' אושעיא :
הואיל ויצאו רוב גשמי שנה.

Jerusalem Talmud, Rosh Hashana 1:2: Rabbi Ze'ira said: Up to now they have lived from last year's rain; from now on they live from the coming year's rain.

פרק א הלכה ב רבי זעירה דו אמר : עד כאן הן חיינ ממי
השנה שעבר ; מיכן והילך הן חיינ ממי השנה הבאה.

Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashana 15b: Our Rabbis taught: If the fruit of a tree blossoms before the 15th of Shvat, it is tithed for the outgoing year; if after the 15th of Shvat, it is tithed for the incoming year.

ראש השנה טו ע"ב ת"ר : אילן שחנטו פירותיו קודם
ט"ו בשבט מתעשר לשנה שעברה, אחר ט"ו בשבט
מתעשר לשנה הבאה.

Questions

- 1) Is there a difference between the first and second sources, and if so what?
- 2) What does the 3rd source add?

SOURCES 3 – God's Command to Adam to Work and Protect the Earth

<p>Gen 2:15: "The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, <i>l'ovda ul'shomra</i>, to till it and tend it."</p>	<p>בְּרֵאשִׁית ב, טו: וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹהִים, אֶת-הָאָדָם; וַיִּנְחָהוּ בְּגֶן-עֵדֶן, לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ.</p>
<p>Ibn Ezra: <i>to till it:</i> to water the garden; <i>and to tend it:</i> from all the animals, lest they come in and pollute (foul) it</p>	<p>אבן עזרא: לעבדה - להשקות הגן; ולשמרה - מכל החיות שלא יכנסו שם ויטנפוהו.</p>
<p>Radak: He put him there to work the land, weeding and hoeing for vegetables and trees for his food, and to guard it from animals and birds as best he could.</p>	<p>רד"ק (על לעבדה ולשמרה): והניחהו בה שיעבוד האדמה ההיא בנכוש ובעדור בירקות ובאילנות למאכלו, ולשמרה מחיות ומעופות כפי כחו...:</p>

Question: What is radical about Radak's explanation?

SOURCES 4 – The First "Protected Species"

<p>Deut 20:19 When you besiege a city a long time... you shall not destroy its trees, by wielding an axe against them. You may eat of them, but you shall not cut them down; for is the tree of the field a person, to withdraw from before you into the siege? 20 Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down, to construct bulwarks against the city you are at war with, until it falls.</p>	<p>יט כִּי-תָצוּר אֶל-עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עֲלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ, לֹא-תִשְׁחִית אֶת-עֵצָהּ לְנֹדַח עָלֶיהָ גְרֹזָן, כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֵתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת: כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה, לְבָא מִפְּנֵיךָ בְּמִצּוֹר.</p> <p>כ רק עץ אֲשֶׁר-תִּדְעַע כִּי-לֹא-עֵץ מֵאֲכָל הוּא אֶתוֹ תִּשְׁחִית וְכָרְתָּ; וּבְנִיתָ מִצּוֹר, עַל-הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר-הוּא עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה--עַד רִדְתָּהּ.</p>
<p>Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 6:8 And this applies not just during siege, but everywhere – one who cuts down a fruit-tree in a destructive way receives lashes.</p>	<p>רמבם, הלכות מלכים פרק ו הלכה ח ולא במצור בלבד, אלא בכל מקום: כל הקוצץ אילן מאכל דרך השחתה--לוקה.</p>

Question: What is the apparent scope of the prohibition in the verse (time, place, circumstances)? How does it appear in the Rambam?

SOURCES 5 – The Limits of Immunity

<p>Mishnah Shevi'it 4:10: How much should an olive-tree produce that it should not be cut down? A quarter (of a <i>kav</i>); Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: It all depends on the kind of olive-tree.</p>	<p>משנה שביעית ד, י: כמה יהא בזית ולא יקוצנו, רובע; רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר, הכול לפי הזית.</p>
<p>Baba Kama 91b: Rav says: A palm tree bearing one <i>kav</i> of fruit may not be cut down. An objection was raised (from Mishna Shevi'it, above, about olives). (The response) Olives are different; they are more valuable.</p>	<p>בבא קמא צא ע"ב: אמר רב: דיקלא דטען קבא אסור למקצציה. מיתבי: כמה יהא בזית ולא יקצצו, רובע. שאני זיתים דחשיבי.</p>

Note: a *kav* was a measure of volume about 33.6 cubic inches or 6 eggs. (6 Eggs (Bezah) = 1 Log, 4 Log = 1 Kav; in modern equivalent, a *kav* is about 2 liters.)

Questions

- 1) Why are there different measures for different fruits/produce? Why might there be different measures even for one category, e.g. olives?
- 2) Is the farmer likely to be pleased or displeased by these measures? What is the effect on his ability to use his trees?

SOURCES 6 – Relative Value

<p>Baba Kama 91b-92a: Rabina said: If its value (for other purposes) exceeds that of its fruit, it is permitted (to cut it down)... When Rav Hisda saw certain palms among the vines, he said to his field laborers: "Remove them with their roots. Vines can buy palms but palms cannot buy vines."</p>	<p>בבא קמא צא ע"ב-צב ע"א: אמר רבינא: ואם היה מעולה בדמים מותר... רב חסדא חזא תאלי בי גופני אמר ליה לאריסיה עקרינהו גופני קני דקלי דקלי לא קני גופני.</p>
<p>Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 6:8 ...But one may cut them down if they cause damage to other trees or to another's field, or if they can be used for greater value. The Torah only forbids <i>wanton</i> destruction.</p>	<p>רמבם, הלכות מלכים פרק ו הלכה ח... אבל קוצצין אותן, אם היה מזיק אילנות אחרות, או מפני שמזיק בשדה אחרים, או מפני שדמיו יקרים; לא אסרה תורה, אלא דרך השחתה.</p>

Question: What does Rav Hisda's statement about vines and palms teach us about the "ecology" of trees planted for their produce?

SOURCE 7 – Fragile: Don't Drop!

<p>Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13 "Consider God's doing! Who can straighten what He has twisted?" (Eccles 7:13) When the Holy One created the first human being, God took him and led him around all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: Behold my works, how beautiful they are. All that I have created is within your domain. Take care, therefore, that you do not destroy My world, for if you do, there will be no one to fix it right after you.</p>	<p>קוהלת רבה, פרשה ז, 13 "רָאָה אֶת מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים, כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָוְתוּ?" (קוהלת ז, יג) – בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו: ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי, בשבילך בראתי. תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם תקלקל אין מי שיתקן אחריך.</p>
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SOURCE 8 – Priorities

<p>Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai used to say: If you are holding a sapling in your hand and someone tells you, 'Come quickly, the messiah is here!', first finish planting the tree and then go to greet the messiah (Avot d'Rabbi Natan, B, chapter 31).</p>	<p>רבן יוחנן בן זכאי היה אומר: אם היתה נטיעה בתוך ידך ויאמרו לך: הרי לך משיח - בא ונטע את הנטיעה ואחר-כך צא והקבילו. (אבות דרבי נתן, נוסח ב' ל"א)</p>
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Summary Questions:

1. In what ways has Rabbinic legislation both expanded and contracted the Torah's prohibition in Deut 20:19 (Source 4, above)?
2. What are the implications of this Rabbinic legislation for our conduct and activities today?

The Seven Species

Written by Ariela Pelaia, the Director of Programming (Jewish Life Education) at Temple Beth El in Stamford, CT., who is a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary

The Seven Species (*Shivat Haminin* in Hebrew) are the seven types of fruits and grains named in the Torah (Deuteronomy 8:8) as the main produce of the land of Israel. In ancient times these foods were staples of the Israelite diet. They were also important in the ancient Jewish religion because one of the Temple tithes derived from these seven foods. The tithe was called the *bikkurim*, which means "first fruits." On the holiday of Tu B'Shvat it has become traditional for Jews to eat from the seven species.



Deuteronomy 8:8 tells us that Israel was . . .

"a land of wheat, barley, grapevines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of oil olives and date honey."

The seven species are:

- * **Wheat** (*chitah* in Hebrew)
- * **Barley** (*se'orah* in Hebrew)
- * **Grapes** (*gefen* in Hebrew), usually consumed as wine
- * **Figs** (*te'edah* in Hebrew)
- * **Pomegranates** (*rimon* in Hebrew)
- * **Olives** (*zayit* in Hebrew), usually consumed in oil form
- * **Dates** (*tamar* or *d'vash* in Hebrew)

About Date Honey . . .

The biblical verse from Deuteronomy does not actually mention palm dates but instead uses the word "d'vash" as the seventh species, which literally translates to honey. In ancient times the palm date was often made into a form of honey by mashing the dates and cooking them with water until they thickened into a syrup. It is generally thought that when the Torah mentions "honey" it is usually referring to palm date honey and not the honey produced by bees. This is why dates were included in the seven species instead of bee honey.



Almonds: The "Eighth Species" . . .

While not technically one of the seven species, **almonds** (*shaked* in Hebrew) have become a sort of unofficial eighth species due to their close association with Tu B'Shvat. Almond trees grow all over Israel today and they tend to bloom right around the time that Tu B'Shvat usually occurs. Because of this, almonds are also often eaten with the actual seven species on Tu B'Shvat.