

# Tu Bishvat

## New year of the trees

Tu Bish'vat: the fifteenth day of the month of Sh'vat. Chag Hailanot: the holiday of trees. This special festivity does not find its origins in the Torah like Pesach and Rosh Hashanah. It is also not native to the Bible, unlike Purim, or from Biblical times like Chanukkah.

This festival is mentioned for the first time in the Mishnah: "And the first of Sh'vat will be the new year for trees according to the opinion of the House of Shamai. The House of Hillel says: it is the fifteenth of it." Like most of the discussions from that time, today we follow the opinion of the Sage Hillel.

To say the truth, it does not seem to be a very significant event in the Jewish calendar. Especially for the communities in the Southern Hemisphere which are in the middle of Summer vacation. Nevertheless, here in Israel, where I live, Tu Bish'vat has a particular charm (like each of the festivals).

We can attach many meaningful concepts to trees.

For starters, we refer to flora in general by the know term of "nature". In a time when mans destructive hand razes all that it finds in its path, Tu Bish'vat comes to remind us about the importance of caring for the environment. Our Earth was created by G-d and, under no circumstance, do we have the right to destroy it. Moreover, it was given to Human beings to profit from its resources and, thus, survive; but this does not mean that we can squander them. Judaism reminds us, at least once a year, how we must behave with our Pacha Mama (Mother Nature).

The leaves of the trees give us oxygen necessary to breathe. Israel is the only place in the world where the amount of trees is larger year by year. This is so by the indefatigable activities of the Keren Kayemet LeIsrael (the Jewish National Fund, JNF), which plants and creates new forests throughout the State. It is quite common to see groups of young people and adults visiting the Holy Land and leaving in it their roots, both literal and metaphorical. Literal since they plant with their own hands a pine tree or an oak. Metaphorical, hearkening to the origins of our people; returning to the land of our patriarchs and continuing the millenary traditions of our ancestors. These roots are our life.

Finally, it is trees that provide us with their fruit, our nourishment. It is very common in Israel to gather with the family to celebrate Tu Bish'vat. There are even modern hagadot, like those of Pesach, to guide us in which blessings and rites we must follow. Seven species come from our Land: wheat, barley, grapes, olives, pomegranates, figs, and dates. Each of them with their particular properties, coming together to create a balanced organic diet.

May it be G-d's will that this Tu Bish'vat we can gather again with our beloved to celebrate the beginning of a new year for nature, remembering always where we come from and what is our true mission on Earth.

**Roger Rosenthal**

*Lech Lecha Coordinator for the  
Javaia Israelit - Long Term Programs in Israel*

*(Translated by Rabbi Juan Mejía,  
Soutwestern Coordinator for Bechol Lashon)*



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