

The Symbolism of Tu B'Shvat
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In a few days we will be celebrating the beautiful holiday of Tu B'Shvat. This meaningful day on the Jewish calendar encourages us to contemplate our unique connection to the Land of Israel. As the Midrash tells us: "Israel is chosen from among all the nations, and the Land of Israel is chosen from among all the lands. Let the chosen ones come and inherit the chosen inheritance."

Praise Israel, speak warmly of the Land, its beauty and its holiness. Be supportive of those who are making Aliyah and contemplate this for yourself.

On Tu B'Shvat is customary to eat fruit that comes from the Land of Israel. Especially to eat from the seven species with which the Torah praises this Land: Wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. We also try to eat a "new" fruit - one we have not eaten in the past year. This enables us to say the additional blessing "Shehecheyanu" on this new fruit. Our sages explain that when eating produce of the Land of Israel we are infusing our bodies with the holiness of Eretz Yisrael.

Tu B'Shvat is an opportunity to contemplate the source of the blessing in our lives. It's a time to see beyond the trees. Peek behind nature. Acknowledge God who is orchestrating all that goes on around us, providing, sustaining and protecting us. Tu B'Shvat is certainly an appropriate time to think about being more careful with making blessings before we put food into our mouths. Recite the *b'rachot* slowly and with concentration.

The Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin informs us that among the signs of the Redemption are that the trees will blossom and the remnants of Israel shall return to the Land. Remember that in 1948 there were 600,000 Jews living in Israel. Today there are more than seven million Jews residing in Medinat Yisrael. With cranes and construction all around us, we see the prophecy and miracle unfolding before our very eyes. Remarkably, half the Jews in the world live in Israel today.

Tu B'Shvat is certainly a time for planting and thinking about the future. In the Torah God instructs the Jewish People: "When you come to the Land, and you plant." God is teaching us: Even though you will find the Land full of goodness, do not say, 'We will sit and not plant,' but rather be careful to plant. Just as we entered this world and found trees that others planted – we too must plant for the next generation.

Finally, Tu B'Shvat speaks to the theme of "renewal." On Tu B'Shvat, the fruit are yet to be seen. Still, we rejoice; faithful that in a few weeks' time, Spring will be here and the trees will bear fruit. In our own lives as well, there are times when we may feel helpless and without hope. Yet Tu B'Shvat teaches us that Man should never despair. Spring is around the corner and the sunshine will soon return.

These past two years, Israel experienced perhaps its most challenging time since its establishment. We endured a relentless war with tens of thousands of people displaced from their homes, thousands killed and hundreds taken captive. On the world stage as well, we see rampant anti-Semitism and the continued isolation of Israel and the Jewish People. Tu B'Shvat reminds us that better times lay ahead. Even in this difficult time, the sap is rising, the trees will soon blossom and the fruit will return.

KKL-JNF is deeply grateful to our friends and partners around the world for their dedication and commitment to the Land of Israel and the Jewish People. Shevat is an acronym for the words *Shenishma B'Sorot Tovot*. May we hear good tidings.

With blessings to you and your families for a Chag Tu B'Svat Sameach.

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