

before I could remember, but it wasn't until I was sitting in class in elementary school one day that I actually felt His presence. I had been thinking about the origins of everything around me, from the desk I was sitting at to the clothes I was wearing. I could trace everything back to nature, but I hit a brick wall when I tried to figure out who planted the first seed. And that was when I realized that there was some higher being who set everything in motion, who created this gloriously diverse universe with millions of different species and subspecies, all working together to form a kind of kaleidoscope of life.

Now I'm older, and I've learned much more complex arguments and "proofs" for monotheism. I've also learned that a dandelion is just something that needs to be uprooted to make way for the "real" flowers, and that a skunk's odor is to be feared rather than embraced. But I miss the simple faith in Gd I discovered as a child, and the love I had for His world.

So I think it's time for the adults to take back Tu B'Shvat. Well, we don't have to take it, exactly. We can share it with the kids. But the point is, nature is not something we grownups should take for granted just because we're busy people who don't have time to play in the mud anymore. At the heart of Tu B'Shvat is a celebration of the world in all its glory and complexity, and a holiday like that has no age limit. Just think: we could be living in one of those futuristic science-fiction universes where everyone dresses in the same space-age suit and the architecture is all uniform and austere. Instead, Gd in His infinite kindness gave us a smorgasbord of tastes, sights and smells to appreciate and enjoy.

This Tu B'Shvat, let's linger a little longer over a sunset, or bite into an apple with renewed gusto. When the snow starts to fall, don't mutter dejectedly about how it will delay your commute to work. Instead, take a moment to revel in how that blanket of white fluff sparkles in the sun. Think back to the time when a snowstorm was a cause for joyous celebration, because it meant sledding and hot cocoa and days off from school.

For my part, I will hang out in the suburbs, breathing in the fresh aroma of skunks on the prowl.

Tova Bernbaum is a freelance writer living in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York.

Dear Friend:

The Holiday of Tu B'Shvat-15 Shevat, occurs this year on Monday, January 25. There is a custom to eat carob on Tu B'Shvat. The Talmud tells us that it takes 70 years for a carob tree to mature and bear fruit. By eating carob on Tu B'Shvat we are highlighting an important lesson learnt from the carob tree. Although we may be living in the moment and enjoying the "here and now", we must not lose sight of the importance of patiently investing in the future. Although it may be a long and arduous process with no immediate gain, the fruits of our labor will be harvested by generations to come. Our efforts will be well rewarded and future generations will remember us and thank us, giving us continued life and existence into the future.

*Enclosed is a piece of carob for you to enjoy together with our delicious honey whole wheat challah!*

Shalom,



Rochel Kaplan

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## Lesson 4 Tu B'Shvat



### *Tu B'Shvat,*

the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of *Shevat*, is characterized as *Rosh Hashanah* the beginning of the year.

The first of *Tishrei* is *Rosh Hashanah* for the judgment of mankind, and *Tu b'Shvat*, the fifteenth of *Shvat*, is *Rosh Hashanah* for trees, regarding the requirement of tithing their produce.

Our sages designated the fifteenth of *Shvat* as the boundary between one year and another regarding fruit-bearing trees, for by this date, most of the annual rain has fallen. Fruits that grow after this date are therefore considered to be produce of a new year.

The day is not marked, however, by a prohibition of work, by an obligation to eat a festive meal and rejoice, or with special prayers. Nevertheless, *Tu b'Shvat* is invested with a festive sense and has some vestiges of a holiday.

The reason for the festive mood of this Rosh Hashanah of trees is that *Tu b'Shvat* bespeaks praises of the Land of Israel. On this day the strength of the soil of *Eretz Yisrael* is renewed and it begins to yield its produce and demonstrate its inherent goodness. And it is with reference to the fruits of the trees and the produce of the soil that the Torah praises the Land of Israel, as the verse (**Devarim 8:8**) states: "A land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olives and honey". The verse speaks of two types of grain and five fruits when describing the richness of *Eretz Yisrael*. The honey that the verse mentions refers to honey derived from dates. Thus, the day on which the soil of *Eretz Yisrael* receives renewed strength to give forth its bounty is a day of rejoicing for the people of Israel, who till the land, who love it and who yearn for it.

**On Tu B'Shvat, it is customary to eat fruit which is grown in *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel) and to eat fruit which one has not yet eaten that season so that the *Shehecheyanu* blessing can be recited.**

The Midrash mentions the Land of Israel two times as follows:

□ Midrash Tanchuma, End of Behar; “The Land of Israel is most dear to me; as I have sanctified it from all other lands

□ Midrash Bamidbar Rabah 7:10 “The Land of Israel is where the Shechinah [G-d’s presence] rests.

The two sightings is the Torah addressing two distinct features about the Land of Israel; its spiritual depth its physical benefits, respectively. The Torah is emphasizing that the Holy Land possesses two dimensions which can be seen as distinct.

The first “Land”, represents the spiritual properties of the land, **The Sublime Israel**. This category consists of five fruits and grains-wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates-corresponding to the Five Books of Moses, **The Torah**. It is a “Land the L-rd your G-d, looks after; the eyes of G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of year to the end of the year.” There is a special Divine Providence over the Land of Israel, more so than any other place in the world. Our sages have taught, that the Land of Israel was created first, while the rest of the world was created last. The Land of Israel is watered by G-d Himself, while the rest of the world is watered by means of an agent, as it says, “Who gives rain upon the face of the land and sends water upon the face of outside places” (Job 5:10).

The second “Land” contains two items-olives and honey-dates. Olive oil with its beneficial effects for various skin ailments and diseases represents the physical bodily benefits of the land. Similarly, the very sweet honey-dates, uniquely pleasing to the pallet, represents physical contentment and satisfaction embodied in the earthly dimensions of the land of Israel. As it says, “For the L-rd your G-d is bringing you to a good land, a land with brooks of water, fountains and depths, that emerge in valleys and mountains, a land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of oil producing olives and honey-dates, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, you will lack nothing in it, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose mountains you will hew copper.”

Rabbi Hamnuna says: There may be a Jew who is not so educated or attentive to the holiness and spirituality of Israel, but he/she is close to it physically, he/she is dedicated to it, protecting, caring for it, sacrificing for it. This Jew must be blessed first. In the concrete reality he/she is so much closer to the land.

Thus the Talmud states, “Why did Omri deserve kingship? Because he added a major city to the Land of Israel, “He bought the mountain of Shomron”. Omri was one of the very corrupt kings of Israel and father role model of the evil king Achav, yet he built Samaria (today the West Bank), and for this he received the gift of kingship. His close kinship to the land, expressed in physically building it, carried tremendous weight and merit.

The notion of physical closeness to the Land, is most conspicuous in our children of uniform, **our soldiers**. Some of them are in fact deeply educated in Torah and appreciate matters of spirituality that they are protecting; yet many others have little understanding of the sublime land. Yet they put their physical safety on the line day in and day out. *They receive the first blessing!*

**May Almighty G-d bless our soldiers-and all residents-of the Holy Land; protect their every step and bring true lasting peace and redemption to our people and the entire world. Happy Tu B’Shvat!**

## Taking Back Tu B’Shvat

By Tova Bernbaum Printed from Chabad.org

Some holidays, like fine wine, seem to improve with age: the more I celebrate them, the more meaning I find in the customs and rituals, as the older and (I hope) wiser me finds different ways to relate to the same events.

Then there are those holidays that loom large in childhood, but fade in importance over time. It’s not that I don’t care about them; I just don’t have school projects and assemblies to remind me of a holiday’s imminent arrival, so it’s not until my niece or nephew brings home flowers made of fruit leather that the bell chimes in my head and I find myself saying, “Hmm, Tu B’Shvat again? Where does the time go?”

When I was growing up, Tu B’Shvat was a day I looked forward to, if for no other reason than that it meant snack bags of exotic fruits like carob and figs. I vaguely understood that it was a new year for the trees and had something to do with nature, but I didn’t really dig too deep into the meaning of the day. All I knew was that it was a time to indulge in rare fruit, and I was more than happy to oblige.

As I got older, those school-issued bags of fruit disappeared, taking my observance of Tu B’Shvat with them. The end of snack bags was probably a good thing (carob can be very hard on the teeth), but saying goodbye to Tu B’Shvat was a sad casualty of growing up. It’s a strange irony that a day that celebrates nature and the lovely world Gd created should be so prominent in childhood and so overlooked in our older years. After all, I think it may be the grownups who really need to take a moment to appreciate the splendor of this intricate and varied universe we live in.

Children already have an innate sense of wonder when it comes to nature. They see beauty, mystery, even spirituality in the little things that adults often write off as uninteresting or insignificant. I remember how as a kid I used to gather bouquets of dandelions to give my mother, who always accepted them with a bemused smile. It didn’t matter to me that they were weeds; everything that grew from the ground—the leaves, the trees, the poisonous mushrooms—seemed beautiful and kind of miraculous. Even the smell of skunks appealed to me in an intriguing, so-bad-it’s-good kind of way.

Nature is also what led me to a real belief in Gd. Granted, the concept of one Gd had been drilled into my head from

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