

## The Buds are Appearing in the Land

Rabbi Ephrayim Beck  
Former Rosh Kollel in Caracas (1999-2001)



---

Tu Bishvat, as we know, is the “birthday of the trees.” But we may ask: what is the significance of Tu Bishvat for man? For many shlichim in Diaspora communities, Tu Bishvat is a “problematic” festival. It seems – by its very definition – to be a festival bound up with Eretz Yisrael and involving planting saplings in the land, hiking in the land, etc. How can Tu Bishvat be “translated” into the language of the Diaspora? The question that arises each year is the same: what spiritual significance does Tu Bishvat have, that may be commemorated even outside of Eretz Yisrael?

One possible answer to this question may be derived from Rav Kook’s commentary on the Siddur, “Olat Ra’ayah.” Commenting on the haftarah read on Sukkot, Rav Kook teaches that there is a parallel between the periodicity of the year and the periodicity of each day. Just as the day is divided into hours of light and hours of darkness, so too is the year. Moreover, just as the day has a starting point, a climax and an ending, so does the year. In addition, just as certain hours of the day may be singled out for attention, likewise certain periods of the year may also be distinguished.

What is important about this parallel is that it notes a point in the year that parallels a similar point in the day. Rav Kook in his commentary points to Sukkot as paralleling the hour of sunset. We shall not address, here, the significance of this parallel regarding Sukkot, but shall rather concentrate on Tu Bishvat in light of this parallel of Sukkot and sunset. Continuing Rav Kook's idea, we see that if Sukkot corresponds to sunset, then Pesach must correspond to sunrise (half a year after Sukkot, paralleling the hours of night). Where is Tu Bishvat in this parallel scheme? We may suggest that Tu Bishvat (which falls two months before Pesach) is precisely the moment of “a-lot ha-shachar,” dawn, the beginning of sunrise – the dawning of the new day.

The blossoming of the almond tree, with its tidings of the awakening trees and all of nature from their slumber to a new year of bounty, represents not only a natural phenomenon but a spiritual one as well. Nature turns to man, immersed in the depths of winter (at least in Israel and the rest of the northern hemisphere) and calls him to follow this awakening to the new year. This call is embodied in Tu Bishvat. If there was no marking of this new year of the trees, we might have paid no attention to this renewal. Tu Bishvat is the Rosh Hashana that falls in the middle of the year, and it calls out to every person – in Israel and elsewhere – to begin preparing, awakening, and renewing him or herself. Yes, we are in the middle of the year, but we dare not allow ourselves to sink into routine. Tu Bishvat offers us a sort of “freshening-up station,” allowing us to stop our regular humdrum, to look around at nature, and to follow its example. To awaken, rejuvenate ourselves and proceed with renewed strength in the paths of nature and those of the spirit.

comments: [efraimback@gmail.com](mailto:efraimback@gmail.com)