



Laws and Customs: Tu B'Shevat

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SHABBOS SHIRAH

This name of this *Shabbos* is attributed to the fact that both the *Parsha* and *Haftarah* include a *Shirah* (song).

The congregation stands during the *Shirah*, facing the *Sefer Torah*.

When reading the third last *Possuk* of the *Parsha*, the word *Zecher* is read twice, first with a *Segol* (*Zecher*), and then again with a *Tzeirei* (*Zeicher*).

There is a custom to eat buckwheat. In association with this, the Rebbe recounts that the *Maharal* of Prague instructed the teachers to gather the young children and their parents in the *shul* courtyard on *Shabbos Shira* and relate to them the story of the splitting of the sea, including how the birds sang and chirped while the Jews sang the *Shirah*, and how the little children fed the birds fruits they had plucked from trees that had miraculously grown in the sea. The *Maharal* then instructed that the children be given buckwheat to throw to the birds in commemoration of the above. The *Maharal* would then bless the children, and also their parents – that they merit to educate and raise them to *Torah*, marriage and good deeds. [In practice, it is forbidden on *Shabbos* to feed birds that do not directly rely on humans for sustenance. Since it is no longer common for the typical household to care for birds, the Rebbe clarified that one should not actually feed the birds on *Shabbos*. Nevertheless, all the above should still be shared with the children, using the opportunity to implant within them the attribute of mercy towards all creations, as demonstrated in this story.]

ROSH HASHANAH OF TREES

Tu B'Shevat (15th of *Shevat*) is the *Rosh Hashanah* for trees, as it is the time when they are infused with sap and their fruits begin the earliest stage of development.

Tu B'Shevat is one of the dates used to calculate the years for *Orlah* (the first three years of a tree's growth – when its fruit is forbidden), *Revai* (the fourth year of a tree's growth – when its fruit must be consecrated), *Terumah* and *Maaser* (the tithes given to the *Kohen* and the *Levi*).

Outside of *Eretz Yisroel*, the laws of *Orlah* apply to any fruits **known** to have grown during a tree's first three years, and the laws of *Revai* apply to **grapes known** to have grown during a vine's fourth year. A

Rav should be consulted to compute these times properly.

Even though *Tu B'Shevat* is the time of a fruit's development in the Northern Hemisphere, it is still the date used when calculating *Orlah* and *Revai* for fruits grown in the Southern Hemisphere.

Contrary to popular misconception, *Tu B'Shevat* is not the day of judgement for trees. Rather, that occurs on *Shavuos*.

TU B'SHEVAT CUSTOMS

Tachnun is not recited on *Tu B'Shevat* or the *Mincha* beforehand, and one may not fast – not even a *Chosson* and *Kallah* on the day of their *Chuppah*.

On *Tu B'Shevat*, it is customary to consume the fruit of trees, especially the *Shivas Haminim* (the fruit with which *Eretz Yisroel* is praised – grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates). Some have the custom of eating a new fruit and reciting *Shehecheyanu*. It is also customary to eat carobs, which are especially associated with miracles. All this is to praise Hashem for renewing the fruits.

When eating fruits grown in *Eretz Yisroel*, one must ensure that there is no concern of *Orlah*, *Revai*, *Tevel* and *Shemitah*. When shopping for fruit, one should note the country of origin.

The Rebbe encouraged public gatherings in association with *Tu B'Shevat*, especially for children who are likened to a growing tree – both physically and spiritually.

The Rebbe also encouraged giving extra *Tzedakah* on *Tu B'Shevat*.

BROCHOS ON FRUITS

Shehecheyanu is recited when eating the fruit of a season for the first time. This applies even to species that fruit twice per year. However, it does not apply to fruits that are widely available year-round (even if they technically grow in seasons).

Multiple varieties of the same species (e.g. white peach and yellow peach) are deemed separate, and one recites a separate *Shehecheyanu* when eating them on separate occasions.

When eating several types of new fruit at once, one *Shehecheyanu* suffices for all.

When multiple types of fruit are **present** at the time of the *Brocho*, and one **intends** to eat more than one type of fruit:

- If one doesn't have a personal preference, the *Brocho* should be recited on the *Shivas Haminim*, which takes precedence to other fruits – even if the *Shivas Haminim* are cut and the other fruits are whole. When several of the *Shivas Haminim* are present, the order of precedence is olives, dates, grapes, figs, pomegranates. When none of the *Shivas Haminim* are present, one may recite the *Brocho* on any fruit, with whole fruits taking precedence to cut fruits.
- If one has a personal preference, he should recite the *Brocho* on the fruit he likes most. [This refers both to a fruit that one usually prefers, or to a fruit that one prefers right now. If one equally likes more than one type of fruit, he may recite the *Brocho* on either.] There are two exceptions: 1) If the fruit he likes is cut, it is best to recite the *Brocho* on another fruit that is whole (unless the cut fruit that he likes is of the *Shivas Haminim*). 2) If the fruit he likes is not one of the *Shivas Haminim*, but one of the *Shivas Haminim* is present and he intends to eat it too, he may recite the *Brocho* on either of the two.

Fruits subject to infestation must be checked prior to making the *Brocho*.

When eating the *Shivas Haminim*, one should remember to recite the special *Brocha Acharona* of *Al Ha'etz*. For all other fruits, one recites *Bore Nefashos*. [When eating both *Shivas Haminim* as well as other fruits, the special *Brocha Acharona* of *Al Ha'etz* suffices for all the fruits.]

MAN IS LIKE A TREE

The *Torah* likens man to a tree:

- A healthy and vibrant tree constantly grows and produces fruit in abundance, both qualitatively as well as quantitatively. So too, a person must grow and produce fine fruits in *Torah*, *Tefillah* and *Tzedakah*.
- Fruits are not vital to existence, but are consumed for pleasure and enjoyment. So too, one must serve Hashem with pleasure and enjoyment.
- A tree must be especially protected and nurtured when it is young. So too, we must especially protect and nurture our young when we raise them to a lifetime of *Torah* and *Mitzvos*.