

Tu Bishvat- Planting for the Future

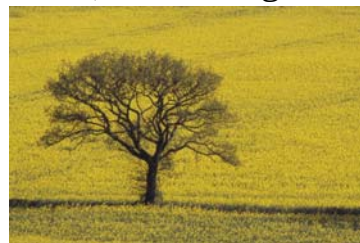
Today is Tu’Bsvat, which is traditionally celebrated as the ‘new year of the trees’. In honor of today I would like to share with you a brief thought. In the past century, a custom has emerged that on this day trees are planted, and the Talmud (Taanit 23b) relates a famous story.



Choni Ha-Maagal, an early rabbi of the Mishna, used to wonder about the verse in Psalms, “When God will return the captivity of Zion, we will be like dreamers.” How would they be like dreamers?

One day he was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree; he asked him, “How long does it take for this tree to bear fruit?” The man replied, “Seventy years.” He then further asked him. “Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?” The man responded, “I have found carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children.” Soon after, Choni ate a meal, and fell into a deep sleep. Like Rip Van Winkle, the Talmud relates that he magically slept for seventy years! He returned to the tree to see a young boy harvesting the Carob. He asked the boy, “Did you plant this tree.” The boy responded that it was his grandfather that did so. How did this event Choni’s life give him insight into the verse?

It is not a coincidence that the Talmud mentions that Choni slept for seventy years, and not sixty or eighty. *The first exile from the Land of Israel lasted exactly seventy years.* The Jewish people thought they were leaving their homes never to return. Who would have imagined that they would return to Israel in only seventy years? In our era, the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the world. Within a century, the country with the largest population of Jews is the State of Israel! In hindsight, these transformative processes seem miraculous. While for a human being, seventy years can be an entire lifetime, with a larger perspective on history and life, it is but a blink of an eye, an insignificant dream. Choni learned about the need to think in larger terms about life and history through his interaction with this simple farmer.



How often do we despair when the seeds we plan do not seem to take root? We sometimes think that our efforts do not bear fruit. In our fast-paced world, do we tend to look only at

immediate goals, and not think about our long terms visions? Are we asking questions about what we, our families, our people, and our society should look like seventy years from now?

Tu B'shvat in recent years has been associated with the environmental movement. We now realize what we do now (and what we did in the previous decades) will have impact on our grandchildren. As a society, are we thinking like the farmer, realizing that the year 2078 is just around the corner? What will the world look like then, and what will we leave our grandchildren?

Tu B'shvat challenges us to think big about ourselves and our community. May we all be blessed with long life to see the fruits from the seeds we plant.