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Tu B'Shvat (Beshalach): Sensing the Sap

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Every Shabbos is special, meaningful and uplifting. Shabbos offers us the opportunity to reconnect with God, our family and our self. But this Shabbos is unique. It is *Shabbos Shira*; the Shabbos on which we read the Parsha of Beshalach and learn of the miraculous splitting of the sea. We see the *emunah* (belief) of the Jewish nation and the demise of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army. We read the beautiful *Shira (song)* of *Az Yashir*; a song that speaks to the greatness of God, His love for our people and our boundless love for Him. But this Shabbos is unique for another reason – it is *Tu B'Shvat* (the 15th of the Hebrew month of Shvat). The Mishna (Rosh Hashanah 2a) explains that the 15th of Shvat is the New Year for fruit trees. Fruits must be tithed from produce of the current year. As such the Rabbis of the Mishna established a calendar year for fruit trees. All fruits produced between the 15th of Shvat this year and the 14th of Shvat next year are part of one fruit cohort and are tithed based on this grouping. By creating a tithing year, the rabbis ensured that the farmer would be vigilant with his tithes, dispensing them in a timely fashion. While this is an important piece of agricultural and tithing information it does not seem particularly inspirational. Yet, we see that *Tu B'Shvat* is looked at as a *Yom Tov (a celebratory day)*. The Shulchan Aruch explains that we do not recite the supplicatory prayer of *Tachanun* and we do not fast. But wherein lies the *Yom Tov* identity of this day? While it is beautiful to see nature renew and rejuvenate it doesn't seem to qualify as a *Yom Tov*? How are we to understand the deeper meaning and relevance of this day?

Rav Dovid Zechut (*Zecher Dovid, 1778-1865*) makes an amazing observation. *Tu B'Shvat* is not simply a *Rosh Hashanah (New Year)* for the *Ilanot (trees - plural)*, the Mishna states that it is the *Rosh Hashanah l'Ilan (the tree - singular)*. To which “tree” does the Mishna refer? The Torah states, “... *Ki Ha'Adam Etz HaSadeh, Man is the like the tree of the field (Devorim 20:19).*” The *Ilan (tree)* to which the Mishna refers is man. *Tu B'Shvat* is the *Rosh Hashanah*, for the trees and for the **tree (man)**. When one goes outside and looks at nature the trees still look lifeless. It has been a long winter and the trees have long since shed their leaves and fruit. But it is during this time of year, it is on this day of *Tu B'Shvat* that the sap begins to pulsate and flow through the tree. It is during this time of year that the very life-blood of the tree begins to circulate and infuse life throughout the trunk and branches. The tree may look lifeless on the outside, but inside there is vitality, inside there is great potential. *Man is like the tree of the field*. There are times in life when we look withered and lifeless. There are times in life when we fail to produce the fruits of accomplishment. Many seasons pass and my tree appears to be fading away. But like the tree, we possess the sap of potential. Like the tree we have the ability to renew. Like the tree, no matter how long we have been dormant, we have the power to produce the beautiful fruit of accomplishment. But we must make the decision to access the sap. We must make the decision to tap into the reservoir of personal potential. We must make the decision to once again produce fruit.

This is the *Yom Tov* of *Tu B'Shvat*. On the day we rejoice over nature's renewal, we celebrate our ability to renew as well. On the day when we know the sap is pulsating throughout the trees, we feel the sap of potential in our veins. As nature begins to blossom and flourish, may we find the courage to do the same.