

House of Sages

TU B'SHVAT

16TH FEBRUARY, 2025

COME & LEARN

צְדִיק כִּתְמַר יִפְרַח כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה:

The righteous bloom like a date-palm; they thrive like a cedar in

Lebanon

Psalms 92:13



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SOURCE 1: PSALMS 92:13

The righteous bloom like a date-palm; they thrive like a cedar in Lebanon

צְדִיק כְּתַמָּר יִפְרַח כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבָּנוֹן
יִשְׁגֶּה:

FRAMING QUESTIONS:

- What comes to mind when you think about Tu B'shvat?
- What does the holiday mean to you?

THE JEWISH NEW YEARS

Context: In ancient times, Jewish new years served very practical purposes for Jewish society such as markers in the calendar for shmitta and tithes. For example, Tu B'shvat is referred to as the birthday of the trees; that was a functional designation because in Halacha (Jewish law), there are rules about when you can begin to eat fruit from trees.

SOURCE 2: MISHNAH ROSH HASHANAH 1:1

There are four new year celebrations, and they are:

The first of Nisan is the new year for **kings** and for **festivals**.

The first of Elul is the new year for the tithe of **animals**.

Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say: the first of Tishrei. The first of Tishrei is the new year for **years**, for **shmitta** and **jubilee years**, for **planting** and for **tithing vegetables**.

The first of Shevat is the new year for **trees**, according to the words of Bet Shammai. Bet Hillel says: on the fifteenth of that month

אַרְבַּעָה רֵאשֵׁי שָׁנִים הֵם
בְּאֶחָד בְּנִסָּן רֵאשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה לְמַלְכִּים
וְלִרְגָלִים
בְּאֶחָד בְּאֵלוּל רֵאשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה לְמַעֲשֵׂר
בַּהֵמָה
רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר וְרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמְרִים,
בְּאֶחָד בְּתִשְׁרִי. בְּאֶחָד בְּתִשְׁרִי רֵאשֵׁי
הַשָּׁנָה לְשָׁנִים וְלִשְׂמִטִּין וְלִיּוֹבְלוֹת,
לְנִטְיָעָה וְלִירְקוֹת
בְּאֶחָד בְּשֶׁבֶט, רֵאשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה לְאֵילָן,
כְּדַבְּרֵי בֵּית שַׁמַּי. בֵּית הַלֵּל אוֹמְרִים,
בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ

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SOURCE 3: EXODUS 12:1-2

(1) And the LORD spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying:

(2) 'This month shall be to you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר

(ב) הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשִׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לַחֹדֶשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה

SOURCE 4: LEVITICUS 23:23-25

(23) And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:

(24) Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest to you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation.

(25) You shall do no manner of work; and you shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

(כג) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר.

(כד) דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ יְהִי לָכֶם שַׁבָּתוֹן זְכוֹרֹן תְּרוּעָה מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ.

(כה) כָּל מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֹשֶׁה לַיהוָה

SOURCE 5: ISMAR SCHORSCH ON PARSHA TZAV

Ismar Schorsch is a former Chancellor of JTS

...The existence of two new years, then, echoes the long-forgotten debate of R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua. What united them is that neither rabbi called for the adoption of a calendar with but a single new year. They argued over which was primary and which secondary. To its credit, Judaism incorporated both. The newer holy days of Rosh

Hashanah and Yom Kippur did not overwhelm the older pilgrimage festival of Passover. Together, both sacred seasons express the fullness of human need. In the spring, we join with family and friends to celebrate the rebirth of our people. Nature and history converge in a burst of new vigor, hope and creativity. We have a need to belong, to attach our lives to something greater and more lasting than ourselves, to find meaning beyond the self.

SOURCE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

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SOURCE 5 CONTINUED

But the self is not to be denied. It must find some sacred solitude within the totality of community and peoplehood. And so we gather again in the fall against the backdrop of a natural world that is beginning to wither in order to contemplate what the passage of time means in our own lives.

As in so many other areas, Judaism strives for balance, keeping polarities in creative tension. The phenomenon of two new years, focused on the nation and the individual and promoting the values of particularism and universalism, is not an isolated instance. Judaism offers an unending dialectic between polarities such as priest and prophet, law and psalmody, a written Torah and an oral one-- or better yet, a canon without closure, halakkah and aggadah, rationalism and mysticism and the centrality of the land of Israel and the accommodation to life in exile. In sum, Judaism is a glorious prism that refracts God's light in a rainbow of human expressions.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What do you think of the difference between Rosh Hashana and Pesach as new years according to Schorsch?

SOURCE 6A: ROSH HASHANAH 14A:9-10

The mishna taught: **On the first of Shevat is the new year for trees**, according to the statement of Beit Shammai. The Gemara asks: **What is the reason** that the new year for trees was set on this date? Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Oshaya said: The reason is since by that time **most of the year's rains have already fallen**, and **most of the season**, i.e., **winter, is yet to come**, as it continues until the spring equinox, which usually occurs in Nisan.

בְּאֶחָד בְּשֶׁבֶט רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְאֵילָן.
מֵאִי טַעְמָא? אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר אָמַר
רַבִּי אוֹשְׁעִיָּא: הוֹאִיל וַיִּצְאוּ רוֹב גְּשָׁמֵי
שָׁנָה, וְעַדִּין רוֹב תְּקוּפָה מִבְּחוּץ. מֵאִי
קָאָמַר? הֲכִי קָאָמַר: אֶף עַל פִּי שְׁרוּב
תְּקוּפָה מִבְּחוּץ, הוֹאִיל וַיִּצְאוּ רוֹב
גְּשָׁמֵי שָׁנָה

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SOURCE 6B: RASHI ON ROSH HASHANAH 14A:9-10

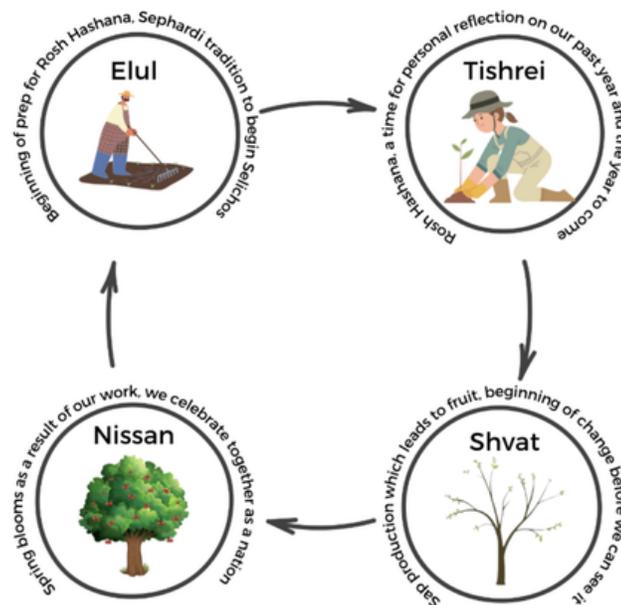
Since most of the year's rains have fallen - As most of the rainy days, which is the time of the primary rainy season, have already passed, such that the sap has risen in the trees; and from then on, the fruits emerge.

באחד בשבט ר"ה לאילן - ואין תורמין מפירות אילן שחנטו פירותיו קודם לכן על פירות האילן שחנטו לאחר מכאן

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Rashi points out that the date of Tu B'Shvat was chosen because it is when sap production begins to rise in trees, why do you think this is important?
- The way the Torah reading cycle was set up, we always read about the Exodus around the time of Tu B'Shvat, why do you think that is?

SOURCE 7: GRAPHIC



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SOURCE 7: EXPLANATION

An explanation of the cycle of growth that we can learn from the Jewish New Years by Rikki.

In Elul, we begin our preparations for the high holidays, demonstrated through the Sephardi tradition to begin reciting selichos. Then in Tishrei, we focus on personal reflection, looking inwards at our past year; what we did well and what we need to work on. Hopefully, we leave Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with a plan for growth. By Shvat, we are experiencing internal changes – our sap is beginning to rise. Like trees, we produce fruit in our actions, in our words, in what we create, and the relationships we build. Tu B'Shvat is a time to recognize what's happening under the surface. Nissan is when we see the fruits of our labor; in spring we bloom. We read about the exodus in the middle of winter, in the season of barren trees, to remind us that spring is coming.

SOURCE 8: TAANIT 23A:15

Just as my ancestors planted for me, I too
am planting for my descendants.

כִּי הֵיכִי דְשָׁתְלוּ לִי אֲבֹהָתִי — שְׁתְּלִי
נָמִי לְבָרְאִי

REFLECTION SPACE:

What do you want to bloom by spring? What seeds do you want to plant?
How does the personal growth we do today, 'plant for our descendants'?

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