

## THE CUSTOM OF EATING FRUIT ON TU BSHVAT

"What is the source of the common custom of eating fruit on Tu B'Shevat?"

"Although eating fruits on Tu B'Shevat is practically a universal Jewish custom, it is not mentioned in Shas or Rishonim. It is not even mentioned in the writings of the Arizal or his principal student, HaRav Chaim Vital. It is first mentioned about 450 years ago in Sefer HaMachzor HaGadol (printed in 5310). He writes (pg. 156), 'Since Tu B'Shevat is the beginning of the year for trees, the custom is for everyone to buy on this day a little of every available fruit.' From that point, this custom is mentioned in various seforim as being the 'custom of the Ashkenazim,' and quoted in the Magen Avraham (131:16) and Mishna Berurah." (131:31).

"I've been invited to a 'Tu B'Shevat Seder' where, I'm told, they eat something like fifteen or thirty different types of fruit, drink four cups of wine and learn various texts. Where does this come from?"

"This is first mentioned by the Maharani Chagiz in a Teshuva (printed in 5488) where he writes that he follows the custom of his teacher, who was his grandfather, the Maharam Galanti II, who would daven to Hashem that He should renew for us and the fruits a good year and he would eat fifteen types of fruit. For each fruit they would learn a perek of Mishnayos, completing Damai, Bikurim and Rosh Hashanah. These mishnayos were chosen since Damai deals with the separation of terumos and ma'asros from the produce of someone who is suspect of not having done so; Bikurim discusses the halacha of bringing the first fruits to the Beis Hamikdash, and Rosh Hashanah, of course, because Tu B'Shevat is a Rosh Hashanah.

"In addition to this, in a sefer published anonymously in 5491 by the name of Chemdas Yamim, there is a long chapter dealing with Tu B'Shevat. This chapter was reprinted on its own under the name, 'Pri Eitz Hadar.' The author created a Tu B'Shevat Seder, detailing how many fruits to eat and the various texts to learn. In his introduction he writes, 'this is a good custom... to have many fruits on this day and to say words of song and praise... as I instituted among my colleagues... and although in the writings of the Rav zt"l (the Arizal and HaRav Chaim Vital) this custom is not found, in my opinion it is a wondrous rectification (tikun niflah) in the nigleh (revealed) and nistar (hidden).'

"He bases the institution of this custom on the words of the Talmud Yerushalmi at the end of Kiddushin (4:12): '[Said] Reb Chizkiya [in the name of] Reb Cohen, a person will eventually give a reckoning for everything his eye saw and he did not eat. Reb Lezer was concerned about this teaching and he would save his coins, and with them he would eat from every item once a year.'

"The Pnei Moshe explains that a person will have to give a reckoning because he does not attempt to give himself an opportunity to bless and give thanks to Hashem who created all the various species which keep people alive. He is thereby showing that Hashem's goodness is unimportant to him. That is why Reb Lezer bought each species once a year; to give himself the opportunity to praise Hashem for His goodness.

"In the seder of the Chemdas Yamim, he advises that one should eat twenty types of fruit and drink four cups of wine. He also writes that according to HaRav Chaim Vital there are thirty types of fruit in the world, which are divided into three groups of ten each:

- 1) fruits whose peel and seeds are edible, such as the grape and fig;
- 2) those with an edible peel but an inedible pit, such as olives and dates;
- 3) those with an inedible peel, and only the inside is eaten, such as pomegranates, nuts and almonds.

If one has these thirty types available, he should eat them. Where fruits are not so readily available, he should eat at least twelve, which represents the twelve different ways the Shem Havayah, the four-letter name of Hashem, can be written.

"HaRav Chaim Palagi in his sefer Moaid L'kol Chai also writes that 'the night of Tu B'Shevat is the beginning of the year for trees, and most Jews are accustomed to arrange the table with all the fruits of trees and the earth, as much as one can afford and each person recites a bracha on one fruit... most people... read the sefer Pri Eitz Hadar (of the Chemdas Yamim)... according to the fruits that one has. There are those who are not accustomed to arrange the fruits and some are accustomed to use specifically the seven species over which the Land was praised. There are some places that only learn the fifteen 'songs' in Tehillim (120-134) and the teachers teach their students all fifteen 'songs' so that they can teach their fathers at the table on the night of Tu B'Shevat.'"

(All the references in the above section, "The Custom Of Eating Fruit," were taken from an article by HaRav HaGaon R' Nochum Zev Rosenstein shlita of Yerushalayim, printed in MeSaviv LaShulchan #310, Shevat 5765.)