

FRUITS OF HOLINESS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

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On Tu B'Shvat, the New Year for trees, there is a custom to eat fruits that are native to the land of Israel. A distinguishing factor of the "native to Israel" fruits - grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates - is the blessing one recites after having consumed them. After consuming any other fruit, one recites the blessing of "Borei Nefashos," a short blessing. However, after eating the native-to-Israel fruits, we recite the "Three faceted-blessing" of "Al ha'etz," a lengthier blessing.

In this lengthier blessing, we thank G-d for the fruit, for the land whence it came, that was given to our forefathers as a heritage, to eat from its fruits. We ask G-d to have mercy on the nation of Israel and on Jerusalem, and to allow the rebuilding of Jerusalem. We further request that we should, after the exile has ended, be brought into the land, be able to partake of its fruit, be satisfied with its goodness, and bless G-d for these things in holiness and purity.

Asking G-d for the privilege of eating the fruit of the holy land in this blessing is actually a point of disagreement mentioned in Halacha (Jewish law). In Tur Orech Chayim 218, it states that not all agree that the passage concerning partaking of the fruit should be recited. Th Sefer HaMitzvos feels that the praise of the land of Israel should be confined to the spiritual realm - that our desire to return to the land of Israel should be so that we can observe those commandments that are exclusive to the land of Israel. Therefore, we should ask G-d for the other items mentioned in the blessing, but not to "partake of its fruit and be satisfied with its goodness."

The B"ach explains why we should (and why indeed we do) request the ability to partake of the fruits of Israel. There is an intrinsic holiness to the land of Israel. This holiness is not restrained to the spiritual realm. The holiness actually manifests itself in a physical form as well. The fruits that are nurtured from the earth of the land of Israel not only extract water and nutrients from the land - they

extract the holiness of the land as well. When partaking of the fruits, we ingest physical nourishment as well as spiritual sustenance. However, this added holiness of the land of Israel does not exist when we are in exile. It is only apparent when we have the Bais HaMikdosh, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, and we are able to serve G-d there. It is therefore appropriate that when we ask G-d to bring His nation out of exile and to rebuild the Bais HaMikdosh, we request the ability to partake of the fruits of the land, which provide us with a spiritual boost, as well.

May we all merit to eat the fruit of the land of Israel, be imbued with its innate holiness, be satisfied with its goodness, and bless G-d for it in holiness and purity, speedily, in our days.

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