

# PLANTING OUR SONG

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

## Beshalach

This Shabat is the Shabat of shira - of song. The rejoicing of the people of Israel at their salvation from the hands of Pharaoh was celebrated and is commemorated until today by the great poem and song of Moshe and Israel. This year, our song is enhanced by the fact that the new year of trees - TU B'SHVAT - falls on the day of Shabat of Bshalach. In my opinion, there is a strong connection between the parsha of Bshalach and TU B'SHVAT. And the connection is made in at least two ways.

The first is that the Jewish people are promised that they will be brought into the Land of Israel and "planted" there - t'veamo v'titoaymo. A people are not granted rights of residence automatically in any land. These rights of residence are earned - the people must be "planted" in the country to truly belong there. And planting requires work, care, persistence, prayer and unceasing attention. The relationship therefore of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is precisely the same as that of the farmer to his orchard. The farmer has invested all of his talent and efforts into his orchard to make certain that the orchard will produce fruit and provide sustenance. The Jewish people must invest their efforts and talent into the Land of Israel in order to earn the right of permanent residence there. In fact, this has been the story of the Jewish return to the Land of Israel over the past century and half. The attempt to permanently "plant" ourselves in the Holy Land is a continual and never-ending one. It still requires our attention fifty-one years after the establishment of the state.

The second connection between TU B'SHVAT and Bshalach concerns itself with the staff of Moses that he carries with him up the mountain to supervise the battle that Joshua fights against Amalek. The symbolism of the staff will be found again in the Torah when the staff of Aharon blossoms to prove his right to the priesthood. There the wooden and apparently dead staff comes to life and sprouts blossoms and fruit. It is able to do so because it is in the proximity of the Ark of the Lord. Spirituality, Torah, holiness can convert what appears to be an inanimate staff into a living productive tree. Therefore the staff is the correct symbol with which to conduct the war against Amalek. For Amalek's power is physical, one of death and destruction and negativity. The power of Israel is one of song and holiness and transformation of the physical into the blessings of the spiritual. These lessons of TU B'SHVAT and Shabat Shira are valid today for us as perhaps never before. May we therefore be able to sing the song of Israel triumphant in our generations as well.

Shabat Shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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