

AS THE SEASON TURNS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This coming Shabat we will commemorate Tu B'Shvat - the new year day for trees and fruit here in the Holy Land. The day carries with it halachic significance with regard to some of the agricultural mitzvot of the Torah are. But as in all matters of halacha and mitzvot, there is a great moral lesson to be taught from this day as well.

Tu B'Shvat marks the turning point of the winter season. Even though there are many weeks of winter still ahead of us, there is no doubt that the season is turning. The days are becoming longer, the sun higher and brighter in the sky and the advertisements for Pesach accommodations more urgent and frenzied in tone. Tu B'Shvat is thus not only a new beginning for the fruits and trees of the Land of Israel, it is meant to signal a new beginning for us as individuals and as a people and a Jewish society.

One of the many amazing patterns of Jewish history, among others, has been the ability of Jewish society to renew itself as the circumstances of time demanded. Every generation and certainly every century of history poses age-old problems coupled with new twists and wrinkles. How to meet those challenges is the responsibility of Jewish leadership of every generation and time. Tu B'Shvat comes to remind us of this omnipresent responsibility of facing the present and the future with realistic and yet inspirational tactics and solutions that deal with our current angst and problems.

The past three centuries, especially in the world of Ashkenazic Jewry, has produced a dazzling variety of movements, ideals and solutions to the age-old "Jewish problem." The Haskala came to "civilize" us; the Marxists arose to create a utopia for us; the Zionists came to make us secure and cure anti-Semitism once and for all; Reform came to make us acceptable to non-Jewish society and to integrate us with humanistic goals; secularism came to free us from the burdens of tradition and mitzvot. None of these movements achieved their stated goals.

The Holocaust made mockery of integration in the general humanistic world; Zionism created the State of Israel but has provided it with no sense of security and certainly has only exacerbated the problem of anti-Semitism; Stalin cured us of Marxism; the Haskala apparently did not sufficiently civilize us; and secularism has to constantly attempt to prove that it is not an empty wagon. Thus there is a great feeling of apathy and emptiness in the Jewish world today. In the realm of traditional Jewry, much of Religious Zionism has lost its steam; Chasidut has pretty much frozen and atrophied and become insular; the yeshiva world has become a place of narrow focus and elitism; the Mussar movement no longer exists; and modern Orthodoxy has not found its voice and parameters.

Therefore we are witness to the end of an era. The old is going and the new has not yet arrived. Hence the apathy and ennui, and the seeming lack of leadership that grips the Jewish world today. It is at such moments in Jewish history that a renewal of faith and idealism has always occurred.

Tu B'Shvat should make us aware that such a renewal is necessary. The season is turning not only weather-wise but in our history and society. The old tactics are no longer efficient for the solution of today's problems. The answers are available within the framework of tradition and halacha as they were when Chasidut revolutionized Ashkenazic Jewry in the eighteenth century and Mussar created the yeshiva world of the late nineteenth century. We will not be able to live forever based on Holocaust memorials or Zionistic slogans that belie the reality of our situation here in the Land of Israel. We need a new way to govern here, to reform our politics and make it more representative.

The Torah should be freed from the chains of party politics that currently smother it. The Torah belongs to all Jews and should be made available to all Jews. Reforming, editing, changing and improving the Torah is now, as it always was, a surefire recipe for disaster and assimilation in the Jewish world. But we have to take a fresh look at our schools and our societal norms to be able to state clearly what our goals are. There may be different ways to reach them but there has to be a consensus as to what the actual goals are. It is a time for renewal and new and different thinking. The winter is turning on us. Let us think hard about reaching the warmth of spring that will surely come. Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

Text Copyright © 2007 by [Rabbi Berel Wein](http://www.rabbiwein.com) and **Torah.org**