

# Thoughts from the Lubavitcher Rebbe

## Tu B'Shvat — New Year for Trees

By Rabbi Yossi Groner

Tu B'Shvat, literally translated as the 15th of Shvat, is considered the new year for trees. On this day trees in Israel receive their renewed energy which helps them be healthy and to produce new fruits. This year Tu B'Shvat comes on Jan. 27 and will be celebrated in a joyous manner.

It is a tradition in Israel and in Diaspora to eat from the seven fruits with which Israel has been blessed on this holiday. Let us take a look at the seven fruits with which the Torah praises Israel: "A land of wheat and barley and grapes and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey."

We see how these fruits—whether or not you eat them—are seven aspects of our spiritual growth.

Wheat is described by our Sages as "food for humans." It refers to the part of ourselves which is uniquely human—the G-dly soul. Food taken into our bodies must be assimilated for us to remain healthy. Similarly, the Divine spark in each of us needs to be assimilated into our beings and into every aspect of our lives, even into our most mundane activities.

Our Sages refer to barley as "food for animals" and this refers to our more basic desires

which, according to Chassidic philosophy, come from the "animal soul." Thus, those parts of us which would fall into the category of "animal instincts" need to be elevated and permeated with purpose.

Grapes make wine which according to the Talmud, makes "G-d and man glad." Interestingly, the Talmud uses the word "anashim" rather than one of the other words for "man" in this instance. Chassidic philosophy says that anashim refers to people who are on the lowest spiritual rung. Gladness and happiness are indeed a form of spiritual service, one which can be attained by individuals who are not involved in lofty, spiritual pursuits.

The G-dly service associated with grapes indicates not only that we ourselves should strive to be joyful at all times, but that our joy should be infectious and we should influence others to have this positive approach to life and G-d.

The Torah relates that fig leaves were used to make the first garments worn by people—Adam and Eve. Afterwards, G-d gave people "leather garments." Leather in Hebrew is "ohr" though it is spelled with an alef.

In the Talmud, Rabbi Meir refers to Adam and Eve's clothing as garments of ohr with an

alef, meaning garments of light. This means that each of us should endeavor to spread the light of the Torah to those whom we meet.

Jewish teachings explain that even the simplest Jew is as filled with mitzvot as a pomegranate is filled with seeds. For G-d created the world in such a way that it is virtually impossible for a person to go through life without performing mitzvot at every turn. The fact that each seed in the pomegranate is a separate entity indicates that each mitzva has its own unique importance.

Olives are bitter. This implies that, though a Jew's life must be characterized by sweetness, and that this primary approach must be one of joy, still when evaluating spiritual achievements, he must come to a state of bitterness. (Not depression which is prohibited by Torah).

Dates are referred to in the verse above as "honey." Honey is the Torah's mystical aspect which strengthens the inner dimensions of the Jewish soul, the essence of our beings which controls our lives.

Through developing all of these aspects of ourselves and by encouraging others to do the same, we will merit to go to the land of Israel where we will enjoy not only the actual fruits with which the Land of Israel is praised, but also the fruits of our labor during the long exile.



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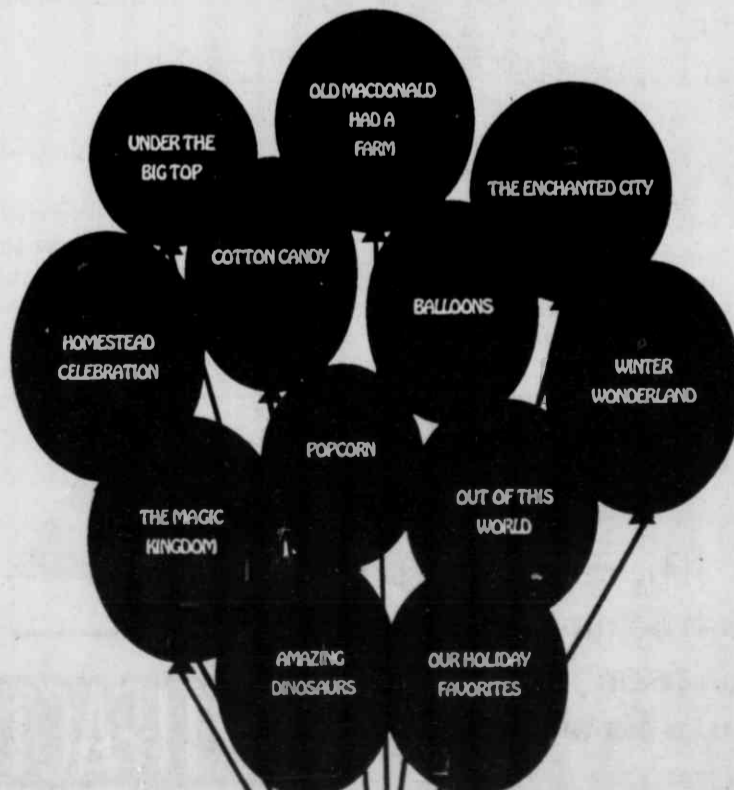
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