

SEASONS OF THE MOON

THE MONTHS OF SHVAT - ADAR I

Shvat - Adar I 5760 / Jan. 8, 2000 - Mar. 7, 2000

THE AGES OF MAN

If we were to compare the seasons of the year to the ages of Man, which age would winter represent?

“Old age” you would say. Winter connotes the chill of rapidly receding years and ultimate death.

Winter’s snow covers the world with a white and aging head. In every language, winter symbolizes old age. Every language, that is, except one. In Hebrew, the word for winter, *Choref*, can also connote the hidden burgeoning of youth into maturity. As it says in the Book of *Iyov*: “*as it was*

in the days of my winter.” (29:4) “Winter” here means dormant vigor. How is it that winter can symbolize the bursting forth of life? How can we understand a world view where winter is not necessarily connected to death — but to the flourishing of life?

AULD LANG SYNE

On the 15th of the Hebrew month of Shevat, which this year falls out on the 22nd of January,

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a new year will begin. There will be little or no television coverage of this event. No one will be jumping into fountains. No one will be waiting for midnight so they can drunkenly wend their way through some ancient Scottish ballad with obscure lyrics. No one will be setting off firecrackers. The 22nd of January will be the quietest New Year’s Day in the world, and yet, *Tu B’Shevat* — the New Year for Trees — is one of the most significant days in the calendar.

I can hear you saying: “What do the trees need a New Year for?”

Apart from its halachic ramifications, why should trees need a New Year? Are they going to make resolutions? What does it mean that the trees have a new year? And why is it specifically on the 15th of Shevat?

HERE COMES THE SUN

Let’s start with the last question. *Tu B’Shevat* takes place in the middle of winter. Everything



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outside seems frozen and lifeless. However, hidden from sight, something is happening deep inside the trees. Under the frozen bark, at the very core, the sap is beginning to rise. Everything looks the same as yesterday, everything seems unchanged — but inexorably, new life is starting to burgeon. It may not be the end of Winter, but it is the beginning of the end.

You can look at Winter two ways: You can look at it as The End. You can look at its deathly chill. Or you can look at it as the silent birthday of life. You can look back and see winter as the end. Or you can look forward and see it as the beginning.

The same is true of life itself. You can look at the winter years of life as the end. Or you see those same years looking forward to a life just about to be born on another plane.

The Torah likens Man to the tree of the field. “*For Man is the tree of the field.*” (Devarim 20:19) Just like the tree contains an unseen vigor which rises in the depths of winter and death, so too man has an unseen vigor planted inside him — an eternal existence which springs to life when we leave this winter-world of suffering and pain.

When we celebrate *Tu B'Shevat*, we are not just celebrating the New Year for Trees. In a way, we are celebrating our own *re*-naissance. We are reminding ourselves that this is just a winter-world.

EVENING AND MORNING

Winter brings us the shortest days of the year. Night seems to dominate the day. Winter is a paradigm of this world. In this world, darkness seems to rule. It's easy to think that this is a brief walk in darkness between two greater darknesses. But to the Jew, this world of darkness is no more than a prelude to a great light. The Jew sees this Winter-world as the harbinger of Spring, not the executioner of Summer.

At the very beginning of Creation, the Torah repeats the following phrase many times: “And it was evening and it was morning...” Evening precedes morning. Night precedes day. Why does the day start with the evening? If you were creating the world, wouldn't it be more logical to start with the morning, with the light? For if the first thing that G-d called into creation was light, shouldn't we view the day as morning first and only then evening?

Right at the beginning of the Creation, there is a hint. A hint that this is an evening world. A world of winter and darkness. And it is only after this evening-world that we will finally enter the morning-world to live on an eternal plane.

That's the secret message of *Tu B'Shevat*, the day when we celebrate new life rising in the tree. *Tu B'Shvat* is a New Year which proclaims that “It was evening,” but soon it will be morning.

WINTER
WORLD*Of the bleak views**Of the knowing snow**Of the price of ice and rain**Of the World's conspiring**Skydiving**Out of control -**Out of all of this I know**there is a hearth**in the heart of darkness.*

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