

As a kid, *Tu B'Shevat* (the “New Year of Trees”) was about planting trees in Israel through contributions to the Jewish National Fund. Today, the State of Israel still plants trees but the holiday’s attention has shifted toward a more universal concern. . . the future of the planet.

Today, *Tu B'Shevat* may be the quintessential expression of the Jew’s ecological concern. Care and concern for a simple tree may in fact be the key to our survival as a species, and the earth’s survival as a life-sustaining entity. How so? It’s all in a story!

The 5th century Babylonian Talmud (compendium of Jewish law) relates the following story of a mythical character known as Honi the Circlemaker:

“Honi the Wise One was also known as Honi the Circle Maker. By drawing a circle and stepping inside of it, he would recite special prayers for rain, sometimes even argue with God during a drought, and the rains would come. He was, indeed, a miracle maker. As wise as he was, Honi sometimes saw something that puzzled him. Then he would ask questions so he could unravel the mystery.

One day, Honi the Circle Maker was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked the man, “How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?”

The man replied, “Seventy years.”

Honi then asked the man, “And do you think you will live another seventy years and eat the fruit of this tree?”

The man answered, “Perhaps not. However, when I was born into this world, I found many carob trees planted by my father and grandfather. Just as they planted trees for me, I am planting trees for my children and grandchildren so they will be able to eat the fruit of these trees.”

Among the most unselfish acts a person does in their life is purchase life insurance. One does it to protect the future of those who come after him. The same is true with regard to the life-nurturing environment. We plant (and protect) not because we hope to reap the benefits in our lives but because others provided clean air, unpolluted water ways, fields of grain, and orchards of fruit for us. We bear the obligation of passing these blessings on to generations yet unborn.

This year *Tu B'Shevat* is celebrated on Monday, February 10, 2020.

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