

Review of Some Timely Halachos for Shabbos Shira & Tu B'Shvat

SHABBOS SHIRA

1) Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Beshalach is known as "Shabbos Shira".

It is customary to put out pieces of bread for the birds to eat.

One of the reasons given for this custom is that during the 40 years of the Jews' journey through the desert, the Mann fell for six days, with a double portion falling on Erev Shabbos to sustain them through Shabbos.

2) The two evil troublemakers in the Midbar, Dasan and Aviram, tried to disprove Moshe Rabbeinu's proclamation that no Mann will fall on Shabbos, and they took their Mann early Shabbos morning and scattered it all over the camp so the Jews will wake up and see that in fact Mann did fall on Shabbos.

Hashem sent the birds to eat up every last crumb of the "planted Mann" and when the Jews awoke, it was as Moshe had promised, and no Mann was to be found.

Thus as a reward for this, the birds are fed each year on Parshas Beshalach.

3) The Mogen Avraham (Orach Chaim Siman 324:7) decries this minhag, as the Halacha is that one may not feed animals that do not belong to him/her on Shabbos, and thus one may not put out food for the birds during Shabbos Shira, or on any other Shabbos. (This is also how the Mishna Berura Siman 324:31 and the Shulchan Aruch HaRav Siman 324:8 rule.)

Other Poskim justify the minhag to feed the birds on this particular Shabbos as we are doing this as a Mitzvah of Hakoras HaTov (See Aruch HaShulchan Siman 324:3 and Da'as Torah 324:11)

[Incidentally, the Mogen Avraham Siman 171:1, based on Rashi to Ta'anis 20b rules that one may never feed food that is worthy of human consumption to animals or birds, as doing so is being ungrateful to Hashem for the food He has given us]

4) The best thing to do, if one wants to uphold this custom, yet avoid feeding the birds on Shabbos, is to place the bread for the birds right before Shabbos begins. (And if one wants to adhere to the ruling of the Mogen Avraham in Siman 171, the bread that is placed for the birds should be stale and not good fresh bread that is still worthy of human consumption)

Another option brought in the Poskim is to have a minor (boy under 13, girl under 12) put out the bread, as it isn't a real Issur (Aino Shevus Gamur). (See Aishel Avraham (Butchatch) Siman 167: 6 Dibur Hamaschil Sham)

TU B'SHVAT

1) It is customary [for Ashkenazic Jews] to eat different varieties of fruits on Tu B'Shvat, as this day is the 'Rosh Hashanah' for fruit trees (meaning that the "year" regarding Ma'aser and Arlah is counted from this day. See Mishna beginning of Maseches Rosh Hashana. See Mogen Avraham Orach Chaim Siman 131:16 and Mishna Berura Siman 131 S"K 31)

2) Some people have the custom to eat an Esrog (or Esrog Jelly) on Tu B'Shvat (Likutei MaHarich. Care should be taken nowadays before consuming Esrogim, as many are sprayed with pesticides and other chemicals)

3) It is also customary to daven on Tu B'Shvat for a beautiful, kosher Esrog on the following Sukkos (Bnei Yissochor Shvat 2:2)

The holy Ben Ish Chai even wrote special Tefilah for this (See text of the Tefilah below)

4) It is a Mitzvah for a person to seek out and eat new fruits in order to be able to offer praise and thanks to Hashem and to show that we appreciate all the wonderful things that Hashem creates for us to enjoy in this world.

The Mishna Berura (Siman 225:19) references the Talmud Yerushalmi (very end of Maseches Kidushin) where it says:

"[When a person will stand in judgment before Hashem after he/she leaves this world] they will have to give a Din V'Cheshbon (reckoning) for anything (i.e. food that Hashem created) that they had the opportunity to taste, yet didn't taste!"

The Korban HaEida in his commentary to this Gemara explains that it is referring to not reciting SheHechyanu on every possible fruit.

Many Poskim maintain that the custom of eating various varieties of fruits on Tu B'Shvat, and seeking out fruits on which to recite the bracha of SheHechyanu, developed as a way to fulfill this requirement of the Talmud Yerushalmi, and what better day to do this than on the Rosh Hashana for trees!



Tefilah for a Beautiful Esrog

composed by the holy Ben Ish Chai Zatzal to be recited on Tu B'Shvat

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' א-לה-ינו וא-לה-י אבותינו, שתברך כל אילנות האתרוג להוציא פירותיהם בעתם, ויוציאו אתרוגים טובים יפים ומהדרים ונקיים מכל מום, ולא יעלה בהם שום חזזית, וי-היו שלמים ולא יהיה בהם שום חסרון ואפילו עקיצת קוץ ויהיו מצויים לנו ולכל ישראל בכל מקום שהם, לקים בהם מצות נטילה עם הלולב בחג הסכות שיבא עלינו לחיים ולשלום, כאשר "צויתנו בתורתך על ידי משה עבדך, "ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר כפות תמרים וענף עץ עבות וערבי נחל (ויקרא: כ"ג, מ)

ויהי רצון מלפניך ה' א-לה-ינו וא-לה-י אבותינו, שתעזרנו ותסעינו לקיים מצוה זו של נטילת לולב הדס ערבה ואתרוג, כתקנה בזמנה בחג הסכות שיבא עלינו לחיים טובים ולשלום בשמחה ובטוב לבב, ותזמין לנו אתרוג יפה ומהדר ונקי ושלם וכשר כהלכתו

English Translation:

May it be Your Will, Hashem, our G-d, and The G-d of our forefathers, that You bless all of the Esrog trees to bear their fruit at the proper time, and that they shall bear Esrogim that are good, nice, beautiful, and clean from all blemish, and that no lichen should come upon them, and that they shall be complete and they should not have any deficiencies, even pricked by a thorn. These esrogim should be available for us and for all of Israel in every place that they are, in order to fulfill the mitzvah of taking [the esrog] with the lulav on the Holiday of Sukkos, that shall come to us with good life, and with peace, as You have written in Your Torah by way of Moshe, Your servant, "And on the first day you shall take for yourselves a beautiful fruit of the tree, date frond, and branch of a myrtle tree, and [branches from a] willow brook..." (Vayikra: 23; 40)

May it be Your Will, Hashem, our G-d, and The G-d of our forefathers, that You Help us and assist us in this mitzvah of taking the lulav, myrtle, willow, and esrog, in the proper manner, in its proper time, on the Holiday of Sukkos, that shall come upon us for good life, and peace, with happiness and good-heartedness, and that You shall make a nice, beautiful esrog [that is] clean [of all blemishes and deficiencies], and complete, and kosher, according to its laws, accessible to us.]