

Winter Seeds

These days, we eat crisp salad or juice-fresh fruit when there is ice on the trees and we think nothing of it – what should shock us does not; we are not surprised by the foods we eat in Winter despite the unfriendliness Winter temperatures seemingly offer to all life. How can that be? Well, it is rather simple: In today's world, we expect to experience the unexpected or, to turn this idea on its head, we expect what we usually get.

The truth is probably a little more complex: I think most of us would agree that some of the most important moments in life can be traced to a moment of diminutive dormancy. That being said, the idea of renewal and new life centered in the middle of Winter – often referred to as the season of death – seems impossible, doesn't it? That is, however, just how things work in agriculture and in our lives.

As we approach the Winter season here at the shore, we know that it is this repose, this rest that the land and water (and perhaps even we) experience at this time of year that is at the center of the rebirth coming soon in the Spring. That rebirth is conceived now, just as we are inclined to ignore it. Right under our feet, the ground is moving, changing, and preparing for the new life that will burst forth in the next few months. And so it is in the land of Israel.

Israel is at the center and the land is the backdrop for most everything in the Jewish calendar. Special holy days are set and the details of their observance are connected to the places and weather of the land of Israel. And so, in the midst of Winter (in Israel, a cold – yes, cold – rainy season), the land becomes the incubator for all life that will come into being.

I am bringing attention to this cycle, this connection with our environment, for a variety of reasons. Not the least of them is the fact that we are in the midst of some very difficult times that are affecting every aspect of our lives. And I believe that if we are to burst forth from this Winter, we must see this time as one of possibility and of hope, not one of victimhood.

Despite the difficult times facing us, we can choose to meet our future with despair or delight, with horror or with hope. The future will be here with or without us -- none of us can control every detail, every outcome, but it is how we make the future our own, and live in our present, that is the measure of our lives. We can decide that the task of rebirth and renewal is something that cannot occur because it is too barren, too stark, too impossible for something good to come of our circumstances . . . or, we can decide that if we slowly and carefully attend to the truly important things in life – health, family, community, spiritual fulfillment – we will live well now and even better in the future.

As I look at our world in Winter, I see the promise of our country, our new President, our strong congregation and community, and ourselves, and I feel enriched. Despite the sadness, the fear of the unknown, and the despair over losses of many kinds, that many of us and our loved ones are going through in these difficult times, I am convinced that it is at this very time of perceived slumber that the world is making plans for Spring.

As we celebrate *Tu Beshvat* (the new year for trees) this year on February 9th, let us remember that we come from a land that knows about renewal in the midst of retreat, and that how we embrace (and perhaps partner with) the new leadership of our nation will help us to conceive a Spring that will renew ourselves, our loved ones, and our community in ways can

only imagine.

I offer you a special blessing in these uncertain times: May you find warmth in our Winter and comfort within community as you burst forth from the soil of yesterday to the skies of tomorrow.

Rabbi Gerald R. Fox

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