

Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Parashat Eikev – The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel

Sacred Fruits

The Land of Israel is described as “A land of wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey” (*Devarim* 8:8). The Sages understand the verse’s mention of honey to be date honey (*Mishna Berura* 202:44). These seven species were the staple foods consumed by the Jewish people in the Land of Israel during biblical times. They contain special holiness, as reflected by the unique blessing recited after eating them, thanking Hashem for the goodness of the land.

Fruits of Redemption

The praise of the land of Israel for its fruit-trees is a deep environmental lesson in itself, testifying to the importance of nature and trees in Judaism. The Torah paints the shade of the grapevine and fig tree as a metaphor for the idyllic world-peace we await. Our ultimate trust in G-d is expressed through the serene environment where “Yehuda and Yisra’el will sit securely, each person under his vine and fig tree...” (I *Melachim* 5:5). As we munch on juicy grapes, we are reminded that there is no greater sign of the coming redemption than when the Land of Israel produces fruits in abundance (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 98a).

Expressing Emuna through the Seven Fruits

The offerings of the *בִּכּוּרִים/bikkurim* – first fruits brought to the Temple in Jerusalem on Shavuot were only from these seven species. On what merit are these fruits selected? Nogah Hareuveni The founder and chairman of Neot Kedumim, The Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, and author of numerous books on Judaism and nature explains that the flowering and fruiting of the seven species take place during the period between Pesach and Shavuot, a season depending on the delicate balance between contradictory forces of nature. It is characterized by climatic contrasts between extreme dryness and heat on the one hand and cold rainstorms on the other, which could easily be misconceived as battles between opposing deities. Therefore, our pure faith in the One and only G*d is tested specifically through expressing thanks to Hashem for these fruits of the Land.

Fruits of Spiritual Self-Improvement

The season between Pesach and Shavuot is furthermore characterized by self-improvement and spiritual preparation for receiving the Torah. As we count the Omer during the forty-nine days following Pesach, we turn to Hashem in repentance and prayer. Since the fate of the seven fruits is linked to our own spiritual achievement and merit, it is not surprising that these seven kinds comprise a wealth of nutrients and medicinal properties.

Mystical Spiritual Energies and Medicinal Properties

The fact that the seven species reflect our refinement during the Omer period sheds light on why the great Kabbalist Arizal¹ attributes the spiritual energies of each fruit to one of the seven lower *sefirot* (spiritual emanations) that we count during this time (Ariza"l, *Sefer Halikutim, Parashat Ekev*, chapter 8). Their correspondence is according to the order they occur in the Torah verse. It is interesting to note how the medical properties of the seven species are synchronized with their spiritual energies.

Wheat of Kindness

Wheat corresponds to חֶסֶד/*chesed* – Loving kindness, the first of the seven lower *sefirot*. The characteristic of *chesed* is expansion, to reach out and extend oneself towards others. Wheat likewise reflects the nourishing food of kindness and to this day remains our main sustaining food staple. According to the renowned Rabbi and physician Maimonides² wheat strengthens the body and increases mother's milk, the ultimate nourishment of *chesed*.³

Barley of Self-control

Barley corresponds to גְבוּרָה/*gevurah* –restraint. Its characteristic is contraction, reduction and setting boundaries. This is reflected by each barley seed being enclosed in a strong hull (boundary), which remains intact even during threshing. Moreover, the prophet emphasizes that specifically barley must be sowed within the boundary of the marked spot (*Yasha'yahu* 28:25). Due to its contracting quality, barley is highly effective in reducing liquid when added to soup.⁴

Grapes of Beauty

Grapes grow in beautiful clusters and correspond to תִּפְאָרֶת/*tiferet* – beauty. This trait is characterized by the balance between its different and sometimes contrary components. Since *tiferet* is the perfect balance between *chesed* and *gevurah*, grapes include both nourishing and eliminating qualities. Grape-seed oil nourishes the skin, while also containing a very high content of antioxidants⁵ for eliminating free radicals.⁶ Grapes are known to promote weight loss⁷ because of their diuretic quality, yet they are very nutritive replete with vitamins A, B, and C while also treating blood and energy deficiency.⁸

¹ Rabbi Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi, Tzefat 1534-1572.

² Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, Spain, 1135–1204.

³ *Nature's Wealth, Health and Healing Plants Based on the Teachings of the Rambam* p. 278, Rabbi Moshe Cohen Shaouli and Rabbi Ya'akov Fisher, translated by Ruth Steinberg from the Hebrew edition, Beit Kneset Shauli, Ashdod, 1997.

⁴ A recent study by the FDA evidenced that barley reduces cholesterol and risk of coronary disease FDA News, December 23, 2005, <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/news/2005/NEW01287.html>.

⁵ Joshi SS, Kuszynski CA, Bagchi D. The cellular and molecular basis of health benefits of grape seed proanthocyanidin extract. *Curr Pharm Biotechnol.* 2001;2(2):187-200, as referenced on online at <http://www.answers.com/topic/grapeseed-oil>.

⁶ Purple grape juice improves endothelial function and reduces the susceptibility of LDL cholesterol to oxidation in patients with coronary artery disease. See Stein JH, Keevil JG, Wiebe DA, Aeschlimann S, Folts JD. *Circulation* 1999.

⁷ Rabbi Binyamin Moshe Kohn Shauli, *Nature's Wealth*, p. 130.

⁸ Michael Tierra, C.A., N.D., O.M.D., *Planetary Herbology*, Lotus Press, 1988, p. 317.

Figs of Endurance

Figs correspond to נְצַח/*netzach* – endurance, which engenders longevity. The fig-tree reflects everlasting fruitfulness as it has one of the longest periods of ripening, spanning more than three months. Malbim⁹ explains that we need to watch the fig-tree very carefully by picking its figs daily, since they ripen one after the other. Likewise, we need to guard our teachers daily in order to glean the fruits of their wisdom. “Figs, grapes and almonds are always the best fruits whether fresh or dried” (Rambam, *Hilchot Deot*, 4:11). They are very rich in minerals, especially iron. Figs soften the liver and help alleviate constipation, which is one of the main tenets of longevity and health (Ibid. Halacha 13). They are very good for old people,¹⁰ by strengthening the blood and arousing a person’s vitality (Ibn Ezra, *Chabakuk* 3:17).

Pomegranate – the Immune Booster

Pomegranate, a very beautiful and majestic fruit, even has a crown. It corresponds to הוד/*hod*, which means majesty and glory. *Hod* is also related to the Hebrew word תודה/*todah*, which means thanks and recognition. According to Rav Yitzchak Ginsburgh,¹¹ *hod* corresponds to our immune system (Rav Yitzchak Ginsburgh, *Body Mind and Soul*, p. 96). A healthy immune system is able to recognize our friends from our foes. The pomegranate boosts our immune system. Pomegranate seed oil causes the cancer cells to self-destruct. The juice of the fruit is toxic to most breast cancer cells, yet has almost no effect on healthy cells.¹² Pomegranate juice has also been proven to decrease heart disease by decreasing LDL (bad cholesterol) and increased HDL (good cholesterol).¹³

Olive – The Foundation of Life

Olive oil corresponds to יסוד/*yesod* – foundation. Olive oil is the foundation of most Mediterranean foods. Rambam explains that olive oil cleans the liver and loosens stools.¹⁴ It is helpful against stones in the urinary tract to drink a teaspoon of olive oil every morning before eating.¹⁵ Olive oil protects against heart disease by lowering the blood pressure, and coats the stomach to protect against ulcers. Several molecular components of olive oil, called phenols, have the potential to protect against cancer,¹⁶ especially of the bowels.¹⁷ Thus, olive oil can truly be called the foundation of life.

⁹ Rabbi Meir Loeb Ben Jehiel Michael, 1809–1879, in his commentary on Proverbs 27:18.

¹⁰ Nisim Krispil, *Medicinal Herbs of the Rambam* (in Hebrew), Arad, Israel, 1989, p. 211.

¹¹ One of the greatest contemporary Kabbalistic masters, author of numerous books, Rosh hayeshiva of *Yeshivat Od Yosef Chai*.

¹² Research directed by Dr. Ephraim Lansky, at Technion, The Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, 2001.

¹³ Research by a group of scientists in Israel, 2000, headed by Professor Michael Aviram, an internationally recognized authority on the effect of food on heart disease.

¹⁴ Nisim Krispil, *Medicinal Herbs of the Rambam*, p. 109.

¹⁵ Rabbi Binyamin Moshe Kohn Shauli, *Nature’s Wealth*, p. 188.

¹⁶ [Casaburi I](#), [Puoci F](#), [Chimento A](#), [Sirianni R](#), [Ruggiero C](#), [Avena P](#), [Pezzi V](#). *Potential of olive oil phenols as chemopreventive and therapeutic agents against cancer: A review of in vitro studies*. *Mol Nutr Food Res*. 2013 Jan;57(1):71-83.

¹⁷ Stoneham M, Goldacre M, Seagroatt V, Gill L. *Olive oil, diet and colorectal cancer: an ecological study and a hypothesis*. *J Epidemiol Community Health*. 2000 Oct;54(10):756-60. This study shows new evidence of olive oil’s protective effect on colonic mucosa, and positive signs that olive oil indeed prevents the commencement of rectum and bowel cancer.

Dates of Unification

Dates correspond to מַלְכוּת/*malchut* –kingdom. The role of the king is to unify his people. The stickiness of the dates can serve as a unifier when mixed with other substances. *Malchut* is the channel that allows everything to manifest below. Therefore, *malchut* is connected with the digestive system. The Talmud teaches that dates heal intestinal illnesses (*Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot* 10b). The palm tree has no waste, its *lulavs* (hearts) are used for prayer, its fronds for shade, its fibers for ropes, its twigs for a sieve, and its beams for houses. Likewise, the people of Israel have no waste: They each master their own particular part of Torah learning or perform mitzvot and charitable deeds (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 41:1). The righteous person (*tzaddik*) is compared to the date palm (*Tehillim* 92:13), which is tall and strong, pleasant and fruitful.

Conscious Consumption

The Torah's mention of the seven species is not incidental. Rather, these foods are central to a Jewish spiritual path that endeavors to elevate the physical through intentional living. Eating the seven species in a conscious way can promote our well-being, help us connect to the land of Israel, and deepen our relationship with G*d. Each of the seven species contains deep lessons about G*d and our spiritual lives. Every time we eat them, we have the opportunity to tune into their spiritual messages, eat consciously, and bring the world a step closer to its perfected state.

This essay is the foundation for the award-winning book [The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties](http://www.menorah-books.com/shoppingcart.asp), the Wholesome Spirited Cookbook Nutrition & Health Series with Torah Teachings & Recipes. If you are interested in detailed information on the Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel you may order your personal copy in Israel by contacting Elana info@berotbatayin.org, USA <http://www.menorah-books.com/shoppingcart.asp>, rest of the world <http://www.menorah-books2.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=SFISCBS>.

From the Back Cover

The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with their Medicinal and Mystical Properties by Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum is a fascinating, informative book based on extensive research and containing many original ideas. I highly recommend this well-written, innovative, interdisciplinary work. The book makes connections between the most diverse modalities of knowledge, from Biblical, Talmudic, Kabbalistic, and Jewish legal scholarship to modern medical research. In addition, the writing is interspersed with original recipes and practical tips relating to the Seven Fruits of Israel.

The book is filled with the redemptive spirit of the Land of Israel and will appeal to a wide range of readers, including Jewish educators, those with a special interest in the Land of Israel, nutritionists and health-care professionals, as well as anyone interested in discovering and trying out new recipes. The book is suitable for both Jews and non-Jews. *Rabbi Avraham Greenbaum Director, AZAMRA*

