

## שבעת המינים של ארץ ישראל The Seven Fruits of Israel

### Tub B'Shevat – the Time for Celebrating the Fruits of the Land

In honor of Tu b'Shevat I would like to share with you an article that I wrote many years before my award winning [The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties](#) was

published. Tub B'Shevat is the time when we celebrate the fruits of Israel and praise Hashem for the special fruits of the Holy Land. The Land of Israel is described as "A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey" (*Devarim* 8:8). Our Sages understand the verse's mention of honey to be date honey (See *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 G-d for the goodness of the land. (This blessing, said after eating grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives or dates, differs from the blessing said after any other fruits in its effusive praise of the land of Israel and its fruits).



### Abundant Fruits of Israel – Greatest Sign of Redemption

The praise of the land of Israel for its fruit-trees testifies to the importance of nature and trees in Judaism. The Bible paints the shade of the grape vine 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 Israel will sit securely, each person under his vine and fig tree..." (*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).

### The Seven Fruits Reaffirming Our Pure Faith in Hashem

The offerings of the *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 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 storms on the other, which could easily be misconceived as battles between opposing deities. Therefore, the seven species are selected to reaffirm our pure faith in G-d through our expressing thanks to the One and only G-d specifically for the fruits of the Land.

### The Seven Fruits Reflecting Israel's Spiritual Growth

The flowering and fruiting of the seven species parallel our own spiritual development during the season between Pesach and Shavuot, characterized by self-improvement and preparation for receiving the Torah. As we count the Omer during the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, we turn to G-d in repentance and prayer. (The Counting of the Omer is a verbal counting of each of the forty-nine days between Passover and Shavuot when we would offer a daily sacrifice containing an omer-measure of barley). Since the fruiting of the seven fruits is linked to our own spiritual achievement, it is not surprising that these seven kinds comprise a wealth of spiritual attributes, nutrients and medicinal properties.

## The Seven Fruits Correspond to the Seven Lower Sefirot

The special significance of the seven species is accentuated by the great Kabbalist Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi, Tzfat 1534-1572). He attributes the spiritual energies of each fruit to one of the seven lower *sefirot* (spiritual emanations) that we count during each week of the Omer (Arizal, *Sefer Halikutim, Parashat Eikev*, 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.

## The Expansion of Wheat

Wheat corresponds to *chesed* (kindness), the first of the seven lower *sefirot*. The characteristic of *chesed* is expansion, to reach out and extend ourselves toward 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, Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, Spain, 1135-1204), wheat strengthens the body and increases mothers' milk, the ultimate nourishment and expression of *chesed*. (Rabbi Moshe Cohen Shaouli and Rabbi Yaakov Fisher, *Natures Wealth, Health and Healing Plants*, based on the Teachings of the Rambam, p. 278).

## The Restraint of Barley

Barley corresponds to *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. Due to its contracting quality, barley is highly effective in reducing liquid when added to soup. 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>>).

## The Beauty of Grapes

Grapes grow in beautiful clusters and correspond to *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 antioxidants that help in eliminating free radicals. (See <http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/grape-seed-000254.htm>).

Grapes possess a diuretic quality, yet they are very nutritive replete with vitamins A, B, and C, while also treating blood and energy deficiency (Michael Tierra, C.A., N.D., O.M.D., *Planetary Herbology*, Lotus Press, 1988, p. 317).

## The Endurance of Figs

Figs correspond to *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. Malbim 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 observe our teachers daily in order to glean the fruits of their wisdom (Rabbi Meir Loeb Ben Jehiel Michael, 1809–1879, in his commentary on *Mishlei* 27:18). According to Maimonides, "Figs, grapes and almonds are always the best fruits whether fresh or dried" (Rambam, *Mishna Torah, Hilchot Deot*, chapter 4, Halacha 11). Rambam also taught that figs alleviate constipation, (Nisim Krispil, *Medicinal Herbs of The Rambam*, p. 211), which is one of the main tenets of longevity and health (Rambam, *Mishna Torah, Hilchot Deot*, chapter 4, Halacha 13).

Figs may benefit the elderly by strengthening the blood and arousing a person's vitality (Ibn Ezra on *Chabakuk* 3:17). Modern science affirms the nutritional benefits of figs: they are very rich in minerals, especially potassium, iron and calcium, and they contain omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Figs also contain phytosterols, which inhibit the absorption of dietary cholesterol, thus decreasing the total levels of cholesterol. Moreover, they may help prevent certain types of cancers.

### The Majesty of Pomegranates

Pomegranate, a very beautiful and majestic fruit, even has a crown. It corresponds to *hod*, which means majesty and glory. *Hod* is also related to the Hebrew word '*todah*,' which means thanks and recognition. According to Rav Yitzchak Ginsburgh, *hod* corresponds to our immune system (Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, *Body Mind and Soul*, p. 96). A healthy immune system is able to recognize our friends from our foes, and pomegranates boost our immune system. Pomegranate seed oil causes 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 (Research directed by Dr. Ephraim Lansky at Technion, The Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, 2001). Pomegranate juice has also been proven to decrease heart disease by decreasing LDL ('bad cholesterol') and increased HDL ('good cholesterol'). (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).

### The Foundation of Olive Oil

Olive oil corresponds to *yesod* (foundation). Olive oil is the foundation of most Mediterranean foods. Rambam explains that olive oil cleanses the liver and loosens stools (Op Cit, *Medicinal Herbs*, p. 109). It is helpful against stones in the urinary tract to drink a teaspoon of olive oil every morning before eating (Op Cit, *Nature's Wealth*, p.188). Olive oil protects against heart disease by lowering the blood pressure, and has strong anti-bacterial properties. It also contains several antioxidants to help fight cancer (Harvard School of Public Health, Fats and Cholesterol, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/fats.html>). Thus, olive oil can truly be called the foundation (*yesod*) of life.

### The Kingdom of Dates

Dates correspond to *malchut* (kingdom). *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).

### Holy Fruits for Conscious Eating

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 Hashem. 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.

### Hands On:

1. Try to spend time in nature sitting in the shade of the vine and fig tree (or the specific trees you have in your local environment).
2. Take advantage of the nutritional and healing properties of the seven species of the Land, rather than relying on artificial replacements.
3. Take time to eat consciously and focus intensely when you bless Hashem with your full heart before and after partaking in His seven favorite fruits.

For Recipes using the Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel please see

<http://www.aish.com/f/r/Cooking-with-the-Seven-Fruits-of-the-Land-of-Israel.html>

You may also be interested in my book:

[The Seven Fruits of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties](#). In addition to Torah articles, beautiful photos of the fruits of the land and original artwork, it includes a wide selection of recipes for each of the Seven Species.