**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**A River Flows from Eden:**

**The Garden of Eden**

**as the Inner Source of the Jewish Holidays**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #19:**

**“And When You Shall Come into the Land**

**and Shall Have Planted Every Kind of Tree for Food” (Part II)**

**Tu Bi-Shevat:**

**The Mitzva of *Orla* and the Repair of Adam’s Sin**

**II**

**The *mitzva* of *neta Revai***

### *Neta Revai* and the completion of the repair

In our [last *shiur*,](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-18-%E2%80%9Cand-when-you-shall-come-land-and-shall-have-planted-every-kind-tree-food%E2%80%9D-tu-bi-shevat) we saw that for the first three years after planting a fruit tree, its produce is forbidden as *orla*, with the new year being reckoned from Tu BiShvat.

However, the Torah does not limit the special status of a new tree’s fruit to the prohibition of *orla.* The repair of the sin in the Garden of Eden is completed by way of the mitzvaof *neta revai* in the fourth year after the tree's planting: "And in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy, for giving praise to the Lord" (*Vayikra* 19:24). During this year, the fruit of the tree is no longer prohibited, but it still may not be eaten in the ordinary manner. Rather, the owners must bring it to Jerusalem, and it must be eaten there in a state of ritual purity. What is the idea underlying this law?

The Torah defines two properties of fourth-year produce, "holy" (*kodesh*) and "for giving praise" (*hillulim*), each one of them expressing a special virtue of perfection.

Let us start with the element of holiness. The *mitzva* of *neta revai* is recorded in *Parashat Kedoshim.* At the beginning of the many *mitzvot* in the *parasha* stands the heading: "You shall be holy (*Kedoshim tihyu*); for I the Lord your God am holy" (*Vayikra* 19:2), which requires that the people of Israel adhere to the level of holiness. This heading is formulated as both a demand and as a promise and purpose. The Jews are called upon to be holy, but are also informed that indeed they will be so because the Lord their God is holy. However, aside from the mitzvaof *neta revai* which defines the fruit as "holy," the long list of *mitzvot* found in the chapter that opens with this heading contains almost no specific reference to holiness.[[1]](#footnote-1) How is this to be understood?

It is precisely the commandment of *neta revai,* which deals with the nourishment provided to the people of Israel by God by way of the trees and fruit of Eretz Israel, that brings the Jewish people into contact with holiness, as eating this fruit sustains the entire array of faculties within them operating in all walks of their lives. In light of this, the mitzvaof making the fourth-year fruit "holy, for giving praise to the Lord" and eating it in a state of holiness may be seen as a mitzvathat constitutes the fundamental encounter with the objective of *Parashat Kedoshim.* By virtue of this mitzva*,* all the other circles of life that are wrapped in the many *mitzvot* of *Parashat Kedoshim* become sanctified.

Let us continue with the element of "giving praise." Praising God plays a central role in the Divine service in the Temple, and stands at the heart of many of the psalms in the book of *Tehillim*. In the Torah, however, no mitzvaother than *neta revai* deals with giving praise to God.

Why does the Torah choose specifically the *mitzva* of *neta revai* for this role of holiness and giving praise? Why does it bind these two elements specifically to such a basic matter, to fruit that is a material need of man?

It is evident that eating *neta revai* alludes to a return to the ideal reality of the Garden of Eden. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem brings one to the site chosen by God. This holy place is the place in which the Divine presence is found, as it was found in the Garden of Eden in which the voice of God was "walking in the garden to the cool of the day." In this place, eating is refined of its beastly materiality, even transcending worthwhile human eating; the consumption of nourishment becomes a mitzvaand an act of serving God, as in the Garden of Eden, in which, as stated earlier, the Divine service was concentrated in eating.

If we join this to what we saw in earlier *shiurim*, we can already see that the complete system of this *mitzva* in its three parts parallels the story of Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden.

The opening, "And when you shall come into the land and shall have planted every kind of tree for food" parallels the planting of the garden and the bringing of man into it. The prohibition, "Three years shall it be forbidden to you; it shall not be eaten,” emerges from the status of the produce as akin to that of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; thus, it parallels the prohibition: "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it." Finally, the mitzva, "And in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy, for giving praise to the Lord," parallels the mitzva of "Of every tree of the garden, you may freely eat," which is the eating that fulfills the mitzva of "to work it."[[2]](#footnote-2)

### Eating of the body and eating of the soul

How can material eating be Divine service?[[3]](#footnote-3)

In order to understand this, let us first recall the manner of man's creation: "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (*Bereishit* 2:7). Man is composed of a body made from the dust of the ground, and a soul breathed into his body by God. Before the sin of Adam and Chava, the body and the soul are joined together in harmonious fashion; the soul leads and elevates the body, and the body reveals the soul.

Matter and spirit are unified not only in Adam, but also in the garden. The Torah ("It is a tree of life to them that hold fast to it"; *Mishlei* 3:18) and knowledge, both of which appear in daily life as spiritual entities, are portrayed in the garden as joined to a concrete tree, which people would perceive as belonging to the realm of the material.

Therefore, in the service of God in the Garden of Eden, the material and spiritual worlds are fully connected, and eating is not due to a blind material impulse. Rather, it serves as a deep connection to God, the source of the life of both body and soul. At this level, man serves God and cleaves to Him[[4]](#footnote-4) by the very act of eating.

When, however, man sins, he becomes enslaved to his material dimension. He no longer follows the spirit breathed into him by God from within Him,[[5]](#footnote-5) which has connected them together; rather, he is drawn after his lust and the dust within him, and he comes to sin.

From now on, body and soul are disconnected and do not live together in harmony as intended for them from the outset in the Garden of Eden. Man's eating becomes distinctly material activity, much like the eating of a beast. The law given to Adam, "And you shall eat the herb of the field" (*Bereishit* 3:18), is understood in *Pesachim* 118aas likening man's food to the food of a beast, and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi vividly describes a tearful Adam lamenting: "My donkey and I eat from the same trough!"

The decree of death, issued to man in the wake of sin, is also associated with the transition from sacred eating, in which the body is united with the soul, to eating resulting from the material drive. The breath of life is eternal by nature and deserving of life that is not transient, whereas the body made of dust is temporary and passing by nature. Material eating is stuck in the present. It serves immediate needs or impulses that pass as a result of the latest meal. In contrast, when eating is directed toward the soul, it turns from being a patchwork of transient physical actions, to being a tapestry of whole life, life the purpose of which God outlines and elevates.

Eating that nourishes the soul connects man to the dimension of eternal life,[[6]](#footnote-6) whereas eating that primarily feeds the physical layer of dust can only provide temporary life that will eventually end in death: "For dust you are, and to dust shall your return" (*Bereishit* 3:19).

Let us now go back to consider the mitzva of *neta revai*. This mitzva returns us to produce on the level of that of the Garden of Eden and to eating on the level of the soul.

The verse opens by noting the nature of fourth-year fruits that are no longer subject to the laws of *orla.* It is formulated not as an imperative dependent upon us, but rather as a description of existing reality: "All the fruit thereof shall be holy, for giving praise to the Lord." It continues the unique style of the beginning of *Parashat Kedoshim*, "You shall be holy,” which is also not only a command, but a description of reality. The verse asserts as a fact that the fruit itself has already been purified and has reached the level of holiness: "All the fruit thereof shall be holy."

These sacred fruits are brought to Jerusalem, in order to elevate their consumption to eating that is directed toward the soul. Partaking of them in the place of God's presence connects the eating primarily to the soul breathed into man by Him.

The dimension of eternal life associated with the soul of life also finds expression in this eating. In Jewish tradition, Jerusalem is the Eternal City, *Ir Ha-netzach*,[[7]](#footnote-7) the association with which removes the eating from being a passing material act, instead connecting it to the complete life journey of the people of Israel, which continues to be perfected over the course of human history.

The fact that fourth-year produce is intended for praising God attests to the level of that produce. Offering praise is the language of the soul. It is not by chance that the book of *Tehillim,* with all its psalms, end with the words: "Let every thing that has breath praise (*tehallel*) the Lord. Praise (*Hallelu*) the Lord!" (*Tehillim* 150:6). With its every expression of praise, the soul reveals and expresses its devotion to God.

However, with the mitzvaof *neta revai,* that praise is expressed in a unique manner. Instead of words, this mitzvamakes use of eating, which is carried out by the body itself. In this way, the body unites with the soul, the level of holiness in nature that was hidden away in the wake of the sin of Adam and Chava once again reveals itself in the fruit and in the person, and we once again find ourselves reaching the level of the Garden of Eden.[[8]](#footnote-8)

### thE GENERAL MODEL OF REPAIR

The *mitzvot* of *orla* and *neta revai,* which together constitute a rectification of the sin of Adam and Chava, present us with a general model of repair, as expanded upon by the *Sefat Emet* (*Kedoshim* 5651) based on the *midrash* cited in the previous *shiur*:

Concerning the *mitzva* of *orla*, it is stated in the Midrash: "'And when you shall come into the land and shall have planted' — this is what is written: 'It is a tree of life to them that hold fast to it.' Who will remove the dust from your eyes, Adam, who could not comply with what you were commanded for even one hour? Surely your children will wait with *orla* for three years."

The idea is that after the sin, because of which good and evil become mixed, one cannot merit life until the mixtures from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil are first repaired. This applies to all matters, for everything contains something of the tree of life and of knowledge, and the good must be clarified from the evil, and then one merits the life that is hidden in everything.

After the sin, the ground is cursed, but the people of Israel merit by virtue of the patriarchs to repair Eretz Israel and reform it from curse to blessing. Just as in general the land is removed from the hand of Canaan to become the Holy Land,[[9]](#footnote-9) so in every planting there must be turning away from evil in the years of *orla*, and afterwards holiness for giving praise with the revelation of holiness. For any holy matter that goes out in freedom from the mixture of the Other Side is filled with song and praise.

And it is not a small matter that which is written:… "All the fruit thereof shall be holy, for giving praise"… this is by way of turning away from evil during the years of *orla*, and afterwards one merits life.

### Tu Bi-Shevat: the Repaired starting point

The *mitzvot* of *orla* and *neta revai* constitute an entire process. Initially, a tree is planted in Eretz Israel which is like the Garden of Eden, and when it reaches a climax, the fruit of that tree is eaten in Jerusalem in a physical manner which is itself an act of spiritual praise.

By Tu Bi-Shevat, "the greater part of the year's rain has fallen" (*Rosh Hashana* 14a), and therefore "the sap has already moved up in the trees, and the fruit has blossomed" (Rashi, ad loc.). According to this, Tu Bi-Shevat is the moment of transition from the tree's processes of maturation and preparation to the fruit's processes of ripening. On this day in the fourth year, the period of *orla* that stems from the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil comes to a close, and there begins the mitzvaof *neta revai* which expresses our return to the level of the Garden of Eden.

Tu Bi-Shevat marks the first moment of life in a repaired world. From now on, the fruit is pure and has the "taste" of the Garden of Eden which opens the gate to deeper connection to God. The New Year of the Tree, like the New Year for all of creation, is a return to a point free of sin and void of any mixing of good and evil, the repaired starting point of the tree.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The only other references relate to the House of God and the sacrifical service therein: a peace-offering is "the holy thing of the Lord" (*Vayikra* 19:8) while “My holy place” is to be held in awe (ibid. v. 30). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Regarding the two parts of the commandment to Adam, see Rabbeinu Bachya’s commentary on the Torah (*Bereishit* 2:16):

   According to the plain sense of the verse, Adam was given here two commandmentns,a positive commandment and a negative commandment: a positive commandment — “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;” and a negative commandment — “But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it.”

   See also the words of Abravanel cited in our previous *shiur*, explaining that these two *mitzvot* are the practical application of the command, "to work it and to keep it." [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See also *Likkutei Halakhot*, *Orla* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See also *Mesilat Yesharim*, Chapter 26, which deals with the trait of holiness. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “’And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life’… One who breathes breathes from within himself (*Tanya*, chapter 2, in the name of the *Zohar*); "Because one who breathes into the nostrils of another puts of his soul in him" (Ramban, *Bereishit* 2:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the story of the Garden of Eden, the "breath of life" in man parallels the "tree of life" in the garden which bestows eternal life. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. "'And the eternity (*ha-netzach*)’ (*I Divrei Ha-yamim* 29:11) — this refers to Jerusalem" (*Berakhot* 58a). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Regarding the fifth year, the Torah states: "But in the fifth year may you eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield to you more richly the increase thereof." The phrase "that it may yield to you more richly the increase thereof" is explained by Rabbi Akiva as follows: "The Torah speaks against the evil inclination, that a person should not say: For four years I am distressing myself for nothing. Therefore it says: 'that it may yield to you more richly the increase thereof’” (*Sifra Kedoshim* 3, 5). Rabbi Akiva speaks of the evil inclination that tells a person that the *mitzvot* are given to distress man and to cause man a loss. To counter this, the Torah comes and teaches that the *mitzvot* are given to benefit and to bestow abundance upon man.

   This evil impulse, as well, arises for the first time in the story of Adam and Chava. God forbids the first human beings to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, as this will cause them to die. The serpent is the evil inclination that convinces them that the Torah's prohibitions come to take from them the good and to cause them a loss. It argues that God is trying to withhold from man the ultimate good, "And you shall be as God" (*Bereishit* 3:5). However, after the eating, it becomes clear that the Torah comes precisely to prevent humanity from being fillled with shame because of its sins and its materiality. The promise regarding the fifth year closes the system of the *mitzvot* of *orla* and *neta revai* by addressing the causes of the sin of Adam and Chava. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. According to this, the land emerges from its curse by way of its transition from being in the hands of Canaan in a period of *orla*, to being in the hands of Israel, just like the tree emerges from its curse by way of the transition from the years of *orla* to its being holy, for giving praise to God. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)