YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL**

**"All the Trees of the Forest Shall Sing for Joy"**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\**

*Dedicated in memory of*

*Joseph Y. Nadler, z”l, Yosef ben Yechezkel Tzvi*

*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\**

"Then all the trees of the forest shall sing for joy." (*Tehillim* 96:12)

"And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." (*Yishayahu* 55:12)

The trees of the forest sing for joy, while the trees of the field clap their hands. There is a difference between these two acts. Singing is an independent expression, while clapping hands is not; it is merely an accompaniment to singing.

The forest is uninhabited and the trees rule over it; therefore, they sing for joy. The trees of the field face a different situation. They exist together with man. Man plants them and tends to them. Man is the center of Creation, and therefore it is man who sings for joy. The trees of the field join in with his singing: they clap their hands, as it were, in accompaniment. Following the splitting of the Red Sea, all the birds joined in clapping hands to accompany Bnei Yisrael's song of praise to God. For this reason there is a custom of scattering food for fowl and birds, as reward for their accompaniment of our song.

There are people who flee from nature, preferring to settle in concrete urban jungles. Others embrace nature completely and unreservedly, maintaining that all that is natural, is good.

Neither approach is ideal. One must live with nature, but at the same time be aware that nature is "uncircumcised," as it were. We must abstain from some parts of nature – "for three years (the fruit) shall be as uncircumcised for you; it shall not be eaten" (*Vayikra* 19:23); but we must live with nature: after removing the foreskin, as it were, we eat the fruit.

"Rabbi Shimon said: One who walks by the way as he studies, and interrupts his study to say, 'How lovely is that tree!' or, 'How lovely is that meadow' – the Torah considers him as having forefeited his life." (*Avot* 3:7)

A person who has to interrupt his study in order to enjoy nature – "How lovely is this tree!" – is considered as though he forefeited his life. Nature must be part of our Torah study, not an interruption of our study. The "clapping of the hands" by the trees of the field must be interwoven harmoniously with man's song.