



Caspari Center NEWS

March 2015

"Equipping His people
for works of service,
so that the body of
Messiah may be built up"
Ephesians 4:12



Tu BiShvat with No Tree Planting

Thanks to the abundance of holidays on the Israeli calendar, I regularly find myself reflecting on the next one, always seeking some new perspective on it. Recently I noticed that I also ponder the holidays' meaning in connection with the children's lessons for Shabbat school. Probably all children's teachers look at life through the prism of their ministry, which is very beneficial: if a child can get it, anyone can.

Tu BiShvat simply means "the 15th of [the Hebrew month] Shvat." It is a good and joyful holiday that marks the beginning of the New Year for the trees. Yes, for the trees, to enable Israeli Jews to fulfill the Torah commandment concerning the tithes separated from produce. The fruit that came before Tu BiShvat is counted as last year's, while that produced after the holiday is counted as new fruit. However, among secular Israelis, this main, ritual meaning of the holiday is often obscured. The holiday is celebrated by planting trees and eating fruit, with which our country abounds, and is thus both practical and tasty.



As lesson material, Tu BiShvat can sometimes be a bit challenging. For example, this year is the last year of a seven-year agricultural cycle called *shemittah*. No trees are planted this year, so Tu BiShvat lacks one of its usual joys. Sometimes it is difficult to explain to children the reason for not planting trees, because for them it is quite a natural thing to do on this holiday, and they also know it is necessary for the Land of Israel. However, according to the plan of the Almighty, even the land needs to rest and regain strength, and obedience to his law will bring us his blessing.

Tu BiShvat is also a good occasion to talk about fruit. In spite of this being a *shemittah* year, fruit-bearing is not cancelled or postponed until next year. As we read the Scriptures, we see that this is exactly what Yeshua expects of us: ". . . I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last . . ." (John 15:16).

**In spite
of this being
a shemittah year,
fruit-bearing
is not cancelled
or postponed until
next year.**

Israel Office:

55 HaNevi'im St., PO Box 46
Jerusalem 9100001, Israel
Phone: +972 2-6233926
Fax: +972 2-6251933
Email: caspari@caspari.com

U.S. Office:

PO Box 147
Wheaton,
IL 60187 USA
Phone +1 630-668-3328
Fax: +1 630-580-5757
Email: caspariUSA@caspari.com

www.caspari.com

The Bible speaks a lot about the fruit of believers, and about the need for this fruit to be visible. According to Jewish tradition, it is on Tu BiShvat—the best time for fruit-bearing—that the Almighty judges the trees. Both Scripture and tradition liken mankind to trees, and that means the Lord carefully examines our fruit too. He gave us everything necessary for a fruitful spiritual life in Messiah Yeshua, and now expects us to be diligent in bearing fruit: “. . . make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love” (2 Pet. 1:5–7).

Tu BiShvat can remind us to prayerfully consider his work in our hearts, and the fruit resulting from it.

Rita Kontorovich, project coordinator

Stay Rooted and Be Grafted

The power of the tree as a symbol

Modern media use many symbolic images to sell computers, cars, and even medicine, despite the fact that analytical specifications would be enough for consumers. Still, other things often need to be expressed as metaphors.

For example, trees have notable roles in the Bible, starting with the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis and ending in Revelation. In the middle, we see an almond tree in the story of Jeremiah. No doubt these were—and will be—real trees. More symbolic illustrations can be seen in the book of Daniel or the Psalms, not to mention the trees in the parables of Jesus and the teaching of Paul about the olive tree.

One of the graphic symbols often used by the Caspari Center is a tree. Why? Wouldn't it be more convincing to just have photos of classrooms, books, or teachers studying in our seminars? Aren't images of plants and trees already overused?

There are biological facts that can clearly be connected to some challenges we have in the body of Christ today. Nobody expects fruit after the roots of a tree are cut. Without roots, things die. Always. Still, there are believers who think there is no need to know about the original roots of Christianity. Replacement theology neglects the fact that you cannot feed the branches, who are hungry for God, if you are not connected to the roots.

Everybody benefits in the plan of God.

That is why we need illustrations of the roots carrying the branches. And that's why Caspari Center provides education on the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. We need roots just as trees need them.

Not only are roots a very instructive image; we also have the theme of being grafted, taught by Paul in Romans 11. But how many pastors know that the Gentiles are not grafted in only for themselves, but to bless the original tree? That is another often-forgotten biological fact. Sandra Teplinsky writes in her book *Why Still Care about Israel?*:



A horticultural practice in the ancient Middle East was to reinvigorate a cultivated olive tree that had stopped bearing fruit by grafting a wild olive branch into it. The fresh sap, or lifeblood, of the wild olive branches could then begin to bear fruit again.

Everybody benefits in the plan of God. Still, we have believers who think Gentiles should just give financial support to the Messianic movement—not their real, genuine presence.

The tree gives us another message. Both parts need new unity in Christ.

**The tree gives
us another message.
Both parts need
new unity in Christ.**

More than 10 years ago, I was a brand new graphic designer at the Caspari Center. I was supposed to make a series of posters about our ministry. Other great and important ministries were present as well. They were feeding the poor, building wells, and providing medical care in the third world. I was challenged to convince people that a spiritual need is also a need. I asked my co-worker what I should do graphically. He suggested the idea of planting something that we might see come to fruition only after 10–20 years. When we bless the generations to come, we cannot see encouraging results immediately. It is like a tree; you have to wait. That was the moment I “fell in love” with trees.

So I made an olive tree series with the whole tree, from the roots to the fruits we don’t yet see. The Caspari Center planted the first seeds more than 30 years ago. Some of the fruits are visible today.

For example, the feedback we get from participants in our programs is like leaves. Here are some encouraging quotes from them:

“Thank you for a wonderfully planned and executed program with lots of variety and highly skilled teachers who knew how to communicate the historical background of the biblical texts and relate them to our own lives and context.”

“The main workshop was very eye-opening. The subject is very difficult, but important for congregations!”

“Thank you for encouraging and strengthening us!”

We have to stay rooted, grafted together, and bear fruit, as we are being cultivated by the Great Gardener himself. What a strong symbol a tree is!

Heidi Tohmola, graphic designer



media review ✂

Caspari Center publishes a weekly review of material from the Israeli press documenting attitudes toward Messianic Jews, the mission, and the Christian faith. To receive the Media Review free of charge by email, sign up at our website, www.caspari.com.

Christians in Israel

Magazine HaMoshavot, January 30, 2015

This four-page article tells the story of Karen and Elisabeth Kinle, who are the first members of the Christian Bethel Community in Zichron Yaakov to have gone through teachers training at the Oranim College. The Bethel Community, originally from Germany, arrived in Israel in the 1960s as part of their deep conviction that the Jews are the chosen people and it is their job to do as much as they can to protect them.

The Kinle sisters see education as a vocation. “I think that as a teacher I can have the best influence on the younger generation. I educate for values rather than grades,” says Elisabeth. Karen and Elisabeth both asked to do their practicum at Shlomi, the community’s school in Zichron Yaakov. When asked how the community’s school is different, they unanimously answered, “Faith. We believe in the New Testament and implement faith in the classroom as well.”

Karen and Elisabeth enjoyed their time at Oranim, and made many friends there. The Shlomi headmistress is satisfied with the training at Oranim as well, and stated that they will be sending other students to study there in the future.

Maariv, November 18, 2014

Holocaust survivors living in the Migdalei HaYam HaTichon assisted living facility were recently visited by a group of Israel-loving Christians from Finland. The meeting, which included conversation, singing, and dancing, “was very moving,” said Hannah Stern, the resident who was the connecting link between the visitors and the facility.



If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to caspari@caspari.com or visit our website, www.caspari.com.

You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.



Blooming in Barren Places

When I was a little kid, I attended a couple of years of religious education at the temple to which my parents belonged. One of my most vivid memories of the experience was receiving a cardboard folder with a bright green picture of a tree on it. In honor of the holiday of Tu BiShvat, each child in the class was supposed to fill the tree's slots with quarters before bringing it back to class. Our teacher told us our quarters would be used to plant trees in Israel. Planting a tree was a way we could express hope for the future of a nation that was then less than 20 years old.



At the time, I remember wondering if someone in Israel would plant my coins in the ground and one of those vivid two-dimensional tree silhouettes pictured inside the cardboard folder would spring up from the ground as a result. The simple act of collecting quarters to plant trees captured my imagination, and it imprinted something more in me. Filling the slots of those folders with quarters connected me to Israel in a very powerful way. I was proud to know I had some bright green trees waiting for me to climb in Israel.

Before I went to Israel for the first time in 2009, I remember hearing that there were mature forests of trees in the land, planted by Jewish schoolchildren. My trees were there waiting for me! Planting a tree is a way of expressing hope in the future. I thought of the little seedlings to which I'd contributed decades earlier blooming in the desert landscape, and reflected on this prophetic promise from Isaiah 35:1–2: "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God."

The sight of the new forests of trees in Israel moved me deeply. The deserts were indeed beginning to bloom with life. But what was even more profound to me was the sight of groves of ancient olive trees, a picture of steady faithfulness in a land that had experienced generations of turmoil and privation. The imagery of a blooming desert in Isaiah has to do with new and old bearing fruit in what had been a place of barrenness.



These images can shape our prayer and tell the story of Caspari's work among the believing community in Israel. Please join us in praying that the new plantings of Messianic congregations in the land in recent times form deep roots, and those who have been planted for many generations bear good fruit. Together they reflect the glory of God as they bloom in this land.

Michelle Van Loon
US coordinator

Prayer Requests

Please pray for...

- *the rising generation in the Messianic community*
- *unity and cooperation between Messianic Jews and Christians*
- *peace and justice in the Middle East*

