



Wait For It

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In my 20s, I participated in the [Adamah Farm Fellowship](#), a Jewish farming program where we learned about the intersection between Judaism and sustainability as we lived, *davened*, and farmed together. It was there that I first learned how asparagus grows like slim fingers out of the ground, taking three years to fully mature. I remembered being stunned: three full years for an asparagus plant to mature! Three years to wait patiently, tending its growth, waiting to see the literal fruits of one's efforts. At the time, I was traveling a lot and rarely in one place for more than six months; I couldn't imagine the commitment it would require to plant asparagus and tend it, committing to be there to harvest it three years later.

Asparagus, amazingly, has a lot in common with the origins of Tu Bishvat. In VaYikra, the Torah teaches us, "When you enter the Land [of Israel] and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden; three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten" (Leviticus 19:23). Just as asparagus takes three years to mature, requiring our patience and care, so too the Torah teaches us that we must wait three years before we partake of the fruit of any trees we plant. Tu Bishvat, the 15th of Shevat, acts as a marker by which we can determine a tree's age, allowing us to count these years required by the Torah.



Tu Bishvat, then, is a holiday that is about slow growth, patience, and gratitude. In a culture that is all about instant gratification and next day delivery, Tu Bishvat teaches us to slow down. It requires us to wait.

In Massekhet Berakhot (64a), R. Abin ha-Levi teaches:

Anyone who forces the moment, the moment forces them. And	כל הדוחק את השעה שעה דוחקתו
anyone who yields to the moment, the moment will wait for	כל הנדחה מפני שעה שעה עומדת
them.	לו.

This text teaches us that sometimes we have to be patient, allowing something to unfold in its correct time. If we try to force an outcome to happen on our schedule, not only won't we succeed, we may find ourselves pushed aside in the process. But if we are patient, if we recognize that we do not control time, then eventually we will be successful, with time standing by our side.

On the one hand, I find this to be an incredibly compelling teaching about the value of patience and recognition of the limits of our power. We can't always have what we want when we want it. There are circumstances beyond our control; we need to accept that not everything is on our schedule. This is a necessary lesson for children and adults alike. On the other hand, this text can lead us toward an approach to life in which patience becomes passivity. Must we always stand aside, waiting for the moment to yield to us? Are there not some moments in which we get to and have to make something happen on our own timetable?

Rav Yehudah and R. Zeira fall on two different points on this continuum when it comes to settling the Land of Israel. Based on a verse in Jeremiah (27:22), Rav Yehudah teaches that we



don't get to return to the Land when we want to return; rather we have to wait until God decides it's the right time. Rav Yehudah is on the side of patience. You can't force the moment, you have to wait for the moment to come. R. Zeira, however, who wants to move to the Land himself, tries to do so without his teacher Rav Yehudah realizing. According to the Gemara (Ketubot 110b), R. Zeira interprets the verse from Jeremiah differently. It's not that an individual can't move to Israel if they want; it's that the whole group can't resettle the Land without permission from God. R. Zeira is not exactly forcing the moment, but he's not willing to wait passively while he waits for the moment, either. He offers a model of what it might look like to take matters into our hands even while we're waiting, rather than doing nothing until God makes a sweeping gesture.

I come back to my farming days at Adamah. When it comes to growing vegetables, we have control over a number of ifs: if we plant, if we mulch, if we water. We can't sit back completely passive and expect a garden to grow. And yet there are also many factors beyond our control: the sun, the rain, the pollinators, the pests—all of this is beyond our control. If growth is to happen, it will happen on its own internal clock, not ours.

So, too, in our lives. We can set the conditions for the dreams we want to come to fruition in the world. We can plant, we can mulch, we can water. We can begin to move projects forward, we can take risks, we can take action. But, we also have to accept with humility that some things are not in our control. For me, there is a peace and acceptance that comes with acknowledging the limits of what I can make happen.

For many of us, we are not yet in the season of growth: the ground is still hard, the night long, the mornings cold. But soon it will be time for growth. And this year, let us be patient. We will plant, we will mulch, we will water. It will take time. We will wait for it.

