



Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director,
OU Israel

One of the advantages of working from home is getting to see the change of seasons in front of my eyes. It has been almost a year since Israel's first lockdown, and as I work at my dining room table I have a view of our garden to my right. Most years, traveling abroad for work and arriving home after dark when I am in Israel prevent me from appreciating the beauty of the changes of nature which occur in my very own backyard.

We have a large Shekediya (almond tree) behind my house, and this time of year it is in full bloom. As the Shekediya has become a symbol for Tu B'Shvat, I have been reflecting on this holiday more than usual. Over the past few weeks I have seen it grow and blossom with more flowers each day.

In addition to the beautiful Shekediya, we are blessed to have four trees of the Shvat HaMinim in our backyard: grapes, olives, pomegranates and figs. The olive tree has leaves year-round and can

easily be identified. Yet, this time of year the grape, pomegranate and fig trees are dry trunks and branches without even a single leaf. While they may look dead, my brother in law shared an interesting gardening lesson. He taught me that even though they look dead, it is important not to trim them during this time of the winter because underneath the dry branches there is life. If one were to cut them open, one would see that they are full of blossoming just below the surface. Cutting them now would kill the potential flowers and fruits which are waiting for the right time to sprout, and once these trees bloom they will be even more beautiful than the other trees that keep their leaves in the winter.

Why am I sharing this? My work with teens and raising my 9 (Blei Ayain Hara) children has taught me that it is so important to look beneath the surface. As an educator and parent, it is crucial to train oneself to look inside his/her children. Just like we need to see the potential beneath the branches of a dry tree, we must see the potential in each and every youth. We must water them with love and patience so that their individual potentials can blossom.

I must credit the OU Israel staff for helping me realize this important lesson. Last Thursday night, I was at the Zula with Shalom Eisner, Corona Projector for the Municipality of Yerushalayim. We were

In loving memory of
Rabbi Dr. O. Asher Reichel זצ"ל
on his ninth yahrzeit, י"ט שבט
From the Bronner and Reichel Families

discussing how to continue to operate the Zula when the teenagers aren't always interested in compiling with corona guidelines, such as not properly wearing their masks. Due to Corona, the Zula is operating outside its usual location on Yaffo Street since we cannot be inside. The cold in Yerushalayim was frigid, and my hands remained in my pockets while I shuffled my body to try and stay warm. Yet, a few meters in front of me our Zula counselors were strumming their guitars and sitting calmly as they listened to the youth unburden themselves. They were seeing the potential in these kids and watering them with acceptance and love because they know that they will be the future blossoming leaders of the Jewish people.



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