

PLANTS

Rakel Berenbaum

As I wrote a few weeks ago, Israel is the perfect place for a vacation. We truly enjoyed our vacation this summer in Haifa. We spent a lot of time at the beach as well as time in some very interesting, air-conditioned museums. One exciting thing we did was help a farmer pick his produce.

I recently learned about the agricultural volunteer internet platform called "SunDo", that was started by Hashomer Hachadash to help Israeli agriculture. There are times of the year when farmers have a lot of work to do and they are unable to find enough people to help with the work. Through the SunDo App farmers can find volunteers and people who want to volunteer can choose from various farms, types of jobs and locations. We searched the App for a farm near where we were staying that was harvesting during the dates that we were available that offered a job that we thought we were capable of doing. The possibilities available were quite exciting such as picking grapes in the north to planting and harvesting in a green hydroponic farm in the center of the country. Each farmer offers some incentive to make the volunteering a bit easier such as a hot meal during the day or a place to sleep for the time one volunteers. We volunteered in Achihud for Meir Muchrar, a 65 year old farmer filled with passion for his work. He was happy to

teach us about his work, and we learned so much from his Emunah-trust in God. Farming is hard work, and one invests lots of time and money without a guarantee that there will be a good harvest and a return on the investment.

It gave us a way to tour the land, really "connect to the land" and interact with those who really care for the land. When we got there we saw a whole field of dalorit (orange squash) and lots of empty crates to fill. We left after helping to load the crates we had filled with huge well formed dalorits onto the truck to be stored on the farm. We managed to fill all the crates that had been brought to the field to fill on that day. Who would have thought? What a sense of accomplishment.

What does all this have to do with our Torah portion? In chapter 20 (19-20) in the section related to going out to war, there is a verse concerning our relationship with the plant world. When we besiege a city we are instructed not to destroy the fruit trees. On first reading we may think the reason is because Kii MIMENO TOCHAL – cause you can eat from them", man's livelihood depends on the trees (Even Ezra). According to Even Ezra's opinion, the reason for the mitzvah is for man's benefit. According to Rashi, on the other hand, the mitzvah is to protect the tree. He writes " Is the tree of the field a man who is besieged by you, to suffer famine and thirst just like the inhabitants of the city? Why then should you cut it down?

Nechama Leibawitz points out that according to Even Ezra the mitzvah is

motivated by considerations of human welfare while according to Rashi it is motivated by compassion for whatever God has created. The Sefer HaChinuch elaborated on the educational benefit of this mitzvah. He explained it as a utilitarian mitzvah whose aim is to protect man from the willful destruction of things which could benefit mankind. This is known as "BAL TASHCHIT" – we should not willfully destroy gifts of nature. The tree in our text is an example, a prototype. We shouldn't destroy anything that could be used constructively. There's a lot we can learn from the plants around us. This week's portion sensitizes us to that, and the SunDo App gives us an opportunity to actually feel and work with plants as they grow and ripen. I recommend it for everyone.

Thanks to all the hard work we did in the dalorit fields we gained a bigger appreciation for this amazing vegetable with a long shelf life. We say our bracha when eating them with a lot more kavana. This week's recipe is of course from dalorit. It can also be used on Rosh Hashanah as one of the Simanim – foods we eat as a sign for a good year (Kara).

SWEET DALORIT

5 cups cooked rice (can be a bit undercooked)

2 onions, chopped

1 cup water

1 dalorit, cut in small pieces

4 tbsp. raisins

1 tbsp. honey

2 tbsp. cinnamon

4 tbsp. Oil

Salt, pepper to taste

Handful chopped mint (optional)

4 tbsp. Almond slivers (optional)

Saute onion in half the oil with honey and half the cinnamon till golden.

Remove and place on side. Saute dalorit in remaining oil with cinnamon, salt and pepper. Add water and cook covered for 20 minutes. Add rice, onions, raisins and mint. Bring to a boil. Remove from flame, add almonds. Cover and let stand for another 10 minutes.