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A TU B'SHVAT THOUGHT

Trees are the symbol of the Garden of Eden, the Paradise of Creation. Among all the miracles that God performed to bring forth life in Eden, we are explicitly told that God planted a garden and trees grew. But these weren't just any trees. God planted fruit trees.

In Deuteronomy 20, we are told that Israelites laying siege to a city may not cut down trees to aid in their siege. But this injunction is not about just any trees. It expressly forbids the cutting of fruit trees. While this verse is taken as the founding law that has spawned an extensive legal category forbidding wanton destruction, we may also learn one other fundamental principle from it. We may not destroy one Paradise to win another.

No matter how attractive or compelling the city that we wish to occupy appears, no matter how compelling or attractive a world we wish to create seems to us in our imagination, we cannot and must not destroy the paradise that is before us now. For, in truth, when finally won or purchased or created, this fantasy world will sooner or later bore us or disappoint us, and we will ache to be off on another adventure, another siege, another conquest, another destruction. The constancy of the fruit trees tells us that we can only build a future paradise in the midst of our present paradise. Or else it can't be built at all.

Source: Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin