

The Village of Al Taybeh



FROM FRUIT TO NUT

Tucked away at the very northern tip of the west bank and just 20 km northwest of Jenin, Al Taybeh is renowned for being the *almonds village*. Almonds as well as olives are the two major crops in Al Taybeh with an estimated production of 10 tons of olive oil and 10 tons of organic almonds annually. The 15 members of the Palestine Fair Trade Cooperative cultivate an area of 785 dunoms almost entirely dedicated to these two crops. With more than 138 almond fields most people in Al Taybeh welcome their guests with generous servings of their own homegrown delicious varieties. Relying almost entirely on rainwater, almond farmers in Al

Taybeh provide a big portion of Canaan Fair Trade's organic almonds selection. According to Haj Abu Ismail, a member of the cooperative and an elder in his village, "we do not water our almond trees for the simple reason that it changes the flavor of the nut. Our almonds are mostly Baal (rain-fed) and when you taste them you can tell the difference between these almonds and the commercial ones." Most people in Al Taybeh grow almonds as part of their village tradition. Those who do not have enough almonds to sell in the market have enough for their home consumption and a little extra to share with friends in neighboring villages. Almond harvest takes place in the later months of summer starting in August through September where people collect the hard shells



and spread them in the sun for two to three days to make sure they are dry enough for either storage or cracking. But the almond season is not limited to these two months, most people in Taybeh would say that the best time to visit their village is during the spring time in early March when the white almond blossoms dress the branches making the hills look like a beautiful 'wedding dress'. By May the green almond fruit is ripened and freshly picked and served with small plates of salt for a savory and crunchy bites of green almond fruit.

their olive groves one starts to wonder how the people of Al Taybeh maintain their calm and generosity amidst great difficulties.



The road along the electric fence separating Taybeh from neighboring village.



Haj Abu Ismail driving the tractor and Abu Mohammed sitting on the side telling his story.

Since 2004, over a 1000 olive trees have been uprooted for the building of the Israeli segregation wall separating the people of Al Taybeh not just from their families but from their trees as well. Abu Mohammed, who lost more than 30 dunoms and around 500 trees for the building of the electric fence walks up to the fence every morning to look at his trees. When asked how they manage to stay calm and loving in the middle of such an intense situation most people in Al Taybeh say that they are filled with gratitude for the strong life force God has given them. According to Haj Ismail, "a human being is born with who he is inside him. It is a spirit and we have the spirit of life." This is the same reason why 78 year old Um Issam planted a new olive tree in her front yard, "We planted an olive tree here as a remembrance, a symbol for our grandchildren and the youth so they would always remember and know that in this life there is much worth living for."

GRATITUDE: A LIFE FORCE

Aside from being a friendly village, the people in Al Taybeh have to depend on each other for the most basic things. Since there is only one small shop in the whole village, no bakery, and no vegetable market people rely on each other and the two main public bus drivers to bring them what they need from the city of Jenin or from the next door village of Romaneh. One should not be surprised of the steam of hot bread clouding the windows of the small bus going back and forth to Jenin nor would it be unusual to find someone on the bus with several grocery bags not just for their home consumption but for their neighbors as well. This kind of communal interaction adds more to the charm of this quintal village making even a complete stranger feel very safe and taken care of in this community. Wandering around on a tractor with Haj Abu Ismail and his life long friend Abu Mohammed in

Many of the farmers also explain that since Cnaan Fair Trade started buying their olive oil they have regained energy and hope for the future. "Before Cnaan Fair Trade started working in our community we used to have a very hard time especially in transportation and low prices but now they come every year and buy all my olive oil." With an expanding almonds



market, producers in Al Taybeh are excited about the new possibilities and about sharing not just their olives but their almonds as well with the rest of the world.

MULOKHEYEH: A GREEN LEAF FOR A GREEN HEART!

The uplifting spirit of the people of Al Taybeh defies any hopelessness making their open heartedness a gift they share with anyone who comes to visit. And if you are having a low energy day, all you have to do is stop by Hajeh Rosa's house for a home cooked meal.



Hajeh Rosa chopping the leafy Mulokheyeh greens by hand.

The mere experience of tasting her *Mulokheyeh* for example, is enough to reignite energy into anyone's heart. Served with rice, *Mulokheyeh* is a kind of a jute plant that grows on long stems producing green leaves that are finely chopped prepared with chicken and garlic. Many use modern mixers to chop up the green leaves but not Hajeh Rosa. "When the hands touch the food it changes its flavor. It is about *El Nifis* (the spirit) in which you cook. If someone is generous and they like to feed people then you can taste it in their food."

Without a doubt just a nibble from Hajeh Rosa's *Mulokheyeh* would make one understand that indeed it is the spirit of a chef and the open heartedness of a community that make life a journey worth living.



*White almond blossoms in March (top)
Almond nuts during picking season with remains of the green shell, which was previously the almond fruit. (bottom)*