

# Ti'nik Village



## THE VILLAGE OF FRAGRANCE!

Known for its historical significance and Canaanite archeological sites, the village of Ti'nik is located 11 Kilometers northwest of the city of Jenin. With an agricultural area of about 5000 dunoms filled with a wide variety of crops, fields of almonds and olives, Ti'nik produces an average of 5 tons of olive oil each year. With a population of 1500 people, Ti'nik's Palestine Fair Trade Association cooperative is made up of 19 farmers who sell almost the entirety of their olive oil to Canaan Fair Trade. "We thank God we have the Palestine Fair Trade Association. We are now organized, and we can sell our olive oil for a good price. We used to sell so cheap. We have so much olive oil maybe our olive oil production can feed all of Jenin and so we did not know what to do

with the entire surplus. Most importantly, we have now regained our passion in working in the olive fields." Says Haj Rafiq. Aside from their active PFTA cooperative, the people of this scenic village enjoy a distinct view. According to Taysir Sadiq, from the highest hilltop of Ti'nik one can see a 360-degree view from the Carmel Mountain in Haifa to the mountains in the Jordan Valley. But perhaps what is more remarkable than the beautiful views in Ti'nik is the intense almond blossom fragrance overwhelming the plains in preparation for a bountiful spring. While Ti'nik produces several varieties of almonds, it is most famous for a specific one called *Hasan Al Asad* referring to the name of the farmer who first started growing it. *Hasan Al Asad* almonds are slightly bigger than *Baladi* almonds and can be easily hand cracked (*Farkee*). They are delicious eaten green in

spring or as a nut in late summer. Walking under branches of white almond blossoms one cannot help but notice how ancient agricultural practices and the creativity of small-scale farmers have played an important role in preserving biodiversity through healthy land management and crop diversification. In Haj Rafiq's land alone there are several crops other than almonds that make it possible for him to sustain his whole family. From onions, green fava beans, garlic, wheat, to olives, Haj Rafiq says he hardly has to buy anything from the market.

## A BORDER FLOWER

This traditional creativity however extends beyond multi cropping. Farmers in Palestine in general and in Ti'nik in particular have always used a bulb flower called *El Basoul* to identify where one farmers' land begins and where another one ends. In situations where land ownership was in dispute the location of the flower would settle it when it sprouted in spring. According to Um Ashraf, "our grandfathers planted these trees so to avoid any confusion. *El Basoul* lives for a long time and its bulb is big and deep-rooted. It is planted 60-70 cm in the earth so no tractor hitch can reach it. If we were to use a rock or wood to define property then anyone can move the rock. No one can move the *Basoul*. Even if it is winter, it will be a matter of a couple of months before spring comes and the *Basoul* sprouts setting all records straight."



*The Basoul flower separating Haj Rafiq's land from his neighbor.*

While the Basoul is intentionally planted, wild flowers of all sorts cover the plains making the brown

soil turn into canvas for red, yellow, and white flora. But the most important one of them all says Um Ashraf is the purple *Za'matout*, Cyclamen in English. This purple flower grows in the wild in most of the Mediterranean especially in rocky areas. In Palestine, *Za'matout* is especially valued for its delicious taste. Um Ashraf, for example, collects its leaves, boils them, and stuffs them with rice and lamb and spices. After rolling the leaves she places them gently in a pot and covers them with water. She places a lid on the pot and waits around half an hour before she serves the dish with a side of home cured olives from her field. This delightful delicacy she says, "has a great flavor not only because it has a special tang but because we only get to eat it once a year in this season which makes looking forward to it a key part in the joy of eating and preparing it."



*Um Ashraf's delicious olives*

Adding to their great hospitality, the people of Ti'nik enjoy an easygoing attitude that allows them to resolve problems easily. Sadiq El Zyoud was born in 1919, he has seen the village grow from 400 to today over 1500 inhabitants, but he says that in all of these years there is one thing that he has always found to be true about the people in his village. "We love each other. Even when things are tough we support and love each other. When someone needs help in plowing or pruning or anything, you see many people going to help him. It is part of what our parents taught us, a sense of cooperation that allows us to survive." Sitting across the room from Sadiq is his eldest son, Taysir, who has worked in Ramallah as a banker for 14 years. Taysir has recently returned to his village with his family, abandoning his big job in the city. When asked why he would do such a thing, Taysir

says, “There is a kind of humility in our village that makes life so nice. I missed that in the city. Here it does not matter if I am a banker or a PhD people treat each other equally and I really like this in our village. It is more valuable to me than the wealth I can make working in a big job.” Leaning towards his coffee cup, Sadiq affirms that the reason his village has an open and humble spirit is because everyone seems to agree on the teaching of a wise man who said that the key to a good life is “truth in words and respecting what is not yours.” But another reason people in Ti’nik maintain a very close social net is the size of the community. Most people in the village say that they feel like their village is one big family because if they don’t see their neighbor or friend in the morning they are bound to see them in the afternoon.

As for 8 year-old Nour, her favorite thing about her village is not just playing with all her girlfriends but it is also the fact that her grandparents live in it. And her grandfather, Abu Ashraf, makes every Friday a fun day in the field. “My grandfather makes a fire for us every Friday. He makes us breakfast, tea, coffee with milk, bread and cheese that he lets us grill on the fire.” Biting into a piece of bread, Abu Ashraf explains that what he does with his grandchildren is part of his commitment to planting each season so the children can pick and eat with their own hands because a person who knows how to grow his or her own food will always be free and independent. “My grandparents and parents planted for me to eat and be independent. I want the same for the children of my children.”



*Nour and her sister Zein looking out in their grandparents home.*

Spending more than a couple of hours in this charming village one can start to see that the village of Ti’nik represents yet another model where traditional agricultural practices are proving to be not only more sustainable but essential in maintaining a rich biodiversity and a social dynamic that fosters cooperation among farmers and neighbors. More importantly, it is one of those places where one can see hope for the future in the words and eyes of youngsters like Nour who is growing up with access to knowledge and an appreciation for the land and its beauty. And according to her, “when the sun hits the valley in the summer, the whole world sparkles!”