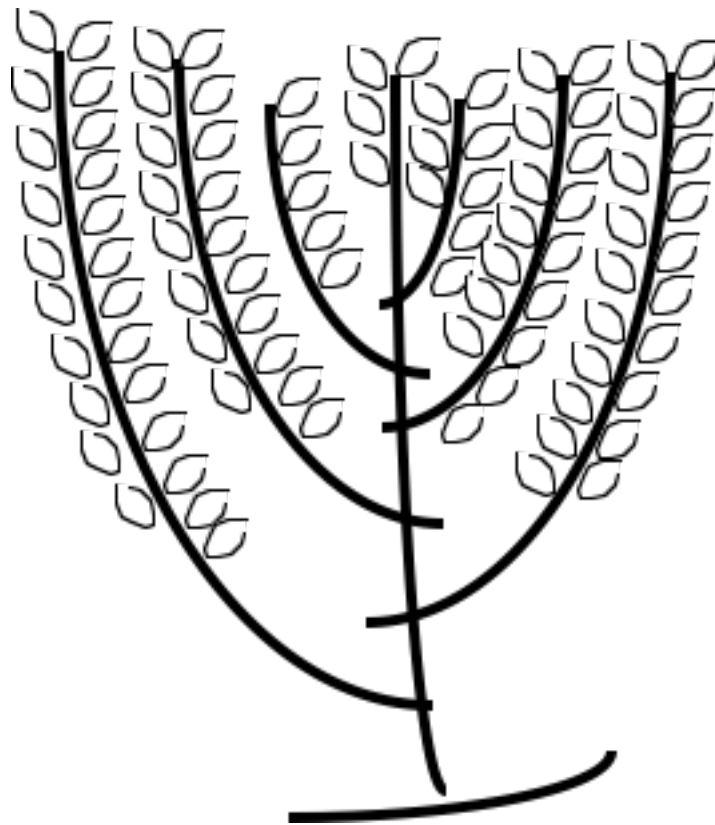


סדר ט"ו בשבט

Seder Tu BiShvat

A Seder for the Festival of the Trees



“If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone should say that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting and then go welcome the Messiah.”

— Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, Avot de-Rabbi Natan



Congregation Beth Israel

חבורת בית ישראל

INTRODUCTION

God led Adam around the Garden of Eden and said, "Look at My works. See how beautiful they are, how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil or destroy My world — for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you."

—Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13

Let us praise this day and our gathering together in it.

Today is the full moon of the month of Shvat: the New Year of the Trees. We mark the passage of time measured in their rings. In the book of Leviticus we read that new trees should not be harvested for three years; the fruit of a four-year-old tree should be set aside as a gift to God; and the fruit of a five-year-old tree may be eaten. The Talmud established this day as the birthday of all trees to help us fulfill that commandment.

The Jewish tradition compares people, the Torah, and even God to trees. In Deuteronomy we read, "For a human being is a tree of the field" (Deut. 20:19). Proverbs depicts the Torah as "a tree of life to them that hold it fast" (Proverbs 3:17–18). And Jewish mystics visualize God as a tree, with roots in creation and branches spreading far and wide.

Today, like the medieval Kabbalists of Tzfat, we will take a Tu BiShvat journey from divine roots to divine treetop, through four levels of our world: *Asiyah* (action), *Yetsirah* (formation), *Briyah* (creation) and *Atsilut* (essence). We will drink four cups of juice or wine to represent these four worlds and the four seasons; we will eat different kinds of fruits, symbolizing our passage.

Our Tu BiShvat journey also reminds us of our obligations to the earth — "To till it and tend it" (Genesis 2:15), as God told Adam. Today, we are witness to many forms of environmental destruction — the erosion of the ozone layer, global warming, deforestation, species extinction, toxic chemicals, and runaway population growth. We see that the poor suffer disproportionately from these ills. Tu BiShvat can remind us to take action to heal the earth.

The Kabbalists created the seder of Tu BiShvat as a "*tikkun*" — a ritual of repair. By eating the fruits and nuts of the trees with special blessings and awareness, we strive to repair our own spiritual brokenness and the brokenness of a world that is not yet as we and God most wish it to be.

Amid the snow of winter, let us reconnect with the world of root and leaf, affirming our faith that spring will come.

הכנה Preparation

It is the New Year of the Trees, but here
the ground is frozen under the crust of snow.
The trees snooze, their buds tight as nuts.
Rhododendron leaves roll up their stiff scrolls.

In the white and green north of the diaspora
I am stirred by a season that will not arrive
for six weeks, as wines on far continents prickle
to bubbles when their native vines bloom.

What blossoms here are birds jostling
at feeders, picking sunflower seeds
and millet through the snow: tulip red
cardinal, daffodil finch, larkspur jay,

the pansybed of sparrows and juncos, all hungry.
They too are planters of trees, spreading seeds
of favorites along fences. On the earth closed
to us all a book in a language we cannot

yet read, the seeds, the bulbs, the eggs
of the fervid green year await release.
Over them on February's cold table I spread
a feast. Wings rustle like summer leaves.

—Marge Piercy, from *The Art of Blessing the Day*

We pause now, just for a minute, to prepare ourselves for the journey we are beginning. We stop, and breathe, and notice what we are doing, how we are feeling, what this moment is like.

To the Kabbalists of Tzfat, the Tu BiShvat seder was deeply important. What mattered was not merely holding a seder, but truly experiencing the seder with *kavvanah*, with focus and intent.

In a moment we will eat fruits and drink juices, each symbolic of some holy element in our lives. Let us each take the time to smell before we eat and drink, to experience the texture of the fruit before we chew, to savor the taste before we swallow. By eating and drinking with *kavvanah* — making our consumption an act of deep appreciation for, and connection with, the natural world — we help to heal the world from its forgetfulness.

Four Questions for the Tu BiShvat Seder

Why do we celebrate the trees' new year in mid-winter?

Throughout winter, the trees are dormant; the land is cold and the trees can't absorb moisture and nutrients from the soil. By Tu BiShvat [in the Land of Israel], the earth begins to warm, the trees draw water and nutrients up through their roots, and the first buds appear. Tu BiShvat is a celebration of the trees and the waters they depend upon.

Why do we celebrate Tu BiShvat with a seder?

The Kabbalists were Jewish mystics who lived in Tzfat, a small community in northern Israel, several hundred years ago. They developed the first seder for Tu BiShvat. Seder means "order," and the Kabbalists developed a mysterious order for their seder. Today, a seder provides a wonderful opportunity to come together with family and friends to learn and celebrate together.

How is this seder different from the Passover seder?

At the Passover seder we tell the story of our history and we eat foods — matzah, maror and herbs — that symbolize that story. The order of the Passover seder helps us to experience the journey from slavery to freedom, and from Egypt to Israel. At the Tu BiShvat seder we tell the stories of our relationship with Creation, and we eat all kinds of fruits to remind ourselves of the miracles of nature. The order of the Tu BiShvat seder helps us experience the journey from the outer world of matter to the inner world of spirit.

What is the order of the Tu BiShvat seder?

[The Kabbalists taught that] we live in four dimensions or four worlds at the same time: the physical world, the emotional world, the intellectual world and the spiritual world. The four worlds provide a natural order for the Tu BiShvat seder: earth for physical, water for emotional, air for intellectual, and fire for spiritual. The elements are integral parts of many Jewish rituals. We acknowledge fire, water and earth every Shabbat, when we light candles, wash hands, and break bread.

-- Ellen Bernstein

עולם העשייה Olam Ha'Asiyah — The World of Action

Asiyah is the physical world,
creation at its most basic.

This is the world of objects:
flesh, stone, wood.

Here the spark of the Divine
is hidden by the shell of appearance.

This is the world of earth
and the season of Winter.

The divine tree roots itself in the world of *Asiyah* — the physical world of existence. The world of *Asiyah* appears hard and impenetrable, but, like winter's frozen ground, it is a shell that contains the life of the spirit below. The white wine or juice we drink symbolizes winter's pale light and white snow.

We recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei peri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.

In winter we layer ourselves in clothing, blanketing ourselves from the cold just as the earth is insulated by snow. The fruit we eat for the world of *Asiyah* also symbolizes the winter season, with its protected outside and soft interior. Removing the hard shells of pomegranates, walnuts, almonds, coconuts, or pecans exposes a vulnerable inside.

Some of these fruits have special significance in Jewish tradition. Like the almond, first of the fruit trees to blossom each year in Israel. Right about this time of year, its pink and white blossoms can be seen all over Jerusalem.

Or the walnut. Rabbi Tarfon likened the people of Israel to a pile of walnuts. If one walnut is removed, each and every walnut in the pile will be shaken. When a single Jew is shaken, every other Jew is shaken and affected. (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan*) Likewise, when a single species is endangered, the entire ecosystem is shaken and affected.

Or the pomegranate. In the Song of Songs we read: “Come, my beloved ... let us see... if the pomegranates are in bloom.” The Rabbis comment: “These are the children who are busy learning the Torah; they sit in rows like pomegranate seeds.” The gleaming red pomegranate seeds remind us that we, too, must be attentive to study Torah, and learn how we must care for our world.

The shell which conceals these fruits also protects. We know what that feels like. In the world of school, work, and everyday activity, our spiritual selves require protection and nurturing. Sometimes we wrap ourselves in a tough outer shell, to protect our feelings and our hearts.

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of *Asiyah*:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei peri ha'ets.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.

A Teaching About The Environment

The Torah teaches, “When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, swinging an ax against them. You may eat from them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?” (Deuteronomy 20:19–20).

This prohibition serves as the foundation for an important principle of Jewish law — *bal tashchit*, the prohibition against destruction. *Bal tashchit* teaches that the needless destruction of anything is wrong.

Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote, “This text becomes the most comprehensive warning to human beings not to misuse the position which God has given them as masters of the world and its matter by capricious, passionate or merely thoughtless wasteful destruction of anything on earth. Only for wise use has God laid the world at our feet.”

עולם היצירה

Olam HaYetsirah — The World of Formation

Yetsirah is the world of formation
where creation changes.

Here materials are transformed,
clay into bricks, iron into plows.

Here we acknowledge creative power,
ours and God's.

This is the world of emotions
and water, Spring and thaw.

We are moving up the trunk of the divine tree. *Yetsirah*, the second world, is the world of Formation. We acknowledge God as creator not only of the physical world, but also of our creative abilities.

In the world of *Yetsirah*, we drink white wine or juice with a dash of red. This gradual deepening of color parallels the reawakening of colors in nature as the sun brings the earth back to life. In spring the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth and the first flowers appear on the hillsides.

As we drink the second cup of wine or juice, white with a dash of red, may we, like the flowers, blossom into our full potential.

We add a bit of red wine or juice to the white and recite together:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei peri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.

The world of *Yetsirah* is connected with springtime. To represent the world of *Yetsirah* we eat fruits without protective shells — olives, dates, apricots, peaches and plums — to symbolize how, in spring, we will forget our protective attire and expose our soft bodies to the sun.

Still, these fruits contain pits, reminding us that we may still have hardness around our hearts. Despite the wondrous expressions of our spirit, each of us is still tied to the hard stone of ego. We still feel the need to protect what makes us vulnerable.

Like the nuts we ate in the world of *Asiyah*, some of these fruits have special significance in Jewish tradition. For instance, the olive. The olive tree is a sign of hope that, despite the enormity of destruction, life can be restored. When the great flood began to subside, Noah sent out a dove. “The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a leaf it had picked from an olive tree.” (Genesis 8:11).

As we eat the fruit of *Yetsirah*, the emotional world of Formation, may our hearts be open to the feelings and needs of ourselves and others, allowing the warmth of our care through the world.

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of *Yetsirah*:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei peri ha'ets.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.

A Reading About the Earth

Teach your children
what we have taught our children —
that the earth is our mother.
Whatever befalls the earth
befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.
If men spit upon the ground,
they spit upon themselves.

This we know.
The earth does not belong to us;
we belong to the earth.
This we know.
All things are connected
like the blood which unites one family.
All things are connected.

Whatever befalls the earth
befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.
We did not weave the web of life;
We are merely a small strand in it.

— Chief Seattle

עולם הבריאה

Olam HaBriyah — The World of Creation

Briyah is the world of creation,
air and thought and Summer.

We recall the words of Genesis:
“Adonai formed a human from the dust

of the Earth, and blew into its nostrils
the breath of life, and the human

became a living being...placed
in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and protect it.”

One name for God is “The Breath of Life.” We breathe out what the trees breathe in; God breathes in us and through us. *Briyah* is the world of air, the holy breath of creation.

In the world of *Briyah*, we drink red wine or juice with a dash of white, reminding us that as the land becomes warmer and the colors of the fruits deepen as they ripen, we too become warmer and more open.

We add a bit of white wine or juice to the red and recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei peri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.

We eat soft fruits to remind ourselves to relinquish both our shells and the stones we carry inside us. Sometimes we develop hard shells to protect ourselves; sometimes we are available to a point, but keep a toughness or hardness inside ourselves; but in our deepest relationships we are like the fruit of *Briyah*, with no inner shell and no outer façade.

Some of the fruits we eat now, too, have special significance in Jewish tradition. The fig is mentioned in the Bible sixteen times, together with the vine, as the most important fruit of the Land of Israel. In the Bible, the fig symbolizes an era of peace and security and an ideal vision for the future. The rabbis asked, “Why were the words of Torah compared to the fig tree?” They answered, “Since all the figs do not ripen at the same time, the more one searches the tree, the more figs one finds in it.” So it is with the words of the Torah — the more we study them, the more sweet morsels we find.

A Talmudic story is told about Honi, who saw an old man planting a carob tree with the help of his grandchild. Honi laughed. "Foolish man," he said, "do you think you will still be alive to eat the fruit of this tree?" The old man replied, "I found trees in the world when I was born. My grandparents planted them for me. So, too, I am planting for my grandchildren."

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of *Briah*:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei peri ha'ets.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.

The Poets Say...

I have come to terms with the future:
From this day onward I will walk
easy on the earth. Plant trees. Kill
no living things. Live in harmony with
all creatures. I will restore the earth
where I am. Use no more of its resources
than I need. And listen, listen to what
it is telling me.

— M.J. Slim Hooey

Let the trees be consulted
before you take any action
every time you breathe in
thank a tree...

— John Wright

עולם האצילות Olam Ha'atsilut — The World of Essence

Atsilut is the world of essence,
divine emanation.

This is the world of spirit
and fire and Autumn.

Physics tells us that what seems solid
is actually filled with impossibly small spaces.

Atsilut affirms this knowing: what seems
like creation is actually just God.

This is the top, where the divine tree dissolves into the unknowable. *Atsilut*, the fourth world, is the world of essence. Pure spirit, *Atsilut* is represented by fire.

In the Autumn world of *Atsilut*, we drink deep red wine or juice. The pure red wine or juice represents the full bloom of nature before the cold winter. As nature expends its last bit of energy in an explosion of colorful leaves, a full cycle is completed.

As we drink the fourth cup of pure red wine or juice, may we become strong, like healthy trees, with solid roots in the ground and with our arms open to the love that is all around us.

We take up a cup of red wine or juice and recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei peri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.

In the world of *Atsilut* we eat no fruit, for this world cannot be represented by any fruit. In this spiritual world, we become aware of God's love, mercy, and wisdom perceived with our hearts, not our senses. Our hearts are full and we praise the Source that renews all creation.

As we have passed through each world, we have changed with each season. We began by protecting our soft inner self and slowly peeled our hard outer layer. Within the next layer another hardness was found, protected by the softness which surrounded it. Then we came to a place where there was no distinction between the protected and the protective. Let us rejoice in where we are!

Another Set of Four Questions for the Tu BiShvat Seder

What do I know about the place where I live?

Trees are particular about the place in which they live. A tree can tell us a lot about the history of its place and how humans have acted upon it. In the tree, we can see the effect of human settlement and industry as well as natural events, like storms or fires.

How much do we really know about the places we live? Let us learn and tell the stories of our home: its rocks, its soil, its animals, its trees.

Where do things come from?

Everything we eat, everything we wear or use has its roots in the natural world. Who made them? Where did the materials come from? How were they processed? What is the environmental cost of buying a product from someplace far away? What is the true cost of our being able to eat fresh vegetables all year round?

How do I connect to the earth?

The first human was called *Adam*: earthling. We can never leave that original name. All that we are, all that we are made of, all that we live on, comes from the earth. We may try to separate ourselves from the rhythms of the earth. We may heat and air condition our houses and cars, but we cannot live outside the earth. We may shape the earth but we can never completely control it. We belong to the earth; the earth does not belong to us.

What is my purpose as a human being?

One might also ask: What is the purpose of a tree? A tree does not live to be a resource. It has a worth and a meaning in creation beyond our needs. And so we have a purpose and a worth beyond our roles as producers and consumers. Is there some greater good for humanity? Like the trees, we are voices in that great choir of life that praises with its every breath the creator of the universe.

— Adapted from Rabbi Larry Troster

We recite together this prayer of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav:

Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone;
may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the
trees and grass — among all growing things and there may
I be alone, and enter into prayer, to talk with the One to
whom I belong.

May I express there everything in my heart, and may all the
foliage of the field — all grasses, trees, and plants — awake
at my coming, to send the powers of their life into the
words of my prayer so that my prayer and speech are made
whole through the life and spirit of all growing things,
which are made as one by their transcendent Source.

May I then pour out the words of my heart before your
Presence like water, O Lord, and lift up my hands to You in
worship, on my behalf, and that of my children!

May it be Your will, O God of our ancestors, that through our eating of the fruits
You have created, the trees be filled with the glory of their ability to renew
themselves for new blossoming, from the start of the year to its end, so that
our lives too will be renewed and filled with goodness, blessings, and peace.

סעודה The Festive Meal

We wash our hands in water, which sustains us, trees, and all life; and we say:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על נטילת ידים.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kiddeshanu bemitsvotav
vetsivanu al netilat yadayim.*

Blessed are You Adonai our God Source of all being who makes us holy with
mitzvot and who enjoins us concerning the washing of hands.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, hamotsi lechem min ha'arets.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, who causes bread to arise
from the earth. God's rich earth nurtures the trees, the grain of our bread, and
all that lives.

Bon Appétit! / Enjoy our potluck feast!

לכו ועשו Go Now And Act

“If you have a sapling in your hand, ready to plant, and the Messiah comes, plant the tree first and then go to greet him.”

—Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*

The rabbis debated, “Which is greater, study or action?” Akiba said, and the sages agreed, “Study — if it leads to action.” (B. Kiddushin 40b)

In the spirit of this declaration, here are two action opportunities in the spirit of the holiday.

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)

443 Park Avenue South, 11th Floor

New York, NY 10016

212-684-6950, ext. 210

www.coejl.org

The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life was founded in 1993 to promote environmental education, scholarship, advocacy, and action in the American Jewish community. Check COEJL’s web site for action alerts on environmental protection or donate directly to COEJL.

Olive Trees for Peace

c/o The Shefa Fund

8459 Ridge Ave, 2d floor

Philadelphia PA 19128

To help Rabbis for Human Rights replant olive trees and give other humanitarian aid to Palestinian villages, send a donation of any size. (Make out this check to "Shefa Fund/Olive Trees for Peace," and please include your e-mail address.) The Shefa Fund is a non-profit tax-exempt group, and contributions are tax-deductible under US law.

This Tu BiShvat Haggadah is a compilation of materials written by Rachel Barenblat and Rabbi Jeff Goldwasser, adapted in part from a Haggadah designed by Barak Gale and Ami Goodman with the support of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life and the Koret Synagogue Initiative.

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The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) deepens the Jewish community’s commitment to the stewardship of creation and mobilizes the resources of Jewish life and learning to protect the Earth and all its inhabitants. Contact them at www.coejl.org.