

סדר ט"ו בשבט

Seder Tu BiShvat

a haggadah for celebrating
the new year 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

Opening song

יַעֲלוּ שָׂדֵי, וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ; אִזְ יִרְנְנוּ, כָּל-עֵצֵי-יַעַר.
Ya'aloz sadai, v'chol asher bo / az y'ran'nu, kol atzei ya'ar.

"Let the field exult, and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy." Psalm 96:12. (Melody by Nava Tehila.)

What is this day?

In 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.

In Deuteronomy we read, "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 the Jewish mystics visualized even God as a tree: with roots in creation and branches spreading far and wide...or perhaps God is the Root from Whom all blessings flow into the varied branches of creation.

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

This is a day for relating to God in and through the natural world. Amid the snow of winter, let us reconnect with the world of root and leaf, affirming our faith that spring will come.

***Kavanah* / intention for our seder**

May this Tu BiShvat seder remind us of our obligations to the earth
To till it and tend it, as God told Adam.

May we be mindful of environmental destruction:
Erosion of the ozone layer, global warming, deforestation;

Species extinction, toxic chemicals, runaway population growth.
May we remember that the poor suffer the most from these ills

And may we be inspired to take action to bring healing to our planet.
Amen, amen, selah.

A prayer from the original Tu Bish'vat haggadah, Pri Etz Hadar:

O God, who makes, forms, creates, and emanates the highest worlds! You made the trees and grasses grow from the ground in the shape and pattern of these highest worlds. And this full moon is the beginning of Your work to renew and ripen the fruit trees, to bring forth the fruit of 'the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden.'

May it be Your will that our eating and blessing and meditating on these fruits will strengthen the flow of love and blessing over the trees, to make them grow and bloom, for good life, for blessing and for peace. May all Creation return to its original strength and may we see the rainbow rejoicing in its colors.

And may all the sparks of divine energy, whether scattered by our hands, or by the hands of our ancestors, or by the sin of the first human against the fruit of the tree, be returned and included in the majestic might of the Tree of Life.

The three coals of Shvat:

Hai Gaon, a 9th cent. Sage, relates the following tradition about Shvat:

In the month of Shvat, God throws down three burning coals to warm the earth. On the seventh of Shevat the first coal falls, to warm the air. On the fourteenth of the month the second falls, to warm the water in the trees. On that day the Arabs say: Today water has entered the trees. On the twenty-third of Shevat, the third coal is thrown, to warm the soil.

In Hebrew, the word for sap is *saraf*, which means fire. Shevat is a time of warming the world, and Tu B'Shevat is a day to welcome and honor the sap—the water in the trees that allows life to return. Tu B'Shevat represents the rising life force as the year moves toward spring—this day is a celebration of the inner fire that waits to burst into air.

—Rabbi Jill Hammer, TelShemesh.org

I said to the almond tree...

I said to the almond tree, "Sister, speak to me of God,"
and the almond tree blossomed.

—attributed to N. Kazantzakis

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.

By eating and drinking with *kavanah* — making our consumption an act of deep
appreciation for, and connection with, the natural world — we help to heal the world
from its forgetfulness.

A teaching about the tree of life

The kabbalists refer to the extension of the worlds as a tree. This tree is the Tree of Life.
For us, the Tree of Life also means the branches of the evolutionary tree, another kind
of extension of the worlds, which connects every living thing and makes all species our
relatives. We know something else the Kabbalists didn't know: the most important fruit
we get from trees is the oxygen they breathe out when they take in CO₂.

—Rabbi David Seidenberg, NeoHasid.org

עולם העשייה

Olam Ha'Asiyah – The World of Action

We live in the world of *assiyah*,
action and physicality.

This is the tangible world
of flesh, stone, wood.

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

We live in the world of *assiyah*. This is the world of tangible physicality. Each of the Four Worlds is associated with a season and an element; this world is associated with Winter and with earth. In winter the ground is frozen, but we know it contains the life of the spirit below. The white wine or juice we drink symbolizes winter's pale light and white snow.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri 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 *assiyah* likewise has a protective 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. 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 studying Torah: the Torah of our holy texts, and also the Torah of the outside 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.

As we eat these fruits representing *assiyah*, may we find healing in our physical lives: in our relationships with our bodies, in our strength, in all matters physical and practical, in our environment.

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

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

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

Teachings 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.

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

Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song
and bringing forth a secret
of the divine mystery
of the creation.

—Rav Kook

עולם היצירה

Olam HaYetzira — The World of Formation

We live in the world of *yetzira*:
change, emotion, transformation.

In this world we turn clay into bricks,
iron into plows, words into poetry.

In this sphere we celebrate
creative power: both ours, and God's.

The world of *yetzira* is the world of emotions and heart. In this realm we celebrate change and creativity, flux and flow. This world is associated with the season of Spring and the element of water.

To symbolize this world, 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:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

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

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

The world of *yetzira* is connected with springtime. 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 *assiyah*, 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 *yetzirah*, may our hearts be open to the feelings and needs of ourselves and others, allowing the warmth of our care to extend to the whole the world. May we find healing in the realm of emotions; may we find healing in our hearts.

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

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

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

A teaching from another tradition

Have a look at these great blessed trees, who live only for the welfare of others, themselves facing the severity of stormy winds, heavy showers, heat and snow, all the while protecting us from them. The birth of trees is the most blessed in the world, as they contribute unreservedly to the well-being of all creatures. Just as no needy person ever returns disappointed from the house of a benevolent individual, similarly do these trees do for those who approach them for shelter. All of their many parts - leaves, flowers, fruits, shadow, roots, bark, wood and fragrance, are useful to others... A tree does not withdraw its cooling shade even from the one who has come to cut it.

—Bhagavata Purana 10.22.32-35

A blessing for the trees

Blessings to the renewal of all living things. Blessings to the trees that provide us with clean air, shelter, food, and resources to live. Here's to the dawning of spring and resurgence of life. Blessed be the earth — glorious in its creation and its creator.

—*Kohenet* Carly Lesser, www.peelapom.com

עולם הבריאה

Olam HaBriyah — The World of Creation

We live in the world of *Briyah*:
air, thought, contemplation.

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.”

The world of *briyah* is the ethereal realm of thought; it is associated with the season of Summer and the element of air.

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 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:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri 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. In our deepest relationships, may we be 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 Torah the fig symbolizes an era of peace and security. 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 encountered an old man who was planting a tiny sapling. 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.”

As we eat the fruits representing *briyah*, may we find healing in our intellectual lives: in our minds, in our thoughts, in the heat of passionate argument and the light of brilliant insight.

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

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

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'atzilut – The World of Essence

We live in the world of *atzilut*,
essence, divine emanation.

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

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

The world of *atzilut* is the world of essence and spirit. This world is associated with the season of Fall and the element of fire. This is the world of that which is intangible.

To represent *atzilut*, we drink deep red wine or juice. The pure red liquid 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 surrounds us.

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

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

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

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

In the world of *atzilut* 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.

The Four Worlds (Action, Emotion, Thought, and Spirit) are each nested inside each of the others. We live in all four realms at once. Sometimes we have hard shells, like the nuts of *assiyah*. Sometimes we have a rock inside us, like the stone fruits of *yetzirah*. Sometimes we are soft all the way through, like the fruits of *briyah*. And sometimes we are so connected with the Holy One of Blessing that we melt beyond our bodies altogether, living in *atzilut*. May we find blessing in each of these four ways of being, each of these four seasons, each of these four worlds.

TASTE AND SEE

Psalms 34, verse 8: "Taste and see that God is good."

We make our way into the woods
at the edge of our land, trees webbed
with plastic tubing, clear
and pale green against the snow.

Down to the beaver dam, pond
punctuated with cattails,
galvanized tin bright
against grizzled trunks.

Dip a finger beneath the living spigot.
At every sugar shack across these hills
clouds of fragrant steam billow.
And after long boiling, this amber...

Where I grew up, the air is soft
already, begonias thinking
about blooming. Here, this
is what rises, hidden and sweet.

—Rabbi Rachel Barenblat



image by Mohamed Ibrahim.

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

A Prayer of Reb Nachman of Bratzlav:

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.

Adamah v'shamayim (Earth and Heavens)

*Adama Veshamayim,
Chom Ha'esh,
Tzlil hamayim*

Love the earth, love the sky
Heat of fire,
Drop of water

*Ani margish zot begufi,
beruchi, benishmati.*

I can feel it in my body
In my spirit, and in my soul

*Heya, heya, heya, heya
heyah, heyah, heyah, ho (2x)*

Heya, heyah, heyah, heyah
heyah, heyah, heyah, ho (2x)

*Ani margish zot begufi,
beruchi, benishmati.*

I can feel it in my body
In my spirit, and in my soul

*(Original chant by Tony Wrench; adapted at the Rainbow Gathering;
translated into Hebrew by Shimon Lev Tahor.)*

סעודה The Festive Meal

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

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצָוָנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kiddeshanu bemitzvotav
vetzivanu 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.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

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!

Grace After Meals

וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ / V'achalta, v'savata, u'verachta

chorus: וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ (v'achalta, v'savata, u'verachta)

We ate when we were hungry, and now we're satisfied
We thank the Source of Blessing, for all that S/He provides.

Hunger is a yearning, in body and soul
Earth, air, fire, water, and Spirit makes us whole.

Giving and receiving, we open up our hands
From seed time to harvest, we're partners with the land.

We share in a vision of wholeness and release
Where every child is nourished, and we all live in peace (Amen!)

(—Hannah Tiferet Siegel)