

**OUR TEMPLE SINAI DC KALLAH TU B'SHEVAT SEDER
CELEBRATING THE 15th OF SHEVAT 5779
THE NEW YEAR FOR TREES**



TU B'SHEVAT—CELEBRATING NATURE'S RENEWAL OF LIFE



We join together once again for our Tu B'Shevat seder, to celebrate the New Year for trees. Tu B'Shevat, the 15th of the month of Shevat, occurs on January 21st this year. It is the time in Israel when budding fruit enters a new year of life and the first bulbs of spring are beginning to bloom. One of the earliest bloomers is the almond tree, and children in Israel look for that beautiful sight around Tu B'Shevat.

The almond tree is growing, a golden sun is glowing;
The birds sing out in joyous glee from every roof and every tree.
Tu B'Shvat is here, hail the trees' New Year.

Let's make the land a garden, with water from the Jordan;
And our land will flow once more with milk and honey, as of yore.
Tu B'Shvat is here, hail the trees' New Year.

Here, we are in the thick of winter, with trees bare and snow still in the offing. But wherever they are, trees are able to sense the length and warmth of the days ahead, and will bloom when the time is right for healthy fruit formation. So we can celebrate right now and look forward to nature's renewal of life that has begun in Israel and will move inexorably to our neighborhoods in the coming months.

We also wish for renewal of ourselves in body and spirit when cold and dark winter turns to warming and brightening spring. Let us hope that whatever troubles any of us has had since Tu B'Shevat last year, whether in our physical or emotional health, or in any other challenges we have had to face, will give way to happiness and serenity in this new year.

HOW SHALL WE HONOR THE NEW YEAR OF TREES?



We appreciate the bounty of trees by enjoying the fruits that will be central to our seder tonight.

We marvel at the spectacular mechanisms of nature by which the blossoming of that bounty is preserved for us year to year, generation to generation.

We remember that the Torah tells us that before man and woman were created, “The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it,” and indeed, science confirms that plants and trees flourished on earth before the arrival of humans.

Let us recite together from Ecclesiastes the call for us to protect the environment that we need to nourish all living things on earth:

In the hour when the Holy one created the first person, God showed his creation the trees in the Garden of Eden and said: "See My works, how fine they are; now all that I have created, I created for your benefit. Think upon this and do not corrupt and destroy My world. For if you destroy it, there is no one to restore it after you."

CELEBRATING REVIVAL IN ISRAEL

Trees for Israel



כ' תמוז אל הארץ ונטעתם (ויקרא י"ט ב')
"When you shall come to the land you shall plant trees." – Leviticus 19:23

For many Jews, Tu B'Shevat symbolizes the revival and redemption of the land of Israel and our commitment to the State of Israel.

When we pray, we face toward Jerusalem. During the Passover seder, we call out: "Next year in Jerusalem." We prayed for rain in Israel and celebrated its harvest festivals. We mourned its destruction and wept over its devastation, and hoped for fulfillment of the biblical promise that we read together from the Book of Amos:

And I will restore my people Israel and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine, they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit.

At a time when Jews feel challenged and often in conflict even among ourselves by the political and social events taking place in and outside of Israel, we take this evening to celebrate the renewal of tree and plant life there. We have a bond with the State of Israel and the ideal of "making the desert bloom," and it is our continuing wish that all its inhabitants will soon be able to enjoy its fruits in peace, security, and well-being.

THE BEAUTY AND VALUE OF TREES



For Reb Nachman, a leading Hasidic teacher around the turn of the 19th century, the outdoors was the ideal place to speak to God:

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.

Henry David Thoreau, of Walden Pond fame, likewise said:

I frequently tramped eight or ten miles through the deepest
snow to keep an appointment with a beech-tree, or a yellow
birch, or an old acquaintance among the pines.

And writer-lecturer Joseph Campbell exclaimed that:

God is the experience of looking at a tree and saying, “Ah!”

THE TU B'SHEVAT SEDER

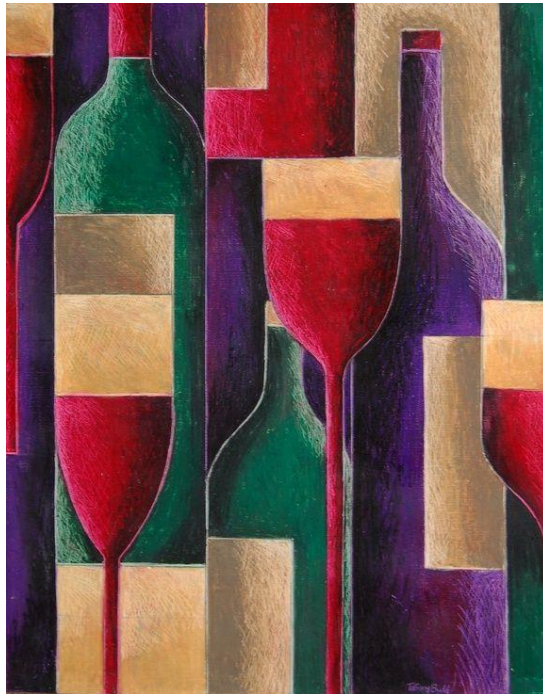


The custom of holding a celebratory meal loosely patterned after the Passover seder began with the Kabbalists of the 16th century. They used the tree as a metaphor to understand God's relationship to the spiritual and physical worlds. For us, the seder is a beautiful, shared reminder of the natural world around us, a world that we pray will always be abundant in trees, the fruits of trees, and the fruit of the vine.

There is no formal haggadah for the Tu B'Shevat seder. We can create our own and contemplate the messages of the festival in our own way. However, there is a common feature of Tu B'Shevat seders around the world: four segments during each of which we drink a cup of wine and enjoy different types fruits.

There are different interpretations of the four segments of the seder. But one, where each segment corresponds to a season, starting with winter, especially fits our ritual of modifying the wine for each segment, beginning with white and ending with red.

THE FOUR CUPS OF WINE



On this way-station
Between the bleak white winter when the trees' sap begins to rise
And the colorful flowers of the warm seasons when fruits ripen,
We drink four cups of wine,
Each redder than the one before,
Each showing that the land becomes warmer,
Each one showing that colors of the fruits
Deepen as they ripen,
Each one in praise of God,
Who renews the fruit of trees each year.



THE FIRST CUP OF WINE

The first cup of wine is composed entirely of white wine, symbolizing the winter, our current season.

We raise our cups and recite the blessing over the wine together:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed art thou, Adonai, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

As we start our seder, let us give thanks for having seen many previous seasons and for the good in life with which we have been blessed.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, shechchiyanu, v'keeyamanu, v'hegeyanu, lazman hazeh.

Blessed art thou, Adonai, Ruler of the universe, who has kept us in life and sustained us and enabled us to reach this season.

THE FIRST FRUIT



In ancient days, there was a custom of planting a cedar tree for a baby boy and a cypress tree for a baby girl. As the children grew, they tended the trees, and the trees grew along with the children. When they married, they used the wood for the poles in their chuppah. This carried the tradition of loving trees from generation to generation.

Now we will have our first fruit. The first fruit is hard on the outside and soft on the inside, such as walnuts, coconuts, or almonds. The hard shell symbolizes the protection that the earth gives us so that we may be nourished and strengthened by the food it provides.

“The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Let us now say the prayer for fruit:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei p’ri h-etz.

Blessed art thou, Adonai, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

ENJOY THE FIRST FRUIT

IN PRAISE OF TREE NUTS



Trees give nuts as they grow and grow,
And here's some facts we all should know.

The pecan, for example, has no mates;
Its tree is the only one native to the States.

Walnuts are tops for fatty acids they contain;
Chemicals so useful in the working of the brain,

Hazelnuts are rich in vitamins B and E;
Compounds that are crucial for our health, you see.

Those wonderful almonds make us all so pleased,
'Cause they're full of fight against heart disease.

And when they're chocolate covered, that's a real treat,
Nutritious and delicious – that's a combo you can't beat!

So let's give the tree nuts a song of praise;
Nuts – *eh-goh-zeem* – are stars on Tu B'Shvat days!



THE SECOND CUP OF WINE

The second cup of wine is mostly white, with a little red mixed in, to symbolize the passing of winter into spring. White wine represents nature in potential. Red wine represents nature in full bloom. Tonight, we begin to leave the winter behind and move into a period of renewal and life. Let us now have our second cup of wine.

THE SECOND FRUIT

Tu B'Shevat is not just about today, but also the future: the trees that will soon bloom, the fruit they will give thereafter, the planet we try to keep healthy so that it will always bring forth trees, blossoms and fruit.

In a Midrash, we find the following story:

The Holy one said to Israel, "Even though you will find the land full of goodness, don't say, 'We will sit and not plant.' Rather be careful to plant trees. Just as you found trees which others had planted, so you should plant for your children.

So it was that, according to another story:

One day, a boy saw an old man planting a carob tree. The boy knew that the old man would not live to see the fruits of his labor. He asked the man: "Why do you bother to plant a tree if you will never see its fruits?" The man answered: "I will not see this tree full grown, but my children will and their children will. I plant this tree for them."

Now we will have our second fruit. The second fruit is soft with a pit in the center, such as olives, dates, peaches or apricots. Perhaps this fruit can symbolize the good person we strive to be: tough and strong on the inside to meet the challenges of life, while on the outside, congenial, helpful, and a delight to others.

ENJOY THE SECOND FRUIT

THE THIRD CUP OF WINE

The third cup of wine is mostly red, with a little white mixed in, to symbolize the continuing change of seasons from spring to summer. The earth has warmed, trees have bloomed, and delicious fruits have become available. We will now have our third cup of wine.

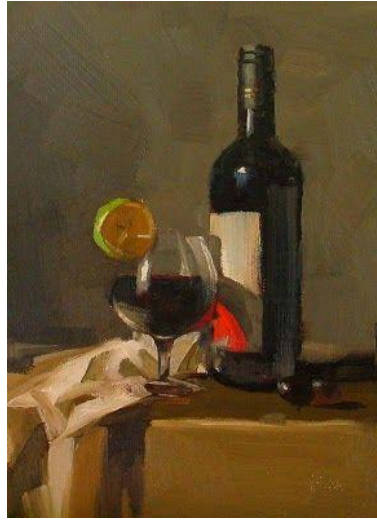
THE THIRD FRUIT



The third fruit is soft throughout and is completely edible, such as figs, grapes and raisins. Things are coming close to their full potential. Even the seeds are now edible. It is said that just as every part of these fruits is good to eat, we are reminded that every part of the Torah is good to study and learn from.

ENJOY THE THIRD FRUIT AND DINNER

THE FOURTH CUP OF WINE



The fourth cup of wine is all red; our seasons have come to completion. Summer is transforming to fall, with the trees in full bloom and filled with fruit, and the air fresh and fragrant, like the aroma of the red wine.

THE FOURTH FRUIT



We will now eat our fourth and last fruit. The fourth fruit has a tough skin on the outside but sweet fruit within, such mangos, bananas, or avocados. It symbolizes the mystery of the world. We are constantly seeking to uncover its secrets and continually nourished by its fruits.

CONCLUSION OF THE SEDER

And so we come to the end of the Tu B'Shevat seder. We have shared a celebration that has made us aware anew of the beauty and nourishment we can find all around us and that has reminded us of the promise of the coming seasons. We hope and pray that all of us, and those we love, will flourish with happiness and good health in this new year of trees!

