

tu b shevat - 6202 1"6

THE NEW YEAR FOR THE TREES

On this day we celebrate a New Year for the Trees, rejoicing in the fruit of the tree and the fruit of the vine, celebrating the splendid, abundant gifts of the natural world which give our senses delight and our bodies life. Sustaining rains are at the peak of their power and the world responds, brimming buds of fragrant life. Tu B'Shevat marks the beginning of spring in Israel. For Jews outside of Israel, Tu B'shevat is a celebration of the renewal of vision and awareness, a celebration of connections and connectedness--to our own inner-selves, to the social world of human beings, and to the natural world and its Source.

According to the Talmud, there are four New Years in the Jewish Calendar: The first of Nissan is the New Year for kings and for Festivals; the first of Elul is the New Year for the tithe of animals. Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Shimon say that the first of Tishrei is the New Year for years and for the fallow year and for the Jubilee Year, for the planting and for the vegetables...Rabbi Hillel says that the fifteenth of Shevat shall be the New Year for the tree. (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1)

Four Worlds and Four Fruits

The structure of the Seder corresponds to the four "worlds"--levels, realms, or spheres through which, the Kabbalists teach, the life-giving flow of the Divine is channeled and filtered. All fruits are divided into categories representing the first three worlds. The fourth world, *Atzilut*, has no representative fruits because it is pure spirit and cannot be represented physically. The three "lower" worlds are ordered according to how close they are to the world of pure spirit. The further away they are, the more protection is needed for the holiness within. The edible part of each fruit--the flesh or the meat--represents the holiness while the inedible portion--the shell, skin or pit--represents protection.

Four Cups of Wine

Throughout the seder, we drink four cups of wine. Each cup represents a different aspect of the tree, from her first seedling, to her growth, to our relationship with her, to her full glory. As the seder progresses, we will also watch the changing color of the wine in each of the four cups become richer with the changing of the seasons as we go from the whiteness and emptiness of Winter, through Spring and Summer to the richness in the reds of the Autumn.

Fifteen Kinds of Fruit

Our wise Rabbis said: "It is a good custom to eat a lot of fruit on this day, and to sing songs of praise for them." Because Tu B'Shevat falls on the fifteenth day of the month, tradition dictates that we eat fifteen different kinds of fruit, five from each of the three categories, to fulfill our obligation to taste the fruits of the earth!

On Blessing and Eating

A most important discipline of Judaism involves the blessing. When a blessing is recited before eating, then the act itself becomes a spiritual undertaking. Through the blessing, the act of eating becomes a contemplative exercise: Just as one can contemplate a flower or a melody, one can contemplate the act of eating. One opens one's mind completely to the experience of chewing the food and becomes fully aware of its taste and texture. One then eats very slowly, aware of every nuance of taste.

This is not just *noshing!* We see the abundance of figs and oranges on the table, we hear the cracking of walnuts, we smell the unique fragrance of fresh strawberries, and taste all other varieties of fruits before us. This meditation on food is the central ritual of the Tu B'Shevat seder. Each berry and nut is a proverbial "grain of sand" through which we can learn to know the world, and through knowing it, we can act rightly in it. - Aryeh Kaplan

Charting the Tu B' shevat Seder

WORLD	IDEA	ELEMENT	SEASON	FRUIT	WINE
assiyah	Action	earth	winter	hard outside, soft inside	all white
yetzirah	Emotion	water	spring	soft outside, hard inside	1/2 white, 1/2 red
briyah	Thought	Air	summer	all soft	1/4 white, 3/4 red
atzilut	Spirit	Fire	fall	none	all red with a drop white

assiyah - עשייה

THE WORLD OF ACTION

Before we can begin to delve into the complexity of our world, and the individual details that make it work, we take a step back and acknowledge the singular magnificence of the act of creation. We read in Genesis: "And God saw all that was done, and found it very good." So we say a blessing now for the beauty of the continual act of creation in our world.

We say together:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
oseh ma'asei v'reisheet.

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם עושה
מעשה בראשית.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, who continually does the work of creation.

First Cup of Wine

Our first cup of wine is pure white like the winter. It represents the Beginning, the time when Creation began with the separation of light from darkness. The seedling of the tree is like this first light. It is a spark of Divine Creation which contains within it the potential to become a tree.

We each fill a cup with white wine, say the blessing together, and then *drink only half* of the wine in the cup:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן
borei p'ri hagafen.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

First Fruit

Assiyah, the lowest world, is the realm of the concrete, the physical. At this level, the need is greatest for protection, for shields and defenses. It is risky, at this level, to let our defenses down, to open up, to peel off protective shells. Being furthest away from perfection, this world is represented by fruits or nuts with an inedible outer shell and an edible inner core: pineapple, coconut, orange, pomello, banana, walnut, pecan, grapefruit, starfruit, pinenut, pomegranate, papaya, brazil nut, pistachio, or almond.

We each find a fruit from the first category, remove the outer shell, say the blessing together, and then eat it:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ
pri ha'eitz.

Praised be our Eternal God, Ruler of the universe: who creates the fruit of the tree

New Fruit for this Season

After eating a new fruit that we are eating for the first time this season, or for the first time ever, it is customary to say a Shehecheyanu, a prayer for special occasions:

If the fruit you just ate was one you had already tasted this season,
find another one that is new for you and we say together:

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שְׁהַחֲיֵנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ
shehecheyanu v'kimanu v'higianu laz'man hazeh. וְהַגִּיעֵנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Praised be You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the universe,
Who has kept us in life, sustained us and permitted us to reach this season.*

Hashkedi yah Porachat

Once, when Rav Kook was walking in the fields, lost deep in thought, the young student with him absentmindedly plucked a leaf off of a branch. Rav Kook was visibly shaken by this act and, turning to his companion, he said gently, "Believe me when I tell you that I never simply pluck a leaf or a blade of grass or any living thing unless I have to. Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song and breathing forth a secret of divine mystery of the creation."

we sing together:

Hash'keidiah porachat, v'shemesh paz zorachat,
Tziporim meirosh kol gag, M'vas'rot et bo hechag.
Tu B'shevat higia chag ha'ilanot. (2x)

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'Shevat is here, the Jewish Arbor Day. Hail the trees: New Year, Happy Holiday!

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'Shevat is here, the Jewish Arbor Day. Hail the trees: New Year, Happy Holiday!

yetzirah - יצירה

THE WORLD OF FORMATION

Second Cup of Wine

Our second cup of wine consists partly of white light - the spark of Divine holiness. Yet, we already see the red flame of life which has begun to burn within it. The flame symbolizes the tree's growth as she is nourished. Beginning as a small sapling, she starts to gain her physical and spiritual Strength from the four basic elements: earth, water, air and fire. Her small trunk reaches toward the sun, her roots soak up water from the ground, her tiny leaves breathe in air, and the fire of life swells within her.

We add red wine to the white wine that is already in our cups, so that the cup is again full, say the blessing together, and then *again drink only half* of the wine in the cup:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן
borei p'ri hagafen.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Second Fruit

Yetzira has enough God-energy to surround its protective parts with holiness, but still needs some protection on the inside, at the heart of the fruit. It is a realm of physicality, but even more, of inwardness, of a sense of feeling. The need for protection and reinforcement is an inner matter of the core, of the heart. It is represented by fruits with edible outer flesh and pithy, inedible cores: olive, date, cherry, loquat, peach, apricot, jujub, persimmon, avocado, plum, or hackberry.

We each find a fruit from the second category, remove the pit or core, say the blessing together, and then eat it:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ
borei p'ri ha'eitz.

Praised be our Eternal God, Ruler of the universe: who creates the fruit of the tree

Tzadi k Katamar

We read in the Psalms: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." But why are the righteous likened to a palm and to a cedar? Because you find it true of the majority of trees that, even after they are cut down, a sprout may be taken from them and planted in another place, and they begin to grow again. But when the palm

and the cedar are cut down, who can make others grow up in their stead except after many years and much labor? So, too, when a righteous man perishes from the world, who can make another stand up in his stead except after many years? - *Midrash*

Tzadik katamar yifrach, ka'erez bal'vanon yis'geh.

צדיק כַּתָּמַר יִפְרַח כְּאַרְזֵי בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; they will grow like cedar in Lebanon. (Psalm 92:13)

b riyah - בריאה

THE WORLD OF CREATION

Thi rd Cup

This cup of wine is partly white and mostly red. The tree has rooted itself firmly in the earth, grown into its full being, and is blooming. The shade, wood, herbs and flowers that are her simple and modest gifts to the earth and humankind allow us to now see her and embrace her as Provider.

We each add more red wine to the mixture of wine that is already in our cup, so that the cup is again full, say the blessing together, and then *drink all of the wine in the cup except for a small drop:*

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן
borei p'ri hagafen.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Thi rd Fru i t

B'riyah, being closest to pure spirit of the three lower worlds, is represented by any fruits which are edible throughout. Here no protective shells, neither internal nor external are needed. The symbolic fruits may be eaten entirely and include: strawberry, grape, raisin, fig, raspberry, blueberry, cranberry, carob, apple, pear, kiwi, or quince.

We each find a fruit from the third category, say the blessing together, and then eat it:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ
borei p'ri ha'eitz.

Praised be our Eternal God, Ruler of the universe: who creates the fruit of the tree

Entering the Garden of Eden

In the Garden of Eden,
In every one of its recesses,
There are eighty myriad species of trees,
The least of which is more beautiful
Than all varieties of spice trees.

Sixty myriads of ministering angels sing sweetly in each recess of the Garden.
The tree of life is in the center, and its foliage spreads over the entire Garden of Eden.
The tree has five hundred thousand kinds of fruit, each differing in taste;
The appearance of one fruit is not like the appearance of another,
And the fragrance of one is not like the fragrance of another.

Clouds of glory hover above the tree,
And from the four points of the compass breezes blow it,
So that its fragrance is wafted from world's end to world's end.

- Midrash from Yalkut Shimoni

atzilut - אצלול

THE WORLD OF EMANATION

Fourth Cup

This cup is the highest level of Creation. We see the tree all aflame with life, so much so that the red flame completely overpowers the white light which was its beginning. Here is the tree in her full glory. All aspects of growth and life are contained within her, and her divine spark is completely concealed. This deep red wine is the citrus whose fruits are now ripe, the etrog whose fragrance we enjoy in the fall, and the melon whose fruit is full of flavor in the summer. The cup of red wine symbolizes the Source of our Strength, the source of our Connection with the Earth. Without the fruits of the Earth which sustain us, we wouldn't have the strength to continue our earthly journey. We praise God for 'binding' us with an earth, within which we can glimpse God's holiness and which we can use as a medium to reconnect ourselves with God's spirit.

We fill our cups once again with red wine, adding to the small drop at the bottom that still contains some white, say the blessing together, and then drink as much as we want, but saving at least a little for Elijah:

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

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Fourth Fruit

And so we arrive at the realm of Atzilut, that of divine emanation. *Olam ha'atzilut* is a realm which embodies all of the qualities of the Divine Presence. Therefore, we cannot conceive of this sphere with our five senses and we have no food with which to represent it. In the realm of Atzilut, we have all of the tools with which to bring the world to come, however we must first make sense of the chaos around us by opening ourselves to "knowing". In an attempt to do this and to gain an understanding of the divine implications of this realm, we do as our ancestors did and look to the tree as a symbol of life -- a life without shells, a life of replenishing the earth, and a life of balance in which there is an inherent understanding of the place of both humans and nature.

Planting our Own Seeds

When a tree that bears fruit is cut down, its moan goes from one end of the world

to the other, yet no sound is heard. - *Midrash from Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*

Rabbi Yohanan said: One day, Honi the Circle Maker was walking on the road, and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, "How long will it take this tree to bear fruit?" The man replied, "Seventy years." He asked, "Are you quite sure you will live another seventy years to eat its fruit?" The man replied, "I myself found fully grown carob trees in the world; as my forebears planted for me, so am I planting for my children." - *Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit*

We each fill a cup with some soil, bore a small hole in the soil, add a few seeds, cover the hole and then add some water.

tikvah - תקווה

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

We turn our thoughts now to the Elijah the Prophet, and Miriam the Prophetess. Elijah is a guest at the Passover seder, and symbolizes our hope for a future Messianic age, when peace will prevail on earth. For Elijah we offer a full glass of wine, a gesture of hospitality for whomever may enter, proving that we are truly ready to welcome the stranger into our home. For it is said that only when everyone in this world treats everyone else as a partner in the task of redemption will we be truly ready to enter into the world to come. We use water to honor Miriam, who sang and danced at the parting of the Red Sea and who is associated with water in the desert. Water symbolizes the life force and our responsibility to replenish the earth.

We pass around a two cups, one for Elijah's wine and one for Miriam's water, and each person contributes a drop from their glass until they are full, as we sing together:

Eilياهو hanavi, Eilياهو hatishbi, Eilياهو, Eilياهو,
Eilياهو hagiladi. Bim'heira v'yameinu, yavo eileinu;
im mashiach ben David, im mashiach ben David.

אֱלִיָּהוּ הַנְּבִיא אֱלִיָּהוּ הַתִּשְׁבִּי
אֱלִיָּהוּ אֱלִיָּהוּ הַגִּלְעָדִי
בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ יָבוֹא אֱלֵינוּ
עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד
עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד

*Elijah the prophet, Elijah the Tishbite. Elijah of Gilead.
Soon, in our days, Elijah will come with the Messiah, the son of David.*

Ushavtem mayim b'sason mimanei ha-y'shuah. (2x)
Mayim mayim, mayim mayim, hoi mayim b'sason. (2x)
Hey, hey, hey, hey!
Mayim mayim, mayim mayim, mayim mayim b'sason. (2x)

וּשְׁאַבְתֶּם מַיִם בְּשִׂשׂוֹן מִמַּעַיְנֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה
מַיִם מַיִם מַיִם מַיִם הוּי מַיִם בְּשִׂשׂוֹן
מַיִם מַיִם מַיִם מַיִם מַיִם בְּשִׂשׂוֹן

And you shall draw forth water in gladness from the wells of salvation.

Parable of Rabbi Isaac

KESHER: BERKELEY'S REFORM CHAVURAH - TU B'SHEVAT SEDER

Rabbi Isaac once told the following parable: A man was walking in the desert hungry, thirsty, and exhausted with heat. He chanced to find a tree whose fruit was sweet, whose shadow was pleasant, and which had a brook flowing at its base. He ate the fruit, drank the water, and rested in the shade. When he rose to leave, he said to the tree, "Oh tree, how can I bless you? If I were to say: 'May your fruit be sweet'--see it is already sweet. Were I to say: 'May your shade be pleasant'--it is already pleasant. And were I to say: 'May there be a brook at your feet'--the brook is already there. My blessing to you therefore will be, 'May all your saplings be like you.'" (Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit)

has udah - הסודא

THE MEAL IS SERVED

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai used to say: "If you happen to be standing with a sapling in your hand and someone says to you, 'Behold the Messiah has come!' you should first plant the tree and then go out to greet the Messiah." -- Avot de Rabbi Natan

we say the blessing over the food together, and then the meal is served!

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam,
hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם
מן הארץ

Praised be our Eternal God, Ruler of the universe: who brings forth the bread from the earth.

next year in jerusalem!

לשנה הבאה בירושלים!