

# Tu B'shvat Seder

11 Shvat 5761 - February 4, 2001

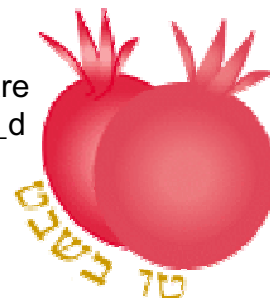
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*This service borrowed greatly from other Haggadot and I am very appreciative of the work other authors have done which made this MOSAIC Haggadah possible and give them full credit for their words and enlightenment - the sources used are mentioned on the last page.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...

Current Jewish thought has given us a preference for history over nature. We are taught about a Judaism built upon the G\_d of Abraham, Issac and Jacob, and how G\_d freed us from bondage in Egypt and although these are mighty pillars upon which to stand, the teachings may cast aside as less important our responsibilities and our role as CARETAKERS for the earth and our environment.



This was probably done historically, because philosophers felt it important to distance Jewish thought from the world of paganism which believed in Gods of sun, rain, earth, rivers and mountains. But in doing so, contemporary Judaism has dulled our sensitivity to the awe-inspiring power of nature. Unfortunately, most of our Jewish teachings are basically indifferent and unresponsive to the supreme challenge of our age: man's degradation of the environment. **Our planet is under siege and we as Jews are transfixed in silence<sup>1</sup>.**

I am very thankful that all of you have come today to hike in this beautiful forest and to observe Tu B'shvat, the birthday of the trees, and to celebrate the oneness of our belief in Judaism, our love for all of G\_d's gifts, and our precious role as caretakers of the environment.

As the Passover Seder is our historical and spiritual connection with our redemption from slavery in Egypt and our birth as a Free people, the Tu B'Shvat Seder is a celebration of our spiritual and mystical connection with the Laws of the Torah regarding the cycles and seasons of nature.

Judaism is a religious tapestry designed to sharpen our eye for the divine, in nature as well as in history, we just need to examine it with an open mind. The Bible confronts us with a vision of responsibility: we are not free to act indifferently or selfishly. Our mission is to tend to this cosmic oasis, to perpetuate an islet of consciousness in a seemingly mindless universe<sup>2</sup>.

**According to Jewish tradition, the land is not ours do to with as we please; we must be responsible stewards of both the land we inhabit and its produce.**

**What is Tu B'Shvat?<sup>3,4</sup>**

Before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the *tithe*, ten percent of all produce was set aside for the support of the priestly class and the poor. Tu B'Shvat (which means "the 15th of the month of Shvat") marks the beginning of a new fiscal year for *tithing*. Its similar to the beginning of the "tax year." The word for the current month, "*shvat*" is related to the Hebrew word for a staff or rod. A staff can be used as a symbol of power, or as a cane to lean on. It serves a master. This is an underlying theme of this month<sup>5</sup>.

In the 16th century, the Kabbalists of Tzfat (Safed, Israel) compiled a Tu B'Shvat "Seder," somewhat similar to the seder for Passover. It involves enjoying the fruits of the trees, particularly those native to the Land of Israel, and discusses philosophical and Kabbalistic concepts associated with the day. Among other things, the seder is a great way to appreciate nature's bounty that we so often take for granted, and to develop a good and generous eye for the world around us.

In recent decades, the stakes have become much higher. Tu Bishvat calls upon us to cry out against the enormity of destruction and degradation being inflicted upon G\_d's world. This degradation includes depletion of our protective ozone layer, global warming, massive deforestation, the extinction of species, poisonous deposits of toxic chemicals and nuclear wastes, and exponential population growth. We are also deeply concerned that the poor suffer disproportionately from environmental degradation.

The Tu B'Shvat Seder, like the Passover seder, follows a specific order. The word seder actually means "ORDER". Our seder is divided into four parts, representing the four worlds of the Kabbalist mystics who first composed it.

### **Blessings (B'rachot):**

In order to appreciate properly the **special** in the seemingly '**ordinary**' around us, Judaism instructs that we reflect on almost every action we take. It is taught that a person who eats something without first saying a blessing is stealing sacred property (B'rachot 35a)

As we go through the seder I hope that all of you will join me in saying a blessing in Hebrew or English before we taste each cup of juice or wine and each fruit or nut.

As you say each blessing, perhaps close your eyes and meditate, if only for a few brief seconds about the wonder of what you are tasting and the many meanings that it can have for you.

## **THE SEDER BEGINS<sup>6</sup>**

Now comes the part we've been waiting for: drinking wine and enjoying other delicacies! Wheat and barley are the first two of the seven species connected to the greatness of the Land of Israel, as it says: "*A land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olives and honey*" (Deut. 8:8).

***Take one of each type of cracker out of your plastic bag. The light-colored crackers are BARLEY & WHEAT and the darker colored crackers are WHEAT only.***

Before saying the blessing and eating the crackers, let us first pause and reflect on our good fortune. G\_d has given us innumerable blessings, enabling us to enjoy this food. G\_d could easily have arranged for humans to be nourished by photosynthesis like plants, or by eating bland oatmeal, or by taking pills. Instead, G\_d created a seemingly endless variety of appetizing and nourishing foods for us to enjoy. He gave us taste buds, and many miraculous organs with which to eat, digest and savor the foods.

*A blessing is a "thank-you note" to our Creator. The sages say: "Who is the wealthy person? The one who is happy with what he has." The more we appreciate our gifts, the more sincere is our thanks, and the more is our pleasure.*

**First you will eat the BARLEY cracker and then the WHEAT cracker. Eat BARLEY, the lighter cracker first, because in Israel, the Barley crop ripens before Wheat. Let us all say together, Blessing #5 and eat one of each type of cracker.**

**THE STRUCTURE OF THE SEDER:** We will be drinking four cups of wine (or grape juice) in conjunction with different categories of nuts & fruits. Each pair corresponds to each of the four *Kabbalistic* spiritual realms (from lowest to highest): **action** ('asiah'); **formation** ('yetzirah'); **creation** ('briah'), and **emanation** of pure Godliness ('atzilut'.) Each level becomes more spiritual and connected to the Creator. As we eat, we elevate the fruits - and ourselves - through the various levels, rising higher and higher.

## **THE FIRST WORLD: OLAM HA-ASSIYAH - THE WORLD OF ACTION**

Assiyah - the first world, is the world of action. Here we assemble and shape artifacts without changing the form of G\_d's raw material. It is the physical world represented by earth and the season of Winter. In the world of Assiyah, we drink white wine and eat fruits with hard outer shells and soft insides.

The white wine we drink for this world symbolizes the sleep that descends upon nature when the Winter sun's rays begin to weaken. In winter we layer ourselves in clothing, blanketing ourselves from the cold just as the earth covered in snow is insulated. The fruit we will consume also symbolizes the winter season with its protected outside. Removing the hard shells exposes a fleshy vulnerable inside. **The shell which conceals also protects.** In the world of work, of everyday activity, our spiritual insides require protection and nurturing. Special effort is necessary to protect it from indifference, from being forgotten and from unkind influences.

Later in the Seder, when we symbolically crack the shells of the nuts and peel the orange, we will release the divine sparks for *Tikun Olam*, the *Healing of the World*. We will then crack the shells of our own personal preoccupations and our own pains.

**1<sup>st</sup> Cup of wine: You should have in front of you a small glass of white wine or white grape juice with one small drop of red wine or grape juice. Please don't drink or eat yet.**

White wine represents nature in potential; red wine represents nature in full bloom. On this day, we begin to leave the winter behind and move into a period of renewal and life. It is further stated in the *Zohar*<sup>7</sup>: "Wine has two colors - white and red. White is from the right side [of kindness]; red from the left side [of strength and judgment]."

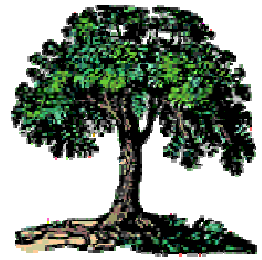
As we progress from white to red, we move from potential to actuality. We are able to appreciate G\_d's judgment as well as His kindness. We see G\_d's design and goodness in the world with increasing clarity.

**May it be your will, Hashem our G\_d, that by virtue of our blessing and eating these fruits we shall enjoy the hidden heavenly roots from which they draw the divine flow of fruiting and blessing. Once again, abundantly fill them with Your glorious flow, nourish and ripen them for an entire year of blessing, good life, and peace. <Amen>**

**Recite with me the first blessing. Blessing #1 on the handout. Now drink the wine.'**

*Meditation:* as we drink the first cup of wine, a white wine, may we feel the sleep of the winter as it refuels our body and soul and prepares us for the lengthening of the days, and the rebirth of nature.

*Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, a Talmudic sage, who lived around 100 CE, said: Anytime our wisdom exceeds our good deeds, to what are we likened? - to a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few; then the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down.... But when our good deeds exceed our wisdom, to what are we likened? - to a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are numerous; even if all the winds of the world were to come and blow against it, they could not budge it from its place....."*



**Please remove from your plastic bag the almonds.**

The almond tree (*Sh'keidiyah*) has special significance for Tu B'shvat. It is the first of the fruit trees to blossom each year in Israel. The word for almond in Hebrew also means to "watch". It is the subject of one of Jeremiah's prophecies: "G\_d said, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" and Jeremiah replied 'I see a branch of an almond (*shakeid*) tree. The Lord said to me, 'You have seen right for I am watchful (*shokeid*) to bring my word to pass." (Jer. 1:11) We can interpret this to mean that we must be watchful and vigilant to G\_d's commandment to serve and protect all creation.

**Please join me in saying blessing #2 and eating some almonds.**

As we eat the fruits and nuts of Assiyah, the physical world of action, may we be blessed with the courage to peel back our own shells and reveal ourselves, to be vulnerable, to grow, and to repair and help heal.

The Talmudic section dealing with agriculture is called "trust in G\_d." When a farmer plants a seed, trust in G\_d gives her the strength to survive the winter. On Tu B'Shvat she begins to see that trust rewarded.

*Meditation:* Similarly, when we plant a seed for personal growth, it requires trust and patience to survive the 'cold,' before we see the fruits of our labor.

**Please remove from your plastic bag the pecans & join in saying blessing #2 and eating pecans.**

***The Branch and the Tree:** One Jew in her relationship to the Jewish people may be likened to a branch growing on a tree. As long as the branch is still attached to the tree, there is hope it may renew its vigor no matter how withered it has become; but, once the living branch falls away, all hope is lost. So it is with a species - if endangered, there is still hope. Once extinct, all hope is lost. Nachmanides said: The Bible does not permit a destructive act that will cause the extinction of a species.*

**Now, Please take in your hand the orange.**

**Oranges:** Just as the ORANGE provides both nourishment and fragrance, so in Israel there are people who provide both wisdom and perform good deeds. Everything consumed at this Seder is symbolic. Take a moment and SMELL the zest of the orange and meditate at how sweet it is to peel back the layer, enjoy the fragrance and eat the fruit.

"Smelling" is considered the most spiritual of senses, since the least "physical matter" is involved. As the Talmud says (Brachot 43b): "Smell is that which the soul benefits and the does body not."

If you haven't eaten an Orange yet this season then please join me in saying a **Sheheckiyanu, blessing#3** which is said when we do something for the first time or eat a fruit that we have not eaten yet this season.

## **THE SECOND WORLD: OLAM HA'YETZIRAH - THE WORLD OF FORMATION**

Yetzirah, the second world, the most vulnerable, is the world of Formation. It is the world in which we cause a transformation of raw materials, such as making bricks from clay. We acknowledge G\_d as creator not only of the physical world but also of our ability to be creative, our capacity to feel, speak, and sing. It is the emotional world represented by water and the season of Spring. In the world of Yetzirah, we drink white wine with a dash of red and eat fruits with soft outsides and hard inner cores.

### **POUR the second cup of wine; white with a dash of red.**

Our next cup of wine: white with a dash of red symbolizes the gradual deepening of color which parallels the reawakening of colors in nature as the warm sun of spring brings them back to life and the first flowers appear on the hillsides. In the full warmth of spring we go outdoors to be with nature. No longer coating ourselves in protective attire, we expose our soft bodies to the sun. We eat fruit containing pits and we are reminded that, despite the wondrous expressions of our spirit, we are still tied to the hard pit of our ego. We are still concealed, deep inside, protecting our divine sparks even from within.

*A Talmudic story is told about Honi, who saw an old man planting a Carob tree. His grandchild was helping him. 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."*

### **Join with me in Blessing #1 and drinking the 2<sup>nd</sup> cup.**

As we drink the 2<sup>nd</sup> cup of wine, white with a dash of red, may we, like the flowers, blossom into our full potential.

### **Take out the dates from the plastic bag and hold them up.**

"Your stature is like a palm tree" (Song of Songs 7:8). Just as the palm tree doesn't bend or sway, so too the Jewish people. " AND, No part of the palm tree is wasted. The dates are for eating; the *Lulav* branches are for waving in praise on *Sukkot*; the dried thatch is for roofing; the fibers are for ropes; the leaves are for sieves; and the trunk is for house beams. The usefulness of the date palm reminds us of the commandment - to not waste.

So too, like the date palm, every one of us, each a valuable part of the Jewish people is needed. Some are knowledgeable in Bible, others in Mishna, others in Aggada (homiletic understanding of the Torah). Still others perform many mitzvot, and others give much charity." (Midrash - Bamidbar Raba 3:1)

**Say with me blessing #2 and if you have not eaten a date yet this season then join me in saying blessing #3 as well.**

*While you are eating the date, close your eyes and Meditate: Imagine one of your bad traits as the seed which has been removed from the date. Really try and picture it in your mind. Then, see that trait growing and developing into something great. This trait no longer holds you back, but propels you forward. Many great people have turned their faults into assets. You too have the potential to become great.*

As we eat the fruit of Y'tzirah, the emotional world of Formation, may our hearts be open to the feelings and needs of ourselves and others, allowing the warmth of our caring to shine through to the world.

### **THE THIRD WORLD: OLAM HAB'RIYAH - THE WORLD OF CREATION**

The Eternal took and placed the human being in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate it and to protect it." (Genesis 2:7,2:15) We are instructed to cultivate for our human needs, but to do it in a manner that does not deplete and degrade Creation, but rather allows all life to flourish.

B'riyah, the 3<sup>rd</sup> world, is the world of Creation. It is the world of thoughts represented by air and the season of summer. In the world of B'riyah, we drink red wine 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.

**POUR the THIRD CUP OF WINE: Red wine with a dash of white.**

As human beings, struggling to survive in a world which often seems antagonistic to our integrity, we can develop hard shells to protect our inner core, like the fruit of the first world. Although we survive as individuals within our shells, we remain partly hidden and cut off from each other, and touching one another takes the patient effort of separating the protective layer from the inner core while keeping the core intact. We can also be more like the fruit of the second world, available up to a point, but withholding our innermost part, perhaps needing a secret toughness to keep from collapsing under the pressure.

But in our most precious relationships, we are most like fruits that are soft throughout and that can be eaten whole, available to each other in every aspect and facet of our personalities and strong in a way which does not cut any part of us off from ourselves or from each other. At this moment of I-Thou there is no inner shell, like the fruits of B'riyah. We feel at one with each other and with all creation.

**Join with me in saying blessing #1 and drink the third cup of wine.**

As we drink the third cup of wine, red with a dash of white, may we cherish the warmth of the season and the abundance of our harvesting.

## **Take the raisins out of the bag**

As we eat the fruit of B'riyah, the world of thoughts and creation, may our thoughts and actions be integrated. May we create harmony in our lives and in the world.

**Join with me in saying blessing #2 and eat the raisins.**

*Meditation: Things are coming close to their full potential. Even the seeds are now edible. They not only have future potential, but are also delicious and ready to eat right now. Think about an area of your life you would like to improve. Picture your ideal self. Realize that's the real you. Now, for the rest of Tu B'Shvat, actually be that person. Act as if you're already there. The experience can be transformational.*

## **THE FOURTH WORLD: OLAM HA'ATZILUT - THE WORLD OF EMANATION**

**Pour the forth cup of wine: All Red with only one drop of white.**

Atzilut, the fourth world, is the world of Emanation. It is the purely spiritual world represented by fire. In the Autumn world of Atzilut, we drink deep red wine and eat no fruit, for this world cannot be represented by any fruit. The almost pure red wine represents the full bloom of nature before the cold winter. As nature expends its last bit of energy, a full cycle is completed.

**RECAP:** 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 that soft layer another hardness was found, protected by the softness which surrounded it. We came to a place where there was no distinction between the protected and the protective.

In the world of Atzilut, we become aware of G\_d's love, mercy, wisdom and other realities perceived with our hearts, not our senses. Our hearts are full and we praise the Source which renews all creation.

**Please join me in saying blessing #1.**

As we drink the fourth cup of pure red wine, 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.

May it be Your will, Oh G\_d of our mothers and fathers, that through our eating of the fruits which we have blessed, that the trees will be filled with the glory of their ability to renew themselves for new blossoming and growth, from the beginning of the year to its end, so that our lives too will be renewed and filled with goodness, blessings, and peace.

**L'Shana tova uv'racha p'ri ut'nuvah  
May the year be fruitful and blessed!**

**L'shana haba'a bi-Y'rushalayim hab'nuya  
Next year in Jerusalem rebuilt!**

**May the Jerusalem of our souls be rekindled  
as we open our hearts to the world, and take good care of G\_d's world.**

## CONCLUSION

We now come to the end of the Tu B'Shvat seder. We have only touched the surface of the true meaning of the festival and of the significance of trees and fruits in G\_d's creation. That is the beauty of the Jewish calendar: each year we celebrate the same holidays and festivals, yet each year we grow and develop many new insights.

*A person can appear successful on the outside, with full branches and a fancy car. "But if the roots are few" - if there is little connection to one's community and one's heritage - then life can send challenges that are impossible to withstand. "A strong wind can turn the tree upside down." A person alone is a person vulnerable to trends and fads that may lead to despair and destruction.<sup>8</sup> But if a person - irrespective of their wealth and status - is connected to community and heritage, then "even if all the winds of the world were to come and blow against it, they could not budge it from its place."*

### Notes:

1. "Tending to Our Cosmic Oasis"; Spring 1991 issue of the Melton Journal Prof. Ismar Schorsch is the Chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

2. Ibid.

3. The First Ray of Light: A Mystical Interpretation of Tu Bishvat, Dr. Shaul Magid is Elaine Ravich Assistant Professor of Jewish Thought at Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.

4. Ibid.

5. Insights into the Month of Shvat, by Rabbi Max Weiman

6. Sources included: - Compiled by Rabbi Shimon Lesserson - Edited by Rabbi Shraga Simmons - Copyrighted material used with permission from "A Tu BeShvat Seder: The Feast of Fruits from the Tree of Life" by Yitzhak Buxbaum (Jewish Spirit Publishing Co.), also published as "A Person is Like a Tree: A Sourcebook for Tu BeShvat" (Jason Aronson Inc.)

7. The *Zohar*, one of the earliest book about Kabbalah was written by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (150-230 CE), also called the **Rashbi**, a pupil of Rabbi Akiva (40-160 CE). After the Romans murdered 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's disciples, the **Rashbi** was authorized by Rabbi Akiva to teach future generations the Kabbalah as had been taught him. So, the **Rashbi** and his son, Eliezer hid in a cave for 13 years and emerged from the cave with the *Zohar*. Written in a unique form; it is in the form of parables and is in Aramaic

8. Source: "MAN IS A TREE" by Rabbi Shraga Simmons