



Fruit of the Lovely Tree: Tu B'Shvat Itself

From the Root and Trunk, biblical and rabbinic, and from each of the branches of our Tree of Torah—kabbalistic, Zionist, Eco-Torah—have come some contributions to the practice of Tu B'Shvat in our generation—the fruit of all these generations.

This section presents some teachings toward the actual celebration of Tu B'Shvat today. We begin with—of course!—blessings, in new shapes drawn from earth by Marcia Falk. Then we turn to Ellen Bernstein, who was among this generation's pioneers in renewing the celebration of the Tu B'Shvat seder. She gives us a "recipe" for shaping our own Haggadah for the seder, drawing on the kabbalistic seder that emerged from Tzfat (Safed) and pointing it toward protection of the earth. Like most recipes, this one has a basic structure and suggestions for how to spice it up yourself.

Then come a series of essays, meditations, and teachings for use in the celebration, ranging from blessings over the fruits and nuts of the seder to poetry from within and beyond Jewish life that celebrates the earth and trees, to questions about *tzedakah* (the socially responsible use of money) on Tu B'Shvat, to the celebration of the seder at a place on earth that is in danger of eco-destruction, to suggestions for children's education. There are even recipes, in the more literal sense, for some traditional Tu B'Shvat meals. And there are songs for the seder—or for planting a tree.



Blessings for the Seder

Marcia Falk
From The Book of Blessings

BIRKAT P'RI HA'EYtz

N'vareykh et eyn haḥayim
matzmiḥat p'ri ha'eytz.

BLESSING OVER THE FRUIT OF THE TREE

Let us bless the source of life
that nurtures the fruit of the tree.

BIRKAT YAYIN

N'vareykh et eyn haḥayim
matzmiḥat p'ri hagefen.

BLESSING OVER WINE

Let us bless the source of life
that ripens fruit on the vine.



Cooking Up a Tu B'Shvat Seder

Ellen Bernstein with Hannah Ashley

Why a Tu B'Shvat Seder?

Why not just plant a tree and eat some fruit? Because a *seder* is a ritual that makes an idea tangible. On *Pesach*, we use all of our senses to transform a trip to the dinner table into a journey of liberation. We eat horseradish in order to really taste the bitterness

of slavery; we see *haroset* and envision the labor of our ancestors, laying bricks with mortar; we drink wine to experience in our bodies the giddiness of freedom. We also tell the story of the exodus from Egypt so that we have words to understand these sensations intellectually. Slavery and freedom, as concepts (and realities), may be difficult to grasp when we are fortunate enough not to be experiencing them at that moment. The Passover seder engages our minds with a saga, while our bodies respond directly, almost bypassing the brain, to the sensations they are taking in.

The intention of a Tu B'Shvat seder, also, is to make an idea concrete. That idea is this: God is the source of all life, and therefore every tiny piece of creation is infinitely valuable. Taking this idea a step further, the seder speaks to human responsibility: Nature is a grand web in which everything is connected to everything else, and every small action that humans do reverberates all over the universe. . . .

How does a Tu B'Shvat seder teach this message? By engaging us intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically with something as small as a raisin or a walnut. At this seder we

- learn about the connections among all creation through text study from a variety of sources—traditional Jewish writings, American authors, environmentalists.
- open our hearts with music, art, meditations and a beautiful environment.
- expand our spirits when we say blessings over many different kinds of fruits and nuts, sometimes as many as thirty or forty, and over four cups of wine. Aryeh Kaplan writes:

The 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.¹

- nourish our bodies from many sources in the web of life when we carefully eat the food and wine we have blessed. Kaplan explains:

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 fills the awareness with the taste and texture of the food. One then eats very slowly, aware of every nuance of taste.²

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 the varieties of fruits before us. This meditation on food is the central ritual of the Tu B'Shvat seder. Each berry and nut is the proverbial "grain of sand" in which to know the world.

How to Deliver This Message?

The entire seder can be a "contemplative exercise" if a holistic sacred space is created. All the senses are fully engaged in a well-orchestrated seder. Powerful rituals are most often part theater, and planning does not detract from the spirituality of a ritual; it demonstrates respect and seriousness. Remember that "seder" means "order." A poorly planned event, or one that is supposed to happen "spontaneously," may end up being disappointing.

Some people may be more interested in emphasizing the environmental education aspects of the seder. However, the strength of using a seder, as opposed to a book or a play, to teach about ecology, is that a seder speaks to spiritual values. It is important, therefore, that the Jewish soul of the seder not be lost.

The soul of the seder concerns "The Four Worlds." The Kabbalists who originated the tradition of a Tu B'Shvat seder defined four levels of meaning in all experience, which they called "worlds." In this seder, each world is also connected to a particular element, and the environmental aspect of that element is explored.

<i>Assiyah</i> , the world of	Action	Earth	Winter
<i>Yetzirah</i> , the world of	Emotion	Water	Spring
<i>Briyah</i> , the world of	Thought	Air	Summer
<i>Atzilut</i> , the world of	Spirit	Fire	Fall

These spheres form the structure of the *seder*, making it a four-part ritual. In each section, the particular essence of that world is illuminated through readings, activities, blessings, and foods.

A Tu B'Shvat seder can be held at any time or place, indoors or out-of-doors, with any number of people of all ages.

Food

Food and drink engage participants on a *physical* level. All fruits are divided into categories representing the first three worlds. The fourth world, *Atzilut*, has no 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 the holiness within that world needs. The edible part of each fruit—the flesh or the meat—represents holiness while the inedible portion—the shell, skin, or pit—represents protection.

Assiyah, being the furthest away from perfection/God-energy, is represented by fruits or nuts with an inedible outer shell and an edible inner core: pineapple, coconut, orange, banana, walnut, pecan, grapefruit, star fruit, pine nut, Brazil nut, pistachio.

Yetzirah has enough God-energy to surround its protective parts with holiness, but still needs some protection. It is represented by fruits with edible outer flesh and pithy, inedible cores: olive, date, cherry, loquat, peach, apricot, jujube, persimmon, plum, hackberry.

Briyah, being the closest to pure spirit of the three lower worlds, is represented by any fruits which are edible throughout: strawberry, grape, fig, raspberry, blueberry, carob, quince.

Some people use the fragrance of flowers, incense, or spices, or just a burning candle, to represent the final world. This seder leaves *Atzilut* completely without symbolism.

Preparing the fruits can be a big job if you're having a large crowd. Cut the fruits into bite-sized portions, especially if you have an abundant variety. Organize the fruits according to "worlds." Five to ten types for each "world" is customary. However, fewer is certainly acceptable, especially if you're buying local or organic

produce. Be sure to let participants know about the food choices you've made; this is a good opportunity for education.

We also drink four cups of wine (or grape juice) to symbolize the four seasons: white wine for the winter slumber; red wine for the vital life force. First we drink one cup of white wine as a reminder of winter, then a cup of white wine with a dash of red for spring; red with a dash of white for summer, and pure red for autumn.

Setting, Music, and Art

The setting and artistic parts of the seder engage participants on an *emotional* level. Any space with a beautiful and peaceful atmosphere—one evocative of nature—will do. Candles, flowers, tablecloths, artwork, and branches will enhance the aesthetic experience.

The seder is a perfect opportunity for people to express their love for nature in whatever way they know best. Local musicians, artists, or dancers may want to compose pieces specifically for the event. The *kavannah*, or intention, of the artwork, songs, or movements as well as the setting and the food is to help participants experience the four "ways of being" into which the *seder* is divided.

Study and Blessings

Like the original Kabbalistic seder, much of this *seder* is devoted to writings from traditional Jewish sources, plus modern thinkers, poets, and environmentalists. The juxtaposition of Biblical/Jewish readings and readings on ecology and nature is a dramatic way to teach about the environmental aspects of Judaism. Study engages participants on an *intellectual* level.

Blessings, and then contemplative eating, either in silence or with music or focused conversation, culminate each section of the seder. These allow for experiencing the seder, and its implications, at perhaps the deepest, the *spiritual*, level.

Tu B'Shvat Seder

Ellen Bernstein

The seder has three parts: an explanation—the why and how of the seder—an opening blessing, and the main body of the seder. The body of the seder is again broken down in four parts, according to the four worlds.

I. Introduction

Said Rabbi Simeon: "Mark this well. Fire, air, earth and water are the sources and roots of all things above and below, and all things above, below, are grounded in them. And in each of the four winds these elements are found—fire in the North, water in the South, earth in the West; and the four elements are united with the four winds—and all are one. Fire, water, air and earth: gold, silver, copper and iron: North, South, East and West—altogether these make twelve, yet they are all one." (Zohar, Exod. 23b)

Read "Why a Tu B'Shvat Seder?" section here, or your own explanation of why the holiday is celebrated in this way. Explain or read about the concept of the Four Worlds.

II. Opening Blessing

R. Nachman of Bratslav used to say: Know that every shepherd has a unique niggun for each of the grasses and for each place where they herd. For each and every grass has its own song and from these songs of the grasses, the shepherds compose their songs.

. . . Would that I merited hearing the sound of the songs and praises of the grasses, how every blade of grass sings to the Holy One of Blessing, wholeheartedly with no reservations and without anticipation of reward. How wonderful it is when one hears their song and how very good to be amongst them serving our Creator in awe.³

Read Blessing section of "Peri Eitz Hadar," (see p. 135) or say your own blessing to open the *seder*.

III. The Four Worlds

If there is a leader, s/he may lead the group in the *meditations* at the beginning of each world, and the *kavannot* before the blessings. The group as a whole *sings*; please embellish on the ideas for music! Distribute the *readings* in each world—embellish here, too. . . . from your own sources—before the beginning of the *seder* so that as many people have parts as possible. Other activities, such as dancing, storytelling, etc., should be inserted into the appropriate world. The *blessings* may be found at the end of the *seder*.

Assiyah: The World of Earth

Meditation

Earth is the rhythm of our feet on the Mountain. In this world, we bless the physical: our bodies, our land, our homes. It is our connection to the Earth that inspires Action.

Songs

Tzadik KaTamar; "You Shall Indeed Go Out with Joy"; "Inch by Inch" (The Garden Song); a dance with a strong beat.

Readings

There never seems to have been any doubt that Rocks came before living things—that they were in a sense, the first beings. In the oldest myths Rocks are tricky objects. Sometimes alive, or at least inhabited by spirits, they could move around and turn into other things. Monotheism quieted them down. They became Rocks of Ages, symbols of heavenly permanence and power, eminences for saint and prophet to stand on, foundations for temples and churches.

Evolution seems to have reversed this trend towards quiescence and Rocks are on the move again. Although we no longer see them as animate, we know that some of them once were alive, that many will be alive again as their elements break down into soil and are taken up by plants, and that they are constantly on the move. Rocks have regained respect in the past century or two. They are not just inert stuff to be blasted through or piled up into buildings. They have a slow life of their own. They *form, mature and age*, and their movements affect the lives of plants and animals enormously.⁴

And the Lord GOD took the humans and put them into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. (Gen. 2:15)

In nature, what dies and decays provides the fertility for that which is to continue.

At one time farmers respected these processes and used them to advantage. Farming is no longer a way of life, no longer husbandry or even agriculture. It is big business. . . . agribusiness. Agribusiness does not love the land. It treats soil as a raw material to use up. The result of the exploitation of the soil is:

1. soil erosion
2. soil compaction
3. soil and water pollution
4. pests and disease due to monoculture
5. depopulation of the country
6. decivilization of the city.⁵

And the Land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the Land is mine: for you are strangers and settlers with me. (Lev. 25:23)

Blessings

For Assiyah, we eat nuts and fruits with a tough skin to remind us of the protection the earth gives. Through this act, we acknowledge that we need protection in life, both physical and emotional. We bless our defense systems. They are holdovers from an earlier time when they helped us to survive.

Say one of the *brachot* over fruit.
Eat the fruits with hard shells on the outside and soft fruit on the inside.

Our first cup of wine is white. In winter, when nature is asleep, the earth is barren, sometimes covered with snow.

Say one of the *brachot* over wine.

Drink the first cup.

Yetzirah: The World of Water

Meditation

Yetzirah is the world of formation and birth. Water, the fluid element, gives shape to all matter. Our hearts are folded rivers: our bones are spiraling vortices: knots in trees are recycling eddies.

From water, the heart pours forth blessing and emotion. At this time we honor the watery ones: the phytoplankton who produce most of our oxygen, the sea creatures: dolphins, whales and seals subject to our unconscious wastefulness, the salmon whose lives are interrupted by dams.

Songs

Ushavtem Mayim, Atsei Zeitim Omdim

Readings

The letter *mem* derives its name from *mayim*, the Hebrew word for water. The letter also represents the *Mikvah* (the ritual bath) and the womb. Water is the place of birthing and rebirthing.

"*Mayim*" shares the same root as the word for What, "*Mah*." When a person immerses in water, he is nullifying his ego and asking "What am I?" Ego is the essence of permanence while water is the essence of impermanence. When a person is ready to replace his ego with a question, then he is also ready to be reborn with its answer.⁶

*Nothing is weaker than water;
Yet, for attacking what is hard and tough,*

Nothing surpasses it, nothing equals it.
 The principle that what is weak overcomes what is strong,
 And what is yielding conquers what is resistant,
 Is known to everyone.
 Yet few men utilize it profitably in practice.
 But the intelligent man knows that:
 He who willingly takes the blame for disgrace to his community
 is considered a responsible person,
 And he who submissively accepts responsibility for the evils in
 his community naturally will be given enough authority for
 dealing with them.
 These principles, no matter how paradoxical, are sound.⁷

From the forested headwaters to the agricultural midstream valleys to the commercial and industrial centers at the river's mouth, good and bad news travels by way of water. Did my toilet flushing give downstream swimmers a gastrointestinal disease? Did the headwaters clear-cut kill the salmon industry at the river's mouth? Did my city's need for water drain off a river and close upriver farmland that fed me fresh vegetables? Did a toxic waste dump leak into the groundwater table and poison people in the next county? Watershed consciousness is, in part, a promotional campaign to advertise the mutual concerns and needs that bind upstream and downstream, instream and offstream peoples together.

This journey is right out your window—among the hills and valleys that surround you. It is the first excursion of thought into the place you live. It focuses on where your water comes from when you turn on the faucet; where it goes when you flush; what soils produce your food; who shares your water supply, including the fish and other non-human creatures. The watershed way is a middle way, singing a local song, somewhere close by, between Mind and Planet.⁸

... All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. Unto the place where the rivers come, thither they return again. . . . The thing that has been; it is what shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done. (Eccle. 1:5-9)

Blessing—*Bracha*—comes from *Breicha*—a pool. Each person has her own pool inside, which is her pool of Blessing.⁹

A person who enjoys the pleasures of this world without blessing is called a thief because the blessing is what causes the continuation of the divine flow of the world.¹⁰

Blessings

For *Yetzirah*, we eat fruits with a tough inner core and a soft outer. Through this act we acknowledge the need to fortify our hearts. With a strong heart and a pure vision we can pull down the protective outer shell. Our lives grow richer and deeper as we become available to the miracle of nature which surrounds us.

Say one of the *brachot* over fruit.

Eat the fruits which are soft on the outside and have hard pits on the inside.

As spring approaches, the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth. Gradually, the land changes its colors from white to red, as the first flowers appear on the hillsides. So, our second cup will be a bit darker. We pour a little red wine into the white.

Say one of the *brachot* over wine.

Drink the second cup.

Briyah: The World of Air

Meditation

Air is the stuff hopes and dreams are made of. Air is the work manifesting as the world. Close your eyes and take a breath. As you inhale, know you are being breathed by the earth. Let the breath out and visualize your next step to beautify the Garden.

Song

Lo Yisah Goy, instrumentals, *niggunim*

Readings

Then the Lord God formed the human of the dust of the ground, and breathed into the nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living soul. (Gen. 2:7)

In Arabic, the wind is "*ruh*," but the same word also means "breath" and "spirit," while in Hebrew, "*ruach*" enlarges the sphere of influence to include concepts of creation and divinity. And the Greek "*pneuma*," or the Latin "*animus*" are redolent, not just of air, but of the very stuff of the soul.

Without wind, most of Earth would be uninhabitable. The tropics would grow so unbearably hot that nothing could live there, and the rest of the planet would freeze. Moisture, if any existed, would be confined to the oceans, and all but the fringe of the great continents along a narrow temperate belt would be desert. There would be no erosion, no soil, and for any community that managed to evolve despite these rigors, no relief from suffocation by their own waste products.

But with the wind, Earth comes truly alive. Winds provide the circulatory and nervous systems of the planet, sharing out energy information, distributing both warmth and awareness, making something out of nothing.¹¹

*Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub
It is the center hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.
Cut doors and windows for a room;
It is the holes which make it useful.
Therefore profit comes from what is there;
Usefulness from what is not there.¹²*

*I live life in growing orbits
which move out over the things of the world.
Perhaps I will never achieve the last,
but that will be my attempt.
I am circling around God, around the ancient tower,*

*and I have been circling for a thousand years.
And I still don't know if I am a falcon
or a storm, or a great song.¹³*

*Every part of the vegetable world
is singing a song
and bringing forth a secret
of the divine mystery
of the creation.¹⁴*

Blessings

For *Briyah* we taste fruits that are completely edible. In this world, where God's protection is close at hand, we can let go of all barriers and try on freedom. We are co-creators with God and each of our thoughts becomes Action.

Say one of the *brachot* over fruit.

Eat the fruits which are soft throughout.

In summer, when vegetable and fruits are abundant, we are reminded of the richness of life. We drink red wine with a dash of white.

Say one of the *brachot* over wine.

Drink the third cup.

Atzilut: The World of Fire

Meditation

There's a fire alive within every living cell of every being. The carbons we eat burn in the presence of the oxygen we breathe, giving us the energy to be. This spark of light is our connection to the Divine.

Song

"In Your Light Do We See Light," "This Little Light of Mine"

Readings

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. (Exod. 3:2)

*Had I not seen the sun
I could have borne the shade
But Light a newer wilderness
My wilderness has made.¹⁵*

I have never understood why so many mystics of all creeds experience the presence of God on mountain tops.

Aren't they afraid of being blown away?

It often feels best to lie low, inconspicuous, instead of waving your spirit around from high places like a lightning rod.

For if God is in one sense the igniter, a fireball that spins over the ground of continents, God is also in another sense the destroyer, lightning, blind power, impartial as the atmosphere.¹⁶

And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and soul, then I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your corn, and your wine and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied. Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them. (Deut. 11:13-16)

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty and frightened. Don't open the door to the study and begin reading. Take down the dulcimer.

Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.¹⁷

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 grasses, among all growing things and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer to talk with the one that I belong to.¹⁸

Blessings

As summer turns to fall, plants are preparing seed for the next cycle of nature. We too must nourish the world for the coming generation. Just as the natural world goes through changes to achieve its full potential, we also need to change: we need to get rid of anger, envy and greed so that we can be free to grow. When we do this, we will become very strong, healthy trees, with solid roots in the ground and our arms open to the love that is all around us.

At this level we go straight to the fourth cup, which we drink full strength red.

Say one of the *brachot* over wine.

Drink the fourth cup.

At the end of the *seder*, a fuller meal using the foods that are mentioned in the quote, ". . . a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil, and honey; a land in which thou shalt eat bread without scarceness," can be eaten. Some suggestions are: challah, mushroom-barley soup, cheeses and honeycake.

Traditional *brachah* over the fruit:

Ba-ruch ata A-do-nai El-o-hay-nu mel-ech ha-olam bo-ray pree ha-etz.

Praised are you, Eternal, Our God, Ruler of the Universe who creates the fruit of the tree.

Alternative *brachah* over the fruit:

Brucha at Yah, El-o-tay-nu ruach ha-olam bo-rate pree ha-etz.

Holy One of Blessing, Your presence fills Creation, You create the fruit of the tree.

Traditional *brachah* over the wine:

Ba-ruch ata A-do-nai El-o-thay-nu mel-ech ha-olam bo-ray pree ha-gafen.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe who creates the fruit of the vine.¹⁹



A Circle of Friends: Tu B'Shvat for Small Children

Elisheva Kaufman

Invite children outside to find a class tree which you will adopt for the year. You may want to designate this area as your outdoor class meeting place. Throughout the year you may share nature stories here, do artwork, have special gatherings, record seasonal observations, etc.

Walk to your class tree. Ask students to join hands around it forming a circle. You may ask them (one task at a time) to: observe, smell, feel (light, shadows, wind, warmth, silence, group energy) and listen. When silent observations are complete, you may ask, "What have you learned about our tree by: looking, smelling, feeling, listening?" These subtle sensations about the class tree may allow for special feelings to arise regarding the children's relationship to nature. Allow for some time to express this in picture form, poetry, or song.

The children may create a circular story after their silent observation experience. Perhaps the circular story is about the life of the tree from seed to now. The first student contributes a sentence to get the story started in the seed stage. Each student adds a sentence, weaving together a story in the round, which tells about this tree. Children may record these circular stories as well as their observations of circles in nature in their nature journals.

While visiting this tree throughout the year, take the opportunity to look for examples of circles in nature, i.e., cycles of seasons, leaves decompose into soil and soil is nourishment for the tree, acorns feed the squirrel and the squirrel is a planter of acorns when

they are hidden for a food reserve, trees cleanse air and send it forth for humans, humans breathe cleansed air and send back carbon dioxide for the tree to convert, nutrients recycle when the dying tree returns to the earth its own trunk, etc. Discuss what it means when things work in a circular pattern or rhythm.



Plants and Trees in Winter: Tu B'Shvat for Older Children

Elisheva Kaufman

And Elohim said,
Let the earth sprout forth vegetation,
Plants that have seeds, and
Trees that have fruits with seeds of its own kind, . . .
and Elohim saw that this was good.
And it was even and it was morning, the third day.

Gen. 1:11

Thus the Torah understands plants as the basis for all life, since they were created on the third day, just after the waters were divided above and below the firmament. Plants are grouped into three main kinds:

- vegetation,
- plants with seeds, and
- trees bearing fruit.

These three groups give us understanding of basic plant forms and processes:

Vegetation includes bacteria, fungi, mushrooms, algae, seaweeds, mosses, lichens, and ferns.

Plants with seeds includes all flowering plants and shrubs with green stems.

Trees includes plants with sturdy wooden trunk-stems supporting leafy growth and bearing cones or fruits with seeds.

Our planet supports a richly diverse plant kingdom on which we are dependent for our very existence. Plants are found throughout all regions of the land and sea. Although we can look at plants from the simpler to the more complex, each plant's relationship to the