

A Tu BeShvat Seder

Celebrating the Tree of Life



An Intention

Tu BeShvat is a celebration of trees. In honoring trees, this celebration eloquently invites us to consider the essence of life, wholeness and renewal. I will never forget as a young girl, one particular Tu BeShvat celebration when I was asked to carefully unwrap and separate the precious roots of a seedling and hold it steady while my Sunday school teacher buried the roots. She pressed the soil around the fragile stem as gently as you would tuck a blanket around a newborn baby. When she finished, we remained huddled together around the tree, quietly enjoying our shared sense of accomplishment in giving this new life a chance to grow and flourish. Before joining the rest of our class, she smiled at me and said in her knowing voice that this seedling would, in the fullness of time, provide comfort and nourishment to more creatures than either of us could ever imagine. While I struggled to digest this insightful affirmation, I couldn't help but feel I had just done something very important.

As an adult I have spent my career working for the Forest Service. In my work I am constantly reminded that planting trees intentionally keeps us focused on a sustainable future. More than that, as my Sunday school teacher suggested, it enables us to connect with nature and engage our sense of wonder in the mysteries of life. Tu BeShvat allows us to further focus our intention to live in harmony with our surroundings and to revel in the beauty of life's many wonders.

The text, illustrations and photos I have created for this Tu BeShvat Seder can be described as a *tikkun*, a "fixing" or repair, and in many ways represent my continuing journey for spiritual wholeness. In this small way, I offer a *yichud*, or mystical intention, to the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience to continue my journey in creating sustainable forests and communities for future generations.

B'shalom, Debra Reifman Whitall
22 Kislev 5768

*There is always Music amongst the trees in the Garden, but our hearts
must be very quiet to hear it.*
~ Minnie Aumonier

The Essence of the Holiday

The leader reads aloud:

The Tu BeShvat *Seder*, or procedure, is similar in some ways to the Passover *Seder*, yet is based in a mystical perspective. It focuses on Nature, something mainstream Judaism has not until recently, paid much attention to. Nature is however, deeply rooted in Judaism. The teachings of the Tree of Life are perhaps the most important reflection of mystical Jewish tradition. Rabbi Tirzah Firestone explains it this way, "Growing on the surface of the earth, with roots below and branches reaching to heaven, the Tree of Life symbolizes the great pillar that unites earth with heaven; through it the energies of the cosmos continuously pour into earthly creation and return back again to heaven."

Rabbi Firestone continues, "In mystical terms, each of us is an entire world or garden unto ourselves. And just as there was a healing tree at the center of the Garden of Eden, so each of us has a healing core of energy at the center of our individual being. Just as the Tree of Life has the power to unify and heal opposites, so we have, at the core of our beings, a connection to the universal power that can bring together all of our different sides and conflicting voices into one unified and peaceful whole."



Keeping this mystical perspective at heart, Tu BeShvat is a day of spiritual renewal for the Jewish people in addition to its more traditional reference in the *Mishna*, or oral history, as a “Rosh HaShanah,” a New Year, for fruit trees. While many different customs and practices for celebrating Tu BeShvat exist, a recurring theme is to open all our senses to the enjoyment of many different kinds of fruit. Another important aspect of this celebration is to praise God, or as Debra likes to say, the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, through stories, poems and song. Together, these themes enable us to create a great *tikkun*, or repair, to occur across the globe and perhaps within each one of us.

Although the Tree of Life is a Jewish tradition, it charts a territory far beyond a Jewish worldview. Rather, it directs us to a reality that includes all ideals and orientations. As Rabbi Firestone points out, “Here lies the sum total or unified field of all the polarities of our world. In this realm of Oneness, all things exist in a state of mystical intention, or *yichud*.” It is heartening to know that, at its core, the Jewish tradition declares an inexplicably broad view, both unbiased and transcendent.

The Order of the Seder

A participant recites:

The Seder begins with readings about the meaning and symbolism of Tu BeShvat. Readings said by the whole group or a specific individual are in **bold** type.

Afterward, we eat different fruits or nuts and drink four cups of wine. After enjoying these different fruits, we take time to reflect on the events of the evening and share the meaning(s) we draw from them. It is important to not drink or eat items out of order.

To begin, each cup is filled with white wine. Also, the fruit and nuts are covered.

After each cup of wine is emptied, fill the next cup with the next kind of wine, each becoming a slightly deeper shade of red. The last cup is filled with a fine red wine.

Today we celebrate the New Year for Fruit Trees.

The leader recites:

You might ask: “Why do fruit trees need a New Year at all?”

Tu BeShvat represents a seasonal turning point, when the harshness of winter begins to wane. Freezing winds may blow outside but inside the tree, the sap of Spring has begun to flow.

I will now guide you through a brief meditation. You may choose to close your eyes.

Imagine you are sitting in the Garden of Eden in the presence of *Shechinah*, or “she who dwells within,” representing an aspect of God that can be understood through our senses. All is one. The *Shechinah* surrounds us, even from within. Imagine you are surrounded by and infused with light, love, and the joy of Divine Presence.

With your eyes open, we now remove the cloth from the fruits and nuts and ask the following Four Questions.

During the *Passover Seder* tradition directs us to have the *youngest* recite the Four Questions. At the *Tu BeShvat Seder* the *eldest* recites, in order to teach us that although we age, we should never grow old. We should always be young in the service of God.

The eldest recites:

Why is this day different from all other days?

1. On all other days, we may or may not eat fruit according to our desire.
Why, on Tu BeShvat, do we eat many different kinds of fruit?
2. On all other days, we drink red or white wine according to our preference.
Why, on this day, do we drink four cups of wine: one of white, pale pink, reddish-pink, and red?
3. Why, on the 15th of Shvat, do we praise fruit and fruit trees, and offer prayers for them?
4. Lastly: Why does the very idea of the Tu BeShvat Seder delight us?
What is its mystery?

A participant recites the answer to the First Question:

On all other days, we may or may not eat fruit according to our desire. Why, on Tu BeShvat, do we eat many different kinds of fruit?

We eat many different kinds of fruit and nuts on this day, making blessings over them, and praising them before the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience. For through this, the trees will be blessed to abundantly produce fine fruit for the enjoyment and benefit of all. And by eating many different kinds of fruit, a person will be reminded that it is the New Year of the Trees.

Rabbi Yaakov Neiman taught:

On Tu BeShvat, it is the custom to eat many kinds of fruit. We should use this time to gaze and meditate on the Creator's wondrous creations, evident in each and every fruit. In all variety of creations, in all the different kinds of fruits and vegetables, one sees the wonders of the Creation and the miracles of God. When another new fruit and new taste enjoyment comes to us, we should use our obligation to offer thanks for the pleasure, and thank the Creator. Through this, we come closer to the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience.

A participant recites the answer to the Second Question:

On all other days, we drink red or white wine according to our preference. Why, on this day, do we drink four cups of wine: one white, pale pink, reddish-pink, and red?

We drink four cups of wine: white, pale pink, reddish-pink, and finally red. The gradual change in color symbolizes the seasonal change in the colors of Nature as the growing year progresses, from the stark, cold white of winter, to the beginnings of springtime warmth, and into the vital, vibrant shades of summer. God established the seasons necessary for fruit trees and other crops, and, after the Flood, the Holy One promised Noah that they would never again be changed: "As long as the earth exists, seed time and harvest time, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22)

A participant recites the answer to the Third Question:

Why, on the 15th of Shvat, do we praise fruit and fruit trees, and offer prayers for them?

The Torah commands Jews living in the Land of Israel to contribute tithes from their orchards every year to the Temple. The Rabbis chose the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shvat – Tu BeShvat – as the New Year for fruit trees, the date to determine to which year the fruit belonged. If a tree began to flower before Tu BeShvat, its fruit was included in the contribution from the previous year, but if it began to flower after Tu BeShvat, its fruit was counted with the following year's contribution.

One opinion of why the Rabbis chose this date was that by this time in Israel most of the rainy season had passed and the sap had risen in the trees; this is the beginning of the process in the development of fruit. Another opinion was that a tree that blossomed before Tu BeShvat did so with rainwater from the previous year, before Rosh HaShanah, while a tree that blossomed after Tu BeShvat did so with water that it absorbed after Rosh HaShanah.



A participant recites the answer to the Fourth Question:

Lastly: Why does the very idea of the Tu BeShvat Seder delight us? What is its mystery?

A Tale: The Baal Shem Tov on Tu BeShvat

One Tu BeShvat, the Rabbi Baal Shem Tov and his students were eating fruit in honor of the day, drinking to life, *l'hayyim*, and discussing the importance of joy, *simha*. During this conversation, the Baal Shem Tov said: Joy is so great, because it can lead a person to an exalted spiritual level so that they see the *Shechinah*, or “she who dwells within,” representing an aspect of God that can be understood through our senses.

The Baal Shem Tov then went with his students for a sleigh ride in the snow-covered countryside and they took along some wine, honeycake, whiskey, and fruit for Tu BeShvat. As they careened along in the sleigh, the snow was falling and they were so joyful that they felt they were floating on a cloud of light. Remembering that it was Tu BeShvat, they sang songs from the mystic Book of Song that tells how all creatures, including plants, sing Torah verses praising their Creator. They sang: “The fig tree says: ‘The one who tends the fig tree shall eat its fruit.’ The pomegranate tree says: ‘Your cheeks are like the halves of a pomegranate.’ The palm tree says: ‘A righteous person shall flourish like a palm tree.’”

The road entered the forest, and the horses galloped in pleasure, kicking up snow all over. On both sides of the road an ancient, dense forest stretched out, with trees whose branches leaned out, arching over the road, almost touching in the middle and nearly blocking out the light of the sun. But here and there the sun peeked through the branches, lighting the traveler’s path as they sped along in the sleigh. And as they went, they sang another verse from the Book of Song: “then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before God...!” Their singing grew stronger and stronger and flocks of birds flying above them began chirping so loudly that it seemed that they were singing along with the joyful travelers in the sleigh.

It is told that Rabbi Baal Shem Tov and his students knew this secret – that God is within the world and always with us. When we know this, we too will sing and hear the songs of the trees and animals. May Tu BeShvat help bring us to that realization.

*Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird
will come.*

- Chinese proverb



A Prayer for Fruit and Fruit Trees

All recite:

May it be your will, the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, that by virtue of our eating fruit and by our meditating on their mystical and spiritual meanings, the fruit trees be filled with the strength of Your abundant grace, to grow and flourish from the beginning to the end of the year, for goodness and for blessing, for good life and for peace.

The Feast Begins

Leader:

After we recite a *kavvanah*, or intention, and the blessing for fruit, we will eat the five fruits associated with the Land of Israel. Eat them in any order you choose.

All recite:

When I make this blessing, may I become a channel for renewed divine energy to flow through me and go out to all creatures and creations – inanimate, plant, animal and human.

Blessed art Thou, the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

Enjoy the following five fruits:

Olives, dates, grapes, figs and pomegranates

Common Fig, *Ficus carica*

The common fig is one of our oldest plant companions. Ancient peoples were familiar with its sweet, seedy fruit, and in the Mediterranean countries it was known as food of the poor, as it was one of the main sources of nourishment for those with little money or property. Alice Thoms Vitale



A Fruit You Have Not Tasted this Season

Leader:

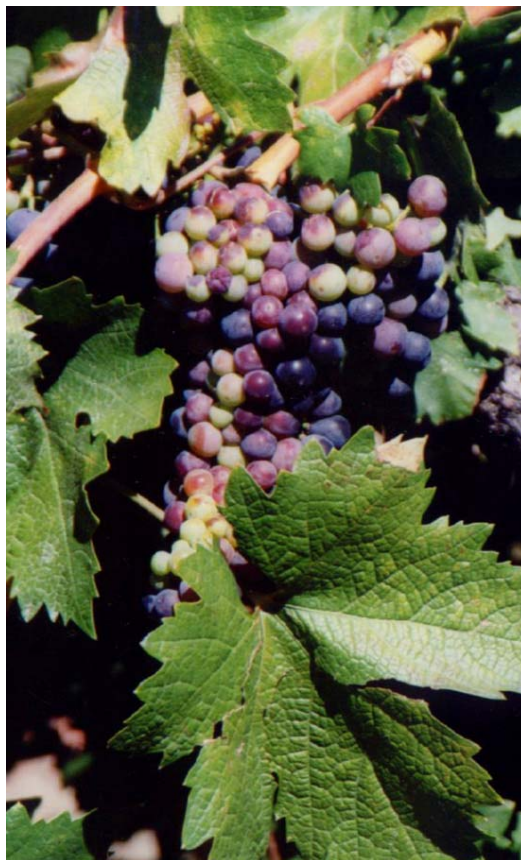
Tradition tells us that at a special time of happiness, we make a blessing – a *shehecheyanu* – thanking God for allowing us to reach this season. On Tu BeShvat, we thank the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience for permitting us to celebrate the New Year of the Trees again, and fittingly express our holiday joy by making the blessing over a new fruit of the season.

Each person holds a fruit they have not yet eaten this season.

All recite:

Blessed art Thou, the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, who has kept us in life, and sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season.

Eat the fruit.



The Four Worlds of Fruit and Wine

A participant recites:

Rabbi Firestone explains, “Long before it became the central symbol for wholeness in the Judaic tradition, the tree was a universal symbol, originally representing the Divine Feminine and later coming to mean eternal life. But the *Kabbalah*, or Jewish mystical tradition, did not just borrow this mystical symbol: it took and developed the meaning of the tree to bring forth a unique and profound philosophy about the dynamic complexity of life. This is its teaching: *to arrive at wholeness and eternal life, one must first encounter numerous opposing forces in the world and contend with the nature of good and evil, which is the principle feature of consciousness and life on earth.*”

To explore the complexities of life, the *Kabbalah*, or mystical Jewish tradition, speaks of **four worlds** that compose the cosmos. They are *Atzilut*, or realm of divine nearness to God from which comes the **formulation of ideas**; *Beriah*, the world of creation, here **ideas become patterns**; *Yetzirah*, the world where **patterns take form**, and *Asiyah*, the **material world**.

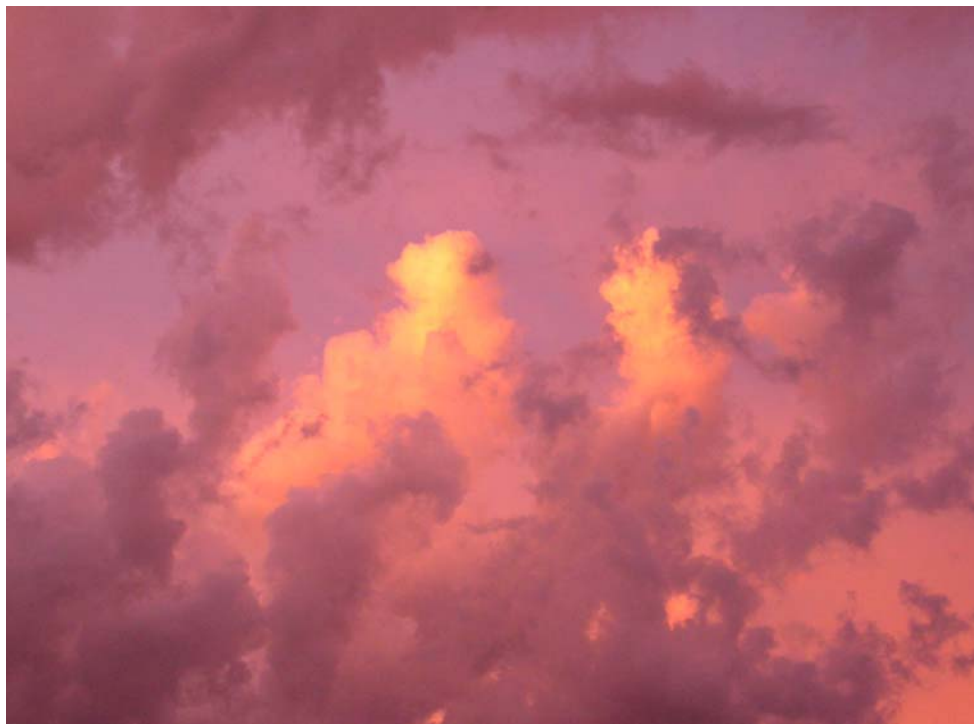


Between every two trees is a doorway to a new world.

~ John Muir

Yitzak Buxbaum explains that in the Tu BeShvat Seder, a connection exists between fruit and nuts and the four worlds that connect the cosmos. This connection is grounded in the word *kelippa*, a negative force that hides Godliness and can be thought of as a shell or pit. Thus, fruit and nuts with an inedible outer shell and an edible inside represent *Asiyah*, because in this material world the path to the center of Godliness is blocked at the outside. Fruit with a soft, edible outside, but having a hard inner pit represents *Yetzirah*, because in this world one is close to God but the center is still blocked. *Beriah* is represented by fruits that are totally soft and edible (seeds are considered edible), because this world is nearer to God and there is no obstacle to communion with the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience. *Atzilut* cannot be symbolized by a fruit's physical characteristics, yet it can be suggested by the fragrant scent of fruit.

The four cups of wine also signify the four worlds of the *Kabbalah*. As we drink each successive cup, we draw down Godliness from Above until we bring it into this world: and with each cup, we ascend to a higher world. In human terms, Yitzhak Buxbaum suggests the four worlds can be associated in this way: *Asiyah*, with our bodies and action; *Yetzirah*, with our feelings, speech and song; *Beriah* with our thoughts; and *Atzilut* - that which is beyond our individual thought but exists within our collective being.



The First Cup: White Wine

A participant recites:

The Holy One, blessed be the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, expressed “Just as wine can be a cause of trouble in this world, in the future I shall make it only a source of joy, as it says: ‘And it shall come to pass on that day that the mountains shall drip with sweet wine’ (Joel 3:18).”

All recite:

Wine symbolizes the secret of Oneness. It symbolizes the joy of the Divine Presence.

Leader:

Drink the first cup of wine meditatively, while uttering a silent prayer: “God, let me know the oneness of all reality and feel the joy of your Presence.”

Lift the cup of white wine.

All recite:

Blessed art Thou, the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience; Creator of the fruit of the vine.

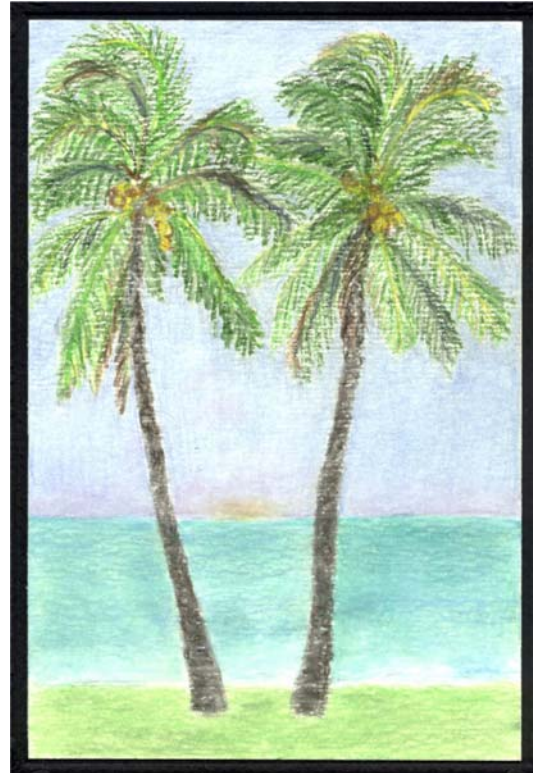
Drink the wine.

Then all recite:

The mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with it. (Amos 9:13)

Fruits with Shells

Fruits and nuts with shells include: pomegranates, nuts (such as walnuts, almonds, pecans, pistachios, Brazil nuts, and coconuts), oranges, grapefruits, mangos, avocados, pineapples, watermelons, cantaloupes, honeydew melons, bananas, and peanuts.



Leader

We'll now focus on the world of Action, *Asiyah*, represented by fruits with shells.

The Torah, and a number of Rabbis, often saw hints of heavenly meaning in the characteristics of fruit trees, fruit and nuts. One Rabbi suggested, "Some nuts are easily cracked, opening almost by themselves; others are middling nuts; others are hard to crack. So too with all of us: some give *zedaka*, or charity, willingly, some give when asked, but others are tough nuts. We should each ask ourselves: Which kind of nut am I?"

Eat fruits that have a thick, inedible rind or peel, and nuts

The Second Cup: Pale Pink Wine

Lift the cup of pale-pink wine.

All Recite:

Blessed art Thou, the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Drink the wine.

Leader:

We now ascend to the world of Formation, *Yetzirah*, represented by fruit with pits.

Fruits with Pits

Fruits with pits
include:
Dates, olives,
apricots, peaches,
plums, cherries,
loquats, jujubes,
hackberries



Jujubes (Chinese Dates) Jujube trees are among the rarest of all fruit trees in the U. S., however, in China they are the most commonly known fruit and rate as popular as the apple tree is in the U. S.

A participant recites:

No part of the palm tree is wasted; every part may be used: Its dates are for eating, its *lulav* branches are for waving in praise on *Sukkot*, its dried up branches are thatch for roofing, its fibers are for ropes, its leaves for sieves, and its planed trunks for house

beams. So it is with the Jewish people: Every one of our people is needed. Some are knowledgeable in *Tanach*, or the Bible; others in *Mishna*, or Jewish religious law, others in *Agada*, or legends, still others do many *mitzvot*, or good deeds, and others do charity (Bamidbar Rabba 3:1).

Eat fruits that have a pit.

Olives and Olive Oil

“The silver-green olive tree, an enduring companion and sustainer of humans, reaches back into antiquity. Planted in biblical times, it is still a presence today in the lands that ring the Mediterranean. An individual tree sometimes lives for up to four centuries, becoming a green monument to the long-gone gardener who planted it” Alice Thoms Vitale



The Third Cup: Reddish-Pink Wine

A participant recites:

The *Torah*, derived from the Hebrew verb *to guide*, provides us with several lessons from trees. The *Torah* portion that Debra studied for her *Bat Mitzvah* comes from the Book *Devarim*, or Deuteronomy, and considers this lesson:

“When you lay siege to a city and wage war against it a long time to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding an ax against any food producing tree. Do not cut down a tree in the field, unless it is being used by the men who confront you in the siege” (20:19).

This passage suggests that if we are mindful enough not to cut down trees during a siege, neither should we cut them down needlessly in times of peace. Jewish scholars have extended this commandment to cover all forms of wasteful destruction under the principle of *bal tashchit*, meaning do not unnecessarily destroy any creature or creation. So what first appears to be a commandment against destroying fruit trees during a siege has broadened into a commandment against any type of wasteful destruction.

The *Baal Shem Tov* provided mystic insight into the meaning of *bal tashchit*. He taught that everything in the world has in it a spark of the *Shechinah*, or “she who dwells within,” which gives that thing existence and vitality. Therefore, he said that a person should treat every creature and creation with reverence; they should not unnecessarily break or damage anything, because it is Godliness.

Lift the cup of reddish-pink wine.

All recite:

Blessed art Thou, the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, Creator of the fruit of the vine. May all creatures and creations be blessed for a good year.

Drink the wine.

Then all recite:

On Tu BeShvat we should learn to honor every creature and creation with reverence.

Look at the trees, look at the birds, look at the clouds, look at the stars... and if you have eyes you will be able to see that the whole existence is joyful. Everything is simply happy. Trees are happy for no reason; they are not going to become prime ministers or presidents and they are not going to become rich and they will never have any bank balance. Look at the flowers - for no reason. It is simply unbelievable how happy flowers are. ~Osho

Fruits that are Totally Edible

The seeds found in these fruits are considered edible:

Figs, grapes, raisins, carobs, apples, pears, blueberries, raspberries, quinces, kiwi, persimmons, and strawberries.



Leader:

We now ascend to the world of *Beriah*, or creation, represented by fruit that is totally edible. In this world, we are nearer to God as there is no obstacle to communion with the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience.

A participant recites:

Consider the Fig:

Rabbi Yohanan said: "What is the meaning of: 'One who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit' (Proverbs 27:18)? Why is the *Torah* compared to a fig tree? Figs on a tree do not ripen all at once, but a little each day. Therefore, the longer one searches in the tree, the more figs one finds in it. So too with the *Torah*: The more one studies it, the more knowledge and wisdom one finds."

Another participant recites:

Consider the Apple:

The *Zohar*, an important book of Jewish mysticism, says: "Just as apples have different colors, so the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience appears in different aspects." Thus, God appears in many aspects, according to one's needs.

Eat fruits that have no shell or pit and are totally edible.

The Fourth Cup: Red Wine

Leader:

According to Jewish law, when one brings a better kind of wine to the table, one makes a special blessing, not: “who creates the fruit of the vine,” but: “Blessed be the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, who is good and does good.” Accordingly, it is fitting to make this blessing over a fine red wine.

One makes a special blessing over wine, different from other drinks; and when a better wine is brought to the table, one shows an added appreciation for God’s goodness. Moreover Yitzhak Buxbaum explained that, when the blessing “God is good and does good” is said, one must drink the better wine with a companion. Rabbi Baruch Shalom Ashlag once gave details of why his father, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ashlag, only drank wine at a meal when he could make the blessing: “who is good and who does good.” “Because,” he said, “this blessing is about the greatest matter of faith there is, for we must believe that the Creator is good and does good.”

Jewish scholars believe this blessing further encourages us to emulate the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience both in being good and doing good. In bringing this goodness to others and ourselves we encourage the best of humanity. This is the primary lesson of Tu BeShvat.

All recite:

The Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience overflows with goodness. May I realize this in my own life and bring it in abundance to others.

Blessed art Thou, The Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, who is good and does good.

Drink the wine.

Fragrant Fruit

Fragrant fruit includes:

Apples, quince, pears, passion fruit, star fruit, mangoes, citrus, and kumquats.



Leader:

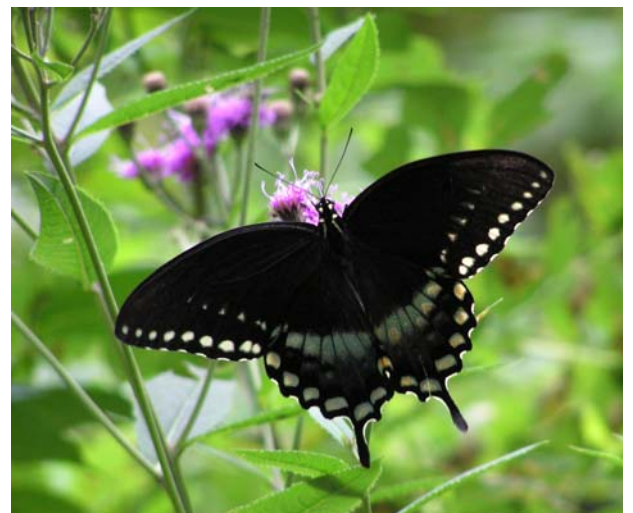
The world of God's nearness, *Atzilut*, can be suggested by a fruit's fragrant scent. According to many Rabbis, Godliness is fragrant. So inhale the fragrance of fruit and let us all recite the following blessing:

All recite:

Praised are you, God, Sovereign of the Universe, who gives a pleasant fragrance to fruit.

A participant recites:

Another way Tu BeShvat delights us: the *Kabbalah*, or mystical Jewish tradition, teaches that *Tiferet*, or Beauty, is one of God's attributes, and the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience, has filled the world with beauty to delight our eyes and other senses. Fruit, like flowers, butterflies, and birds not only provide utilitarian value but also fill the world with lovely colors and graceful shapes. Part of the joy of Tu BeShvat comes from the beauty of Nature itself, thus providing us a glimpse of Divine Beauty.



Conclusion of the Seder

Leader:

We should learn from the tree, for it grows in two directions at once: Its trunk, branches, and leaves continually strive upward, while its roots grow deeper and deeper. So must each of us continually grow through study and prayer. At the same time, we must dig into the work of this world: embracing *Shechinah*, or “she who dwells within,” we must serve our fellow human beings and fulfill the task of tending God’s Garden of Nature. We must care for the world around us: its animals – from mighty elephants and whales to the smallest insects – and its plants – from mighty oaks and sequoias to the humblest shrubs and grasses.

All participants recite:

May we go forth from this Tu BeShvat Seder renewed, purified, and healed, with a new heart and new eyes, to see the wonders of God’s Nature, with its trees of all kinds and shapes, and its fruit of all kinds, shapes and colors. And may we know, understand, and realize that the Power that Makes for Ever-Greater Richness of Experience fills the earth, that *this* is the Garden of Eden, and we are its caretakers.

Leader:

The Tu BeShvat Seder is now completed, according to its order and its customs. As we have observed and fulfilled the Seder, so may we merit to fulfill its inner meaning. May we enter Your Garden and rejoice in Your Presence.



Fruitful Literary, Traditional and Contemporary Quotes

*I love those skies, thin blue or snowy gray,
 Those fields sparse-planted, rendering meager sheaves;
 That spring, briefer than apple-blossom's breath,
 Summer, so much too beautiful to stay,
 Swift autumn, like a bonfire of leaves,
 And sleepy winter, like the sleep of death.*
 - Elinor Wylie

It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action.
 - Gandhi

Life without love is like a tree without blossom and fruit.
 - Khalil Gibran

As the poet said, "only God can make a tree" - probably because it's so hard to figure out how to get the bark on. ~Woody Allen

*Time-honored, beautiful, solemn and wise.
 Noble, sacred and ancient
 Trees reach the highest heavens and penetrate the deepest secrets of the earth.
 Trees are the largest living beings on this planet.
 Trees are in communion with the spiritual and the material.
 Trees guard the forests and the sanctified places that must not be spoiled.
 Trees watch over us and provide us with what we need to live on this planet.
 Trees provide a focal point for meditation, enlightenment, guidance and inspiration.
 Trees have a soul and a spirit. ~Lavenderwater*

The Origin of the Kabbalah

The origin of the Kabbalah centers around a short book titled "Sefer Yetzirah" (Book of Creation). The origin of the book is unknown, but it is known to have been used in the tenth century, but may have been composed as early as the third century. The book tells that God created the world by the means of thirty-two secret paths of knowledge that are the ten "sephirot" and the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It is believed the ten sephirot represent emanations from which the cosmos was formed.

Each of the ten emanations within the sephiroth is called a "sephiroth," and together they form what is called the Tree of Life. This Tree is the central image of Kabbalistic meditation; for again, each sephiroth describes a certain aspect of God, and taken together as the sephiroth they form the sacred name of God. The Tree also describes the path by which the divine spirit descended into the material world, and the path by which humankind must take to ascend to God.

Making one's way through the sephiroth is exceedingly difficult. Because each sephiroth is said to be divided into four sections that run the Four Worlds that compose the cosmos. They are *Atzilut*, the world of archetypes, from which come all manifestation of forms; *Beriah*, the world of creation, here the archetypal ideas become patterns; *Yetzirah*, the world of form, here the patterns are expressed, and *Asiyah*, the material world.

From: <http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/k/kabbalah.html>

Books Referenced in this Haggadah

Buxbaum, Yitzhak. 1998. A Tu BeShvat Seder: The feast of fruits from the tree of life. Flushing, NY: The Jewish Spirit Booklet Series.

Firestone, Tirzah. 2003. The receiving: Reclaiming Jewish women's wisdom. New York, NY: Harper-Collins Publishers, Inc.

Other Fruitful Customs

On Tu BeShvat it is customary to donate ninety-one cents or dollars to *tzedakah*, or charity, because as the Day of Judgment for trees, ninety-one is the numerical value of the Hebrew letters that make up the word *ilan*, or tree.

Tu BeShvat reminds us of the importance of trees. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi encourages us to go into our backyards and thank the trees that give off oxygen, and provide shade to our homes. In thanks and celebration we can blow a *shofar* for our trees.

Give to the Jewish National Fund (JNF). Since 1901, the JNF has planted over 240 million trees in Israel. To plant trees in Israel you can call 1-800-542-TREE (8733) or log onto www.jnf.org

It is also customary to make fruity, nutty, and Israeli-type dishes for this day. Below you'll find a cornucopia of traditional recipes for Tu BeShvat. Enjoy!



Recipes

Aunt Betty's Tzimmes

Ingredients

2 ½ to 3 lb. brisket
1 large onion, whole
1 lemon sliced
salt and pepper
water
2 lbs. dried mixed fruit
8 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and in chunks
2 lemons
honey
potato starch

Directions

Place brisket in heavy pot with onion, 1 sliced lemon and salt. Cover with water and cook covered 2 ½ - 3 hours until meat is tender, but not falling apart. Refrigerate overnight. Skim fat from meat. Add dried fruit and sweet potatoes. Remove onion. Slice remaining lemons and add to mixture. Cook covered until potatoes are tender. ** Add honey and season to taste. Remove cover and boil down to reduce liquid and thicken gravy. Mix potato starch with cold water and stir into mixture. Keep warm in oven.

** This dish can also be made without meat. Cut onion into chunks in bottom of baking dish, cut sweet potatoes into chunks and along with dried mixed fruit add to baking dish. Squeeze lemon and a bit of salt, cover with water and bake until potatoes are tender. From here, follow the directions above from the **.

Tu BeShvat Dried Fruit Compote

Kosher Recipe Bank: www.kosherdelight.com

Ingredients:

- 12 dried pitted prunes
- 12 dried apricot halves
- 6 dried pear halves, cut into ½ inch pieces
- 1-¾ c. apple juice
- 2 T. sugar
- 1 T. brandy (optional)

Directions:

Combine all ingredients in heavy saucepan. Bring to simmer over medium-high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Reduce heat to medium. Simmer until fruit is tender and juices are reduced to very thick syrup, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes. Yields 2 cups

Summer Fruit Compote

Betsy's B&B, Montpelier, Vermont

Ingredients:

- 1 pint strawberries, hulled and cut in ½ lengthwise
- 1-cup blueberries
- 2 kiwi, peeled, cut in ½ lengthwise and sliced
- 1 11 oz. can orange segments
- ¼ c. maple syrup
- 2 T. light rum or orange juice

Mix together and chill before serving. Serves 6



Tu BeShvat Salad

Kosher Recipe Bank: www.kosherdelight.com

Ingredients:

- 1 orange, peeled and cut into round slices
- 1 avocado, sliced
- 1 endive, separated
- 1 bunch watercress
- ½ head romaine lettuce
- 2 pitted dates, diced small
- Seeds of ¼ pomegranate or ¼ c. cranberries

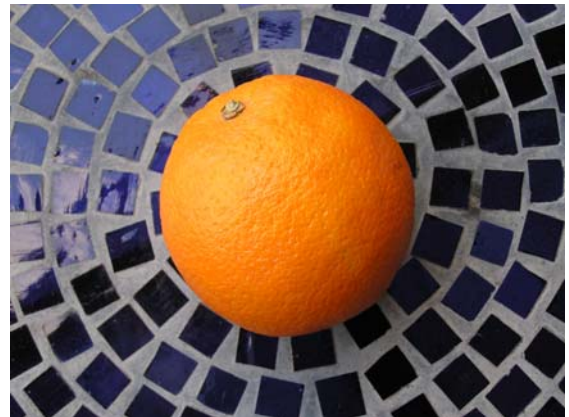
Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients in a salad bowl.
2. Just before serving, mix in salad dressing. Toss 15 times (in honor) of the 15 different kinds of fruits and nuts eaten on the 15th of Shvat). Serves 6

Salad Dressing

Ingredients:

- 2 T. balsamic or red wine vinegar
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- dash of salt
- dash of sugar
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 t. Dijon mustard
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- 5 T. olive or vegetable oil



Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients except oil.
2. Slowly whisk in oil and pour over salad.

Orange-Ginger Chicken with *Baharat*

Joan Nathan's "The Foods of Israel Today"

"This is a great dish, perfect for a dinner party. The beauty of it – besides the marvelous marriage of ginger and orange – is that you can do everything in advance, merely reheating just before your guests arrive."

Ingredients:

4 whole boneless, skinless chicken breasts	4 T honey
Salt to taste	1 ½ c. orange juice
1 T <i>baharat</i> **, or to taste	1 T grated fresh ginger
1 T ground ginger, or to taste	2 t. grated orange zest
4 T olive oil	2 T finely chopped, crystallized ginger
½ c. white wine	3 c. orange liqueur
2 oranges, peeled and sectioned	1 c. chicken broth

Directions:

1. Cut each chicken breast in half lengthwise. Mix together the salt, *baharat*, and ground ginger in a small bowl. Sprinkle each side of the halved chicken breasts with this spiced mixture.
2. Heat the oil in a heavy frying pan with a cover and sauté the chicken gently for a few minutes on each side, just to brown the outside. Remove the chicken from the pan.
3. Add the wine, orange liqueur, chicken broth, honey, orange juice, and fresh ginger to the pan. Bring to a boil and simmer for about 15 minutes to reduce slightly, until light syrup has formed. This can be done 1 day in advance.
4. Return the chicken to the sauce in the skillet and add the orange zest and crystallized ginger, cover, and simmer for about 5 minutes. Turn the breasts, and continue cooking for another 5 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through. Add the orange sections and heat just until warm. Serve the chicken with the orange segments on a bed of couscous or rice, with the sauce drizzled on top.

****Baharat:** often includes a mixture of paprika, chili, cumin, coriander, cinnamon, black pepper, allspice, nutmeg, cardamom, cloves, and salt. If you can't find the mixture, choose your favorites and include some pepper.

Date-Ginger Cake

Kosher Recipe Bank: www.kosherdelight.com

Ingredients:

1 c. all purpose flour
 1 t. baking powder
 ¼ t. baking soda
 1/3 c. parve margarine, softened
 1 t. grated fresh ginger or ½ t. ground ginger
 ½ c. sugar
 1 egg
 ½ c. orange juice
 2 T. water
 1 c. pitted whole dates, snipped
 2 T. all-purpose flour
 Orange Sauce (see recipe below)

Directions:

1. Grease and flour a 8x8x2-inch baking pan; set aside. Stir together the 1 c. flour, baking powder, and baking soda in a small bowl; set aside.
2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Place softened margarine and ginger in a medium mixing bowl; beat with an electric mixer on medium speed for 30 seconds. Add sugar; beat until fluffy. Add egg; beat well. Stir in orange juice and water.
3. Add flour mixture, beating on low to medium speed until combined. Toss dates with 2 T. flour and fold into batter. Spread batter evenly in prepared pan.
4. Bake in the preheated oven for 30 to 35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool slightly (about 30 minutes) in pan on a wire rack. Cut into squares. Serve with warm Orange Sauce. Serves 9

Orange Sauce: Stir ¼ c. sugar, 2 ½ t. cornstarch, 1 t. grated fresh ginger (or ½ t. ground ginger), and ¼ t. finely shredded orange peel in a small saucepan. Stir in ¾ c. orange juice. Cook and stir over medium heat till mixture is thickened and bubbly; cook and stir 2 minutes more. Remove pan from heat. Stir in 1 T. margarine, cut up, until melted. Cover pan and cool slightly. Serve warm. Makes about 1 cup

Soofer Family Iranian-Israeli Haroset
Joan Nathan's "The Foods of Israel Today"

"This flavorful version, with so many nuts, reminds me of the talmudic suggestion as to the symbolism of *haroset*: that it represents the fruit trees under which Jewish women slaves enticed their husbands to make love, and thus propagated the Jewish people."

Ingredients:

1/3 c. shelled pistachio nuts	1 1/4 c. pomegranate juice
1/3 c. unblanched almonds	3 c. sweet red wine (about)
3/4 c. cashews	1 t. cinnamon
1/3 c. hazelnuts	1/2 t. cayenne pepper, or to taste
3/4 c. walnuts	1 t. ground cardamom
2 pears, peeled and quartered	1/2 t. ground cloves
2 red apples, peeled and quartered	1 t. ground coriander
3 c. seedless black raisins	1 t. cumin
1 c. seedless golden raisins	1 t. nutmeg
2-3/4 c. dates, pits removed	1 t. ground ginger

Note: this recipe yields 10 cups...I always cut it in half...(don't be afraid of the cayenne!)

Directions:

1. Roast the pistachio nuts, almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, and walnuts by placing them in the microwave on medium power for about 5 minutes, stirring frequently.
2. Place the roasted nuts in a food processor fitted with a steel blade and process until coarsely ground. Add the pears, apples, raisins, and dates and pulse until the nuts are finely ground and the fruits coarsely chopped. Gradually add the pomegranate juice, continuing to process until thick. Add the wine and the spices and process once more to incorporate, adjusting to taste.

Cousín Marcía's Jewish Apple Cake

Mix together and set aside:

5-6 thinly peeled, cored and sliced apples

3 T. sugar

2 t. cinnamon

Mix together:

3 c. unsifted flour

1 c. oil

1 t. salt

2-½ t. vanilla

2-¼ c. sugar

4 unbeaten eggs

1/3 c. orange juice

3 t. baking powder

Grease a mold tube pan. Start with a layer of batter, then a layer of apples; repeating until all batter and apples are used ending with batter. Bake at 350 degrees F for 1-½ hours or until toothpick comes out clean. Check at 1-¼ hours to see if cake is ready.

Mom's Cranberry Relish

Ingredients:

1 package of fresh cranberries

2 seedless oranges, unpeeled

Start with 1-cup sugar, and then add to taste

Directions:

Place cranberries and oranges in food processor and chop, and then add sugar.

About the Author

Dr. Debra Whitall currently works in Washington, D.C. as a Social Scientist with the Forest Service National Partnership Office. She earned her PhD in Public Administration and Policy from Portland State University and has worked for the Forest Service 27 years. She has worked extensively in California and Oregon, as well as a year in SE Australia. She has held various positions from hydrologist and soil scientist to monitoring coordinator and policy analyst. She and her husband currently live in Arlington, Virginia.