



Middle School Tu B'Shevat Seder

AGES: Middle School

GOAL: Celebrate Tu B'Shevat, learn history, significance of holiday

MATERIALS: 7 pages of the unit package, map, pictures of *Shivat Haminim*, foods made from *Shivat Haminim*: wheat, dates, grapes, figs, olives, pomegranates, and barley

LENGTH OF TIME NEEDED TO CONDUCT THE PROGRAM: one hour

INSTRUCTIONS: See below.

ABOUT OUR SCHOOL: *Beth Am Temple: "A Traditional View for the Modern Jew." Beth Am Temple is a vital, growing Reform congregation founded in 1963. Our new religious school classrooms and offices were completed in 2001. Our members come from Rockland and Northern Bergen County. This geographical diversity enables both our children and our adult members to expand their relationships throughout the Jewish community.*



continued...





Middle School Tu B'Shevat Seder

If this Seder occurs on Friday evening begin here:

Please join me and say the blessings over the Shabbat candles.

Blessed are You Adonai, Sovereign of the Universe, who sanctifies us with Your commandments and commands us to light the candles of Shabbat.

1. Winter is a funny time to celebrate Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish Arbor Day. Although Tu B'Shevat in New York, New Jersey and the northeast of this country hardly herald the beginning of spring, in Israel, Tu B'Shevat signals the end of the rainy season and sees the first buds begin to appear. Bare branches still silhouette the sky and the earth seems to shiver instead of blossom here, but in Israel flowers begin to appear and the earth reawakens.

2. Please join me in reciting the *Shehehyanu* to welcome the new season.

Blessed are You Adonai, Ruler of the Universe, who has kept us alive and sustained us, and has brought us to this special time.

3. Tu B'Shevat is a minor holiday, but one that is filled with festivity and meaning. The name of the holiday comes from the day on which it occurs on the Hebrew calendar, the 15th of the Jewish month of Shevat. The Hebrew letters that spell the number fifteen can be pronounced as "Tu."

4. Just as Rosh Hashana is the birthday of the world, Tu B'Shevat is honored as a birthday for trees. From the first centuries of the Common Era, we learn that Tu B'Shevat was the day that separated one agricultural year from the next.

5. One of the ways Tu B'Shevat is celebrated is with a special ritual

called a Seder, which means "order." The Tu B'Shevat Seder was developed in the 16th century by Jewish mystics called "Kabbalists," who used the Passover Seder as their model.





6. At the original Tu B'Shevat Seder, with the appropriate prayers, the Kabbalists would consume various types of food and drink, each of which would be given a symbolic meaning.
7. The Four Questions asked for Tu B'Shevat are similar to those of Passover:
 - Why is this day different from all other days?
 - Why do we especially eat fruits that grow in Israel on this day?
 - Why today do we think about conserving and sharing?
 - Why do we speak of planting today when in many parts of the world, it is wintry and cold?
8. It also offers us another opportunity to identify with our homeland, Israel. Tu B'Shevat was first discussed in the Torah, Talmud, Kabbalah, it renewed its importance when Israel was established as the modern state of Israel.
9. Tu B'Shevat is also a day of national pride, when our brothers and sisters in Israel recall how the early pioneers worked the land. Throughout Israel's modern history, school children have celebrated the holiday with ceremonies for the planting of trees.
10. Today we celebrate Tu B'Shevat to thank God for the gifts of creation, especially foods that grow on trees and the beauties of nature we enjoy. The holiday also reminds us of our responsibility to care for the earth that God created in order to preserve it for future generations.
11. To help us identify with Israel and Tu B'Shevat, please buckle your seat belts and come to Israel with us now. Often Tu B'Shevat is symbolically presented through the The Seven Species, *Shivat Haminim*. They are wheat, dates, grapes, figs, olives, pomegranates, and barley.





12. *Hittah*: Wheat (Please stand on MAP and hold picture of species)
Wheat grows in the shfela plains, the low lands south from the Tel Aviv Jerusalem line.
13. In every society, wheat represents survival. Wheat represents a staple of life. It is basic to breads, crackers and many other nourishing foods. Many of us take the food on our table for granted, while others who are less fortunate are not even guaranteed simple survival.
14. Please recite with me: *Im ein kemah, ein Torah*.
Literally, this verse means, "Without wheat flour, there is no Torah."
15. If you can't nourish your body, you can't nourish your soul; if you can't feed yourself, you can't find time to study.
16. Think about a mitzvah: Estimate the cost of a week's worth of food and give 10 percent to an organization such as Mazon - A Jewish Response to Hunger, a national organization that gives money to local groups that feed the hungry.
17. A Turkish custom related by Rabbi Hayyim Palache, who lived in Izmir in the 1800s, was to give 91 coins as tzedakah, or charity, on Tu b'Shevat, 91 being the gematria, or numerical equivalent, of the Hebrew word *ilan* (tree).

Please recite *hamotzi* together and eat a wheat cracker or a piece of bread made from wheat.
**Blessed are You Adonai, Ruler of the Universe,
who brings forth bread from the earth.**

18. *Se'orah*: Barley (Please stand on MAP and hold picture of species)
Barley grows in the North Negev regions, between Beer Sheva and the Mediterranean. Barley is also a staple food, but its worth is often unrecognized or undervalued. The omer offered between Passover and Shavuot was a measure of barley, according to rabbinic tradition. While we remember the omer to this day by counting 49 days between Passover and Shavuot, we've forgotten the barley.





19. The Torah teaches us: “If a person consecrates any land to God, its value will be assessed in these terms: 50 shekels of silver to a measure of barley seed.” (Lev. 27:16)
20. Let’s take a moonlight walk around the block. Pay special attention to the way the trees whisper, the clouds scuttle across the sky. Collect anything you can find in a small basket - pine cones, seedlings, pebbles, twigs - and use it as a table decoration. Give a plant to someone who is not appreciated enough - a parent, teacher, friend, sibling, Rabbi, Cantor, Principal or even your gardener!
21. Please recite the blessing together and eat anything made from or with barley.
**Blessed are You Adonai, Ruler of the Universe,
who creates a variety of sustenance.**
22. *Gefen*: Grapes (Please stand on MAP and hold picture of species)
Vine - grows south of Yerushalaim, the Judean hills region with Hebron in the center. Like grapes that grow in clusters on a vine, we, too, live in communities essential to our well-being. Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol in the 11th century in Spain said, “The world is a tree and human beings are its fruit.”
23. Participate in a town beautification project or create one of your own. Buy trees or plants, invite neighbors and create a ceremony. Recite the blessing, traditionally used on seeing trees in blossom: **“Praised are You, Adonai, Ruler of the Universe, who has fashioned a world without deficiency, and has placed within it wonderful creatures and beautiful trees for the delight of human beings.”**
24. Besides sending money for planting trees in Israel, buy Israeli products like Carmel tomatoes, jams, chocolates and wines. Create a *genizah* - a room, closet or box in which to store sacred texts that refer to God. It is a custom not to discard sacred Hebrew texts

- symbols of Jewish continuity - but to store and later bury them in a *genizah* to accord them the same dignity as human beings. Give old Hebrew texts to your synagogue’s *genizah*, or bury them in your own yard so they go back to the earth.





25. Four cups of wine or grape juice represent the changes in the seasons - dark red, light red, pink and white. Four glasses of wine or grape juice are consumed during the Seder:
- White to signify the Renewal of Trees
Please recite the blessing, lift your cup of wine, and sip some wine or grape juice.
 - Pink for the Renewal of Israel
Please pour a little of red wine into your white wine, lift your cup of wine, and sip some wine or grape juice.
 - Light red for Israel's Spring Fruit
Please pour a little of white wine into your red wine, lift your cup of wine, and sip some wine or grape juice.
 - Dark red for the Cup of Thankfulness for the harvest- Please recite the blessing, lift your cup of RED wine, and sip some wine or grape juice.

**Blessed are You Adonai, Sovereign of the Universe,
who creates the fruit of the vine.**

26. *Te'edah*: Fig

(Please stand on MAP and hold picture of figs)

Figs grow in the North of Jerusalem called the Shomron region. A *midrash* (Rabbinical story) teaches that the Torah is like a fig. Every fruit has some inedible part, but all parts of the fig are good to eat.

27. In the Prophets, we read that following the paths of Torah will hopefully lead to an era of peace, a time when “every person will call to his neighbor from under his vine and fig tree.” (Zechariah, 3:10).

28. Study or read together the biblical story of creation. Study and discuss the following midrash about Adam and Eve: "The Holy One took the first human, and passing before all the trees of the Garden of Eden, said: ‘See My works, how fine and excellent they are!

All that I created, I created for you. Consider that, and do not corrupt or desolate my world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you.’ ” (Kohelet Rabbah)





29. *Rimon*: Pomegranate

Pomegranates are indigenous to the Carmel and Haifa region of Israel.
(Please stand on MAP and hold picture of pomegranate)

Rabbis suggested that if you count the seeds of the pomegranate, you will find 613, more or less - the number of *mitzvot* (commandments) in the Torah.

“May we be as full of mitzvot as the pomegranate is full of seeds.” This verse, recited during the traditional Sephardic Seder on Rosh Hashana, reflects the classic connection between the pomegranate and mitzvot.

Choose one *mitzvah* (commandment) to follow for a week. One of the most appropriate for Tu B'Shevat is *bal tashhit*, do not waste. Take small portions of food. Conserve resources: Don't waste water, paper, electricity, or even money. Recycle.

30. *Zeit*: Olive

(Please stand on MAP and hold picture of olives)

Green, black, pitted, or kalamata Olives grow in the Galilee region. Since the time of Noah and the flood, the olive branch has been a sign of hope for an enduring future.

“God fed Israel honey from the crag and [olive] oil from the flinty rock.” (Deut. 32:13). Olive trees grow anywhere - even under the most adverse conditions. As olive trees stand firm in all kinds of terrain, so Israel will endure and remain strong no matter what the circumstance. Sing the classic Tu B'Shevat song, “*Atzei zeitim omdim*” (The olive trees are standing).

If there is someone you've hurt, near or far, extend the olive branch. Send a jar of olives, a container of olive oil, or any food made with olives, along with a note of explanation.





31. *D'vash*: Dates

Dates and honey grow along the Jordan valley, Kinneret and all the way down to the Dead Sea and Eilat

Let's consider our concern for living things (*Tz'aar Ba'alei Hayyim*) - While originally d'vash referred to the honey-like date syrup, today honey comes from the hard work of bees, the most humble of creatures.

Once, when Rav Abraham Kook was walking in the fields, lost deep in thought, the young student with him inadvertently plucked a leaf off a branch. Rav Kook was visibly shaken by this act, and turning to his companion he said gently, "Believe me when I tell you I never simply pluck a leaf or a blade of grass or any living thing, unless I have to." He explained further, "Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song and breathing forth a secret of the divine mystery of the Creation." For the first time the young student understood what it means to show compassion to all creatures. (*Wisdom of the Mystics*)

If you have a pet, feed it before you eat. Make sure its water dish is filled and clean. Volunteer at a local animal shelter. Try not to buy products that are animal-tested or that exploit endangered species. Please join me and recite the blessing and nibble on a date.

**Blessed are You Adonai, Ruler of the Universe,
who creates the fruit of the tree.**

To conclude the Seder, recite the following verse:

L'Adonai ha-aretz u-m'lo'ah. (Psalms 24:1).

The Earth and all its fullness belong to God. We are the caretakers of the Earth,
and it is up to us to protect and preserve its beauty.



Happy Tu B'Shevat!