

סדר ט"ו בשבט

Tu B'shvat Seder

INTRODUCTION

Tu B'Shvat is the "New Year for the Trees." As in all other events in the Jewish calendar, Tu B'Shvat offers a unique opportunity for insight into living and personal growth. Throughout the centuries, Kabbalists have used the tree as a metaphor to understand God's relationship with the spiritual and physical worlds. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, in his 18th century classic "The way of God," teaches that the higher spiritual realms are roots that ultimately manifest their influence through branches and leaves in the lower realms.

In the 16th century, the Kabbalists of Tzfat compiled a Tu B'Shvat "*seder*," somewhat similar to the seder for Passover. It involves enjoying the fruit of the tree, 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 the bounty that we so often take for granted, and to develop a good and generous eye for the world around us.

The seder presented here is based primarily on the Kabbalistic work, "*Chemadat Yamin*," later published Separately under the title "*Pri Aitz Hadar*."

THE SEDER BEGINS

The leader asks:

Why do we celebrate the new year of the fruit trees on Tu B'Shvat?

A participant says:

Since the Holy Temple was destroyed, the Jewish people could no longer bring the first fruit (*Bikkurim*) trees to Jerusalem. On Tu B'Shvat we offer instead the "Fruit of our lips," to praise God for all the fruit trees in the world.

Tu B'Shvat marks a new period for taking tithes, a portion of which is given to the poor. Therefore: "When a person is privileged to eat in the presence of God, he must show his appreciation by giving charity to the poor and feeding them, just as God in his bounty feeds him."

(*"Zohar"- Parshat Trumah*)

A participant says:

The Mishnah in Tractate Rosh Hashanah says that Tu B'Shvat is the New Year for the TREE (singular). This reference to a singular tree alludes to "The Tree"- the Tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

"One should intend that he is eating at the celestial table before God, in the Garden of Eden before the Divine Presence." (*Raishit Chochma- Shar Hakedusha*).

Take a few moments and think deeply about being in the Company of God ... sitting at His table ... experiencing the sublime Spiritual pleasure of a relationship with the Creator himself.

A participant says:

Man's very name, "Adam", is derived from the word Earth "adama." While man is at once the pinnacle of creation, the master and caretaker of the world, he is also dependent on the Earth for his most basic needs. The Torah, in outlining the negative commandment of destroying fruit trees, refers to man himself as a "tree of the field" (Deut. 20:19). Our sages learn from this verse a prohibition against any needless destruction. In other words, fruit trees serve as the archetype for man's relationship and responsibility to his environment.

It was through a mistake in eating fruit that caused Adam and Eve's exile from the Garden of Eden. Eating fruit is a metaphor for our interaction with this world. Correct usage leads to a perfected world and spiritual bliss. Misuse leads to destruction and spiritual degradation. The seder of Tu B'Shvat is our opportunity to rectify the past iniquity and return once again to our rightful place within the Garden.

A participant says:

Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote: "My teacher (the holy Arizal) used to say that one must intend while eating the fruits (at the Tu B'Shvat Seder) to repair the sin of Adam who erred by eating fruit from the tree." Partaking in the physical world inappropriately, for its own sake, lowers us spiritually and diminishes our enjoyment. The solution is to engage in the physical world as a means to a worthy end- i.e. appreciating the greatness of God who created all.

**" אתה תקום תרחם ציון כי עת לחננה ,
כי בא מועד "**

THE SEDER CONTINUES

A participant says:

In the Talmud, Rabbi Abbun said: "In the next world, a person will be judged for all the fine fruit that he saw but did not eat".

Rabbi Elazar fulfilled this teaching. Although he was very poor, he saved up small coins which he kept in a special pouch, to purchase new fruits as they came into season. He tried to make a blessing over every kind of fruit at least once a year.

The Talmud says that someone who eats and doesn't say a blessing is considered a thief. Why? Because every aspect of God's creation is inherently holy. So when one eats a piece of fruit, he is depriving the world of a piece of holiness. A blessing re-infuses the world with holiness.

Eating without a blessing, however, lowers the level of holiness in the world without replacing the loss- and is regarded as theft. (Maharal of Prague)



A participant says:

The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidut, was once visiting the home of Rabbi Yaakov Koppel. When Rabbi Yaakov danced in front of his Shabbat table for an hour, the Baal Shem Tov asked him to explain this unusual custom of dancing. Rabbi Yaakov replied: "Before I taste physical food, I absorb the food's spiritual essence. In doing so, I become so excited that I sing and dance!"

The leader says:

Everything in the physical world is a metaphor for a deeper spiritual concept. Eating is to the body, what knowledge is to the soul. When we eat, we internalize the good part of the food – and through that we grow and develop. Similarly, when we learn a new piece of information, we must "chew it over," digest it, and integrate it into our very being. Only then can we truly grow in wisdom and spirituality.

GRAIN PRODUCTS

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)

We begin by eating bread or cake. When Tu B'Shvat falls on Shabbat, it is appropriate to incorporate the seder into one of the Shabbat meals, using challah as the bread.

The leader says:

Before saying the blessing, let us pause and reflect on our good fortune. God has given us innumerable blessings, enabling us to enjoy this food. God could easily have arranged for humans to be nourished by photosynthesis like plants, or by eating bland oatmeal, or by taking pills. Instead, He 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 and digest the food.

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 sublime is our pleasure.

.....

If eating **cake or cereal**, recite the following blessing:

"ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא מיני מזונות"

"Blessed are you god, King of the Universe, who creates species of nourishment."

.....

"שירו למלך"

ועתה בנים שירו שירו
ועתה בנים שירו למלך
ועתה בנים שירו שירו למלך, תפארת מפואר

ואשרי עבדיו אוי עבדיו
המשמיעים קול שבחו
ואתה בנים, שירו שירו למלך
שירו שירו למלך

A participant says:

"The verse says: 'When you eat the bread of the Land, you shall bring an offering to God' (Numbers 15:19). This refers to the waving (*tenufah*) of the Omer. *Tenufa* can be read as *Tenu Feh*- "give a mouth." The mouth is symbolic of the honor we give God. Hence the Omer was waved to show that we give God this "mouth", since the chief praise of God is when the Jewish people give Him honor and glory.

"Why was the Omer made from barley and not from wheat? Because barley ripens first. Wheat (*Chita*) is the more perfect food, being symbolic of the elimination of sin (*Chet*). There are those who say that wheat is the plant with which Adam sinned." ("Zohar"- Balak 189a)

FRUIT

On Tu B'Shvat, it is customary to eat the fruit by which God himself praises the Land of Israel. As the verse says: "The trees have borne their fruit, fig tree and vine have yielded their strength. Children of Zion be happy, rejoice in the Lord, your God." (Yoel 2:22-23)

If you have a preference, eat the fruits in the order you most enjoy. Otherwise the order of eating should be: olives, dates, grapes, figs, pomegranates.

Say the following blessing and then eat one of the fruits:

"ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ"

"Blessed are you God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the tree."

If there is a seasonal fruit at the table which you have not yet tasted this season, say the following additional blessing before eating the fruit:

"ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה"

"Blessed are you God, King of the Universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."

לך אתן את הארץ הזאת...

"כי את כל, את כל הארץ אשר אתה רואה
לך לך, לך אתננה ולזרעך עד עולם

לך אתן את הארץ הזאת, את הארץ, הארץ הזאת
וברך כל מיני תבואתה לטובה, ותן ברכה על פני האדמה"

Take each fruit one by one, as the appropriate paragraph below is recited. Enjoy the many unique flavors and textures. Reflect on the fact that the Creator of time and space wants us to take pleasure in everything that He put into the world.

Participants take turns saying the following paragraphs:

OLIVES:



God called your name 'a green olive tree, nice and beautiful fruit.' (Jeremiah 11:16)

Rabbi Yehoshuah Ben Levi said: "Why is Israel compared to an olive tree? Because just as the leaves of an olive tree do not fall off in the summer nor in the winter. So too, the Jewish people shall not be cast off- neither in this world nor in the world to come." (Talmud- Menachot 53b)

The Sages taught: "Just as olive oil brings light into the world, so do the people of Israel bring light into the world." (Midrash- Shir Hashirim Raba 1:2)

DATES:



"The righteous shall flourish like a Palm tree" (Psalms 92:13). The righteous are fruitful and sweet, just like a date palm."

"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.

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

GRAPES:



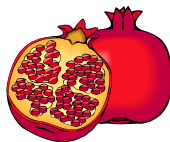
"Just as a vine has large and small clusters with the large ones hanging lower, so too with the Jewish people: Whoever labors in Torah and is greater in Torah, seems lower than his fellow (due to his humility)." (Midrash – Vayikra Raba 36:2)

FIGS:



Rabbi Yochanan said: "What is the meaning of 'He who tends a fig tree who will eat its fruit'? (Proverbs 27:18) Why is the Torah compared to a fruit 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 he finds. So too with Torah: The more one studies, the more knowledge and wisdom one finds." (Talmud- Eruvin 54a)

POMEGRANATES:



"Let us get up to the vineyards. Let us see if the vine has flowered, if the grape blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates have budded. There I will give you my love."
"If the pomegranates have budded." These are the little children who study Torah and sit in rows in their class like the seeds of a pomegranate."
(Midrash- Shir Hashirim Rabba 6:11)

A participant says:

Rami Bar Yechezkel once came to Bnei Brak and saw goats grazing under a fig tree. Honey was dripping from the figs and milk from the goats- and they became intermingled. He said: "Behold, a land flowing with milk and honey!" (Talmud- Ketubot 111b)

Al Kol Elle

Al hadvash ve'al ha'okets
Al hamar vehamatok
Al biteynu hatinoket shmor eyli
hatov.

Al ha'esh hamevo'eret
Al hamayim hazakim
Al Ha'ish hashav habayta
min hamerkhakim

Chorus:

Al kol eyle, al kol eyle
Shmor nah li eyli hatov
Al hadvash ve'al ha'okets
Al hamar vehamatok.

Al na ta'akor natu'a
Al tishkakh et hatikvah
Hashiveyni va'ashuva
El ha'arets hatovah.

Shmor Eli al ze habayit
Al hagan, al hakhoma
Miyagon, mipakhad peta
Umimilkhama.

Shmor al hame'at sheyesh li
Al ha'or ve'al hataf
Al hapri shelo hivshil od
Veshene'esaf.

Chorus:

Merashresh ilan baru'akh
Merakhok nosher kokhav
Mish'alot libi bakhoshekh
nirshamot achshav.

Ana shmor li al kol eyle
Ve'al ahuvey nafshi
Al hasheket al habékhi
ve'al ze hashir.

על כל אלה

על הדבש ועל העוקץ
על המר והמתוק
על בתנו התינוקת
שמור א-לי הטוב.

על האש המבוערת
על המים הזכים
על האיש השב הביתה
מן המרחקים.

פזמון:

על כל אלה, על כל אלה,
שמור נא לי א-לי הטוב
על הדבש ועל העוקץ,
על המר ומתוק.
אל נא תעקור נטוע
אל תשכח את התקווה,
השיבני ואשובה
אל הארץ הטובה.

שמור נא-לי על זה הבית
על הגן, על החומה,
מיגון, מפחד פתע
וממלחמה.

שמור על המעט שיש לי
על האור ועל הטף,
על הפרי שלא הבשיל עוד
ושנאסף.

פזמון...



WINE

At the Tu B'Shvat Seder, it is traditional to drink four cups of wine, similar to the Passover seder.

- *First cup- pure white*
- *Second cup- pale pink (white with a drop of red wine)*
- *Third cup- darker pink (with more red added)*
- *Fourth cup- almost totally red (with only a drop of white)*

A participant says:

White wine represents nature's 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: "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 God's judgment as well as his kindness. We see God's design and goodness in the world with increasing clarity.

A participant says:

"Wine rejoices the heart of man." This refers to the wine of Torah. *Yayin* (Hebrew for wine) equals 70, the numerical value of *Sod*, meaning "secret." (Wine represents the hidden aspects of the Torah.) ("Zohar"-Parashat Pinchas).

A participant says:

The Talmudic section dealing with agriculture is called "trust in God." When a farmer plants a seed, trust in God gives him the strength to survive the winter. On Tu B'shvat he begins to see that trust rewarded.

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

Yerushalaim Shel Zahav

Avir harim tzalul kayayin
Vereiach oranim,
Nisa beru'ach ha'arbayim
Im kol pa'amonim.

Uvetardemat ilan va'even
Shvuyah bachalomah,
Ha'ir asher badad yoshevet
/nitzevet
Uvelibah chomah.

Chorus:
Yerushalayim shel zahav
Veshel nechoshet veshel or
Halo lechol shirayich ani
kinor.
x2

Eicha yavshu borot hamayim
Kikar hashuk reikah,
Ve'ain poked et har habayit
Ba'ir ha'atikah.

Uvame'arot asher basela
Meyalelot ruchot,
Ve'ain yored el yam hamelach
Bederech Yericho.

Chorus...
Ach bevo'i hayom lashir lach
Velach lik'shor k'tarim,
Katonti mitze'ir bana'ich
Ume'acharon ham'shorerim.

Ki shmech tzorev et
hasfatayim
Keneshikat saraf,
Im eshkachech Yerushalayim
Asher kulah zahav...

Chorus...

Chazarnu el borot hamayim
Lashuk velakikar,
Shofar kore behar habayit
ba'ir ha'atikah.

Uvame'arot asher baselah
Alfei shmashot zorchot,
Nashuv nered el yam
hamelach

ירושלים של זהב – נעמי שמר

אוויר הרים צלול כיון
וריה אורנים
נישא ברוח ערביים
עם קול פעמונים

ובתרדמת אילן ואבן
שבוייה בחלומה
העיר אשר בדרד יושבת
ובלבה חומה

ירושלים של זהב ושל נחושת ושל אור
הלא לכל שיריך אני כינור.

חזרנו אל בורות המים
לשוק ולכיכר
שופר קורא בהר הבית
בעיר העתיקה.

ובמערות אשר בסלע
אלפי שמשות זורחות
ושוב נרד לים המלח
בדרך יריחו.

ירושלים של זהב ושל נחושת ושל אור
הלא לכל שיריך אני כינור.

אך בבואי היום לשיר לך
ולך לקשור כתרים
קטונתי מצעיר בניך
ומאחרון המשוררים.

כי שמך צורב את השפתיים
כנשיקת שרף
אם אשכחך ירושלים
אשר כולה זהב...

ירושלים של זהב ושל נחושת ושל אור
הלא לכל שיריך אני כינור.

Conclusion

A participant says:

"Rabbi Abba taught: There is no more revealed redemption- no greater indication of the impending redemption- than that which the verse (Ezekiel 36:8) states: "And you, mountains of Israel, you shall give forth your branches and you shall bear your fruit for my people Israel, for they shall soon come." (Talmud- Sanhedrin 98a)

Rashi explains: When the Land of Israel will give fruit bountifully, this is an indication of the impending redemption, and there is no greater indication than this.

We have come to the end of the Tu B'Shvat seder. We have only touched the surface of the true meaning of the holiday and of the significance of trees and fruit in God's creation. That is the beauty of the Jewish calendar. Each year we celebrate the same holiday, yet each year we grow and develop many new insights.

The rest of the evening is spent singing and learning Torah.

Next year in Jerusalem!

" לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה "