

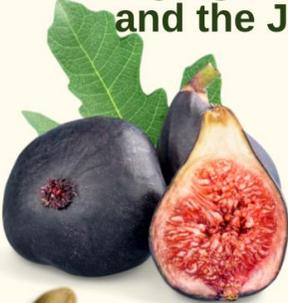


Happy
Tu



B'Shevat

Sponsored by
Chabad House of Western Michigan
Congregation Ahavas Israel, Temple Emanuel,
and the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids



15 Shevat 5782
January 16, 2022

Virtual Via Zoom

Song: Hashkeidiyah Porachat

(The almond tree is blooming beneath the golden sun. Birds sing from every roof telling us the time has come. Tu B'Shevat has come, the holiday of trees.)

Winter is with us. Nature seems asleep. The trees stand with black and brown branches against the pale winter sky.

In the land of Israel spring is almost here. Flowers begin to dot the fields. Almond trees begin to blossom. Heavy winter rains are over, gentler showers fall; sap begins to rise in trees.

Jews there and here and everywhere celebrate Tu B'Shevat, a new year for trees.

On Tu B'Shevat our ancestors looked forward to the pink flowers of spring, the red and yellow fruit of summer when they would bring gifts to the Temple and provide for the poor.

We too rejoice at the renewal of life and thank God for the blessings of branch and bud.

What is this day?

In Leviticus we read new trees should not be harvested for three years; the fruit of four-year-old tree should be set aside as a gift to God; and the fruit of five-year-old trees may be eaten. The Talmud established this day as the birthday of all trees to help us fulfill that commandment.

In Deuteronomy we read, "A human being is a tree of the field." (Deut. 20:19). Proverbs depicts the Torah as a "Tree of Life to them that hold it fast" (Proverbs 3:17-18). And the mystics visualized God as a tree: with roots in creation and branches spreading far and wide...or perhaps God is the Root from Whom all blessings flow into the varied branches of creation.

Song-Eitz Chayim He (Proverb 3:17-18)

(It is a Tree of Life for those who hold it fast, and all its supporters are happy)

The Kabbalists created the seder of Tu B'Shevat as a tikkun, a ritual of repair. By eating fruits and nuts with special mindfulness we strive to repair our own spiritual brokenness and the brokenness of a world which is not yet as we and God most wish it to be.

This is a moment for us to relate to God in and through the natural world. Amid the snow of winter, let us reconnect with the world of root and leaf, affirming our faith that spring will come.

The Trees Choose Israel

When Hashem created trees, shrubs and grass, they were invited to choose where to grow and bloom. Most of them wanted to grow on great mountains, in lush quiet valleys. All wanted comfort and honor. The olive and the fig, the date and the pomegranate, wheat and barley all had a different request. "If we have found favor in Your eyes, plant us in a small dry land." "Why did you make this request?" asked Hashem. They answered, "We have heard that your people, the people of Israel, will be given the Land of Israel. It is our request that we may be permitted to help the people of Israel make the desert bloom, cover its fields with wheat and barley, grow green trees in its mountains and valleys. Then Israel will find shelter in their shade and eat from their fruit and dwell in their land in peace and security."

HaShem, we voice our praises for the world You have created, for the land of our people restored, for Torah which nourishes our souls. We now enjoy the fruits of Your world and we give thanks to You. HaShem, the flow of Your spirit makes all plants sprout, all trees bud. We praise You on this day for forming buds that bring luscious fruit.

May it be Your will, that as we eat fruit with love for You, new buds will form, and beautiful flowers and ripe fruit will grow in abundance. May the land give its plenty and trees of the field give their fruit.

The First Cup: White Wine-The Renewal of Trees

On this way-station of bleak white winter, when the trees' sap begins to rise, and the colorful flowers of the warm seasons when fruits ripen, we drink four cups of wine, each one redder than the one before, each showing that colors of the fruits deepen as the ripen, each one in praise of HaShem who renews the fruit of trees each year.

Blessing over the first cup of wine.

The First Fruit: Fruit with Shells

The first kind of fruit we eat has an outer shell, the almond. In Israel, the almond tree now blooms. Its white blossoms tinged with pink, brighten the countryside after the bleak colorless days of winter.

The almond tree has special significance for Tu B'Shevat. The word for almond in Hebrew, shekeydiah, which means to watch or wake. The almond tree is the first to awaken out of its winter sleep and by the fifteenth of Shevat it is already full of blossoms.

In addition to almonds, we eat also other kinds of fruits and nuts with shells. Shells protect what is inside. Removing the hard shell exposes a vulnerable inside. Sometimes we are like this fruit. We are hard on the outside, difficult to get to know, protected against possible hurt by others.

Blessing over the fruit with shells.

Once, while the sage Honi was walking along a road, he saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked him, "how many years will it require for this tree to give fruit?" The man answered that it would require seventy years. Honi asked, "Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat of its fruit?" The man answered, "I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted for me. I will do for my children." (Ta'anit 23)

I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree. A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed against the earth's sweet flowing breast; a tree that looks at God all day and lifts her leafy arms to pray. A tree that may in summer wear a nest of robins in her hair; upon whose bosom snow has lain; who intimately lives with rain. Poems are made by fools like me. But only God can make a tree. (Joyce Kilmer)

The Second Cup of Wine-Pink Wine-The Renewal of Israel

Gradually the earth warms and the Land of Israel changes its garment from white to pink as spring flowers appear in the mountains. The sun's rays shine upon our earth and thaw the frozen ground. We see in our cups the hint of springtime and the earth's reawakening.

Blessing over the second cup of wine.

The warmth of our world spreads into our lives. At work and away we make friends. We are ready to share ourselves with our neighbors, but only to a point. Like the date, we offer our outer being, as we protect the intimacy of our hearts.

When the Tanach speaks of "a land flowing with milk and honey," it refers to honey from the date palm, the tamar. The tamar is one of those trees which abound in blessing, for every part of it can be used by humans. For this reason, the rabbis compare the people of Israel to this tree.

Israel is like a date palm, of which none is wasted; its dates are for eating, its lulavim are for blessing; its fronds are for thatching; its fibers are for ropes; its webbing for sieves; its thick trunks for building, and so it is with Israel, which contains no waste. (Bereshit Rabbah 41)

In addition to dates, we eat all kinds of fruits that have hard pits inside and fruit on the outside.

Blessing over fruit with pits.

Song: Psalm 92: 13-14-Tzaddik Katamar

(The righteous shall flourish like palms, grow tall like cedars in Lebanon. Rooted in the House of God they shall be ever fresh and green, proclaiming that God is just, my Rock, in whom there is no wrong)

Rabbi Isaac told the following parable: A man was once wandering in the desert, hungry, thirsty and exhausted from the heat. He chanced upon a tree whose fruit was sweet, shadow was pleasant and had a brook flowing at its base. He ate the fruit, drank the water and rested in the shade. When he rose to leave, he addressed the tree, "O tree how can I bless you?"

If I were to say, "May your fruit be sweet," see, it is already sweet.

If I were to say, "May your shade be pleasant" it is already pleasant. And if I were to say, "May there be a brook at your feet," the brook is already there. My blessing will therefore be, "May all your saplings be like you." (Ta'anit 5)

The Third Cup-Light Red Wine-Israel's Spring Fruit

In the land of Israel, the first spring fruits ripen, strawberries, and apricots; red poppies and tulips cover the ground like a blanket, brightening the countryside.

Our wine is red but still with a hint of the winter's whiteness that we now see passing. As spring arrives the earth becomes soft. The farmers turn the soil and place their seeds in its moist warmth.

Blessing over the third cup of wine.

Have a look at these great blessed trees, who live only for the welfare of others, themselves facing the severity of stormy winds, heavy showers, heat and snow, all while protecting us from them. The birth of trees is one of the most blessed things in the world, as they contribute unreservedly to the well-being of all creatures. Just as no needy person ever returns disappointed from the house of a benevolent individual similarly do trees do for those who approach them for shelter. All their many parts, leaves, flowers, fruits, shadow, roots, bark, wood, fragrance, are useful to others. A tree does not withdraw its cooling shade even from the one who has come to cut it. (Bhagavata Purana)

Rabbi Abraham Kook, the first chief Rabbi of Israel, was once walking in the fields when a student accompanying him plucked a leaf off a tree. Rav Kook was visibly shaken. Turning to his companion he said, "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 fruit and vegetable world is singing a song and breathing forth a secret of the Divine mystery of Creation."

For the first time the young student understood what it means to show compassion to all creatures. Everything serves a purpose, every tree, fruit, and blade of grass are gifts to us to enhance our world. If we can master such sensitivity for the plant world, how much more so for the people around us.

Our friends become dearer. We can drop our defenses and open our hearts. Like the fig's fruit which is entirely edible, both freshly picked as well as thoroughly aged. Our actions become love as we share our joys and sorrows, our hopes, dreams and fears. Together we build a future.

Many fruits have parts that are inedible; dates have pits, watermelons have seeds, pomegranates have skin. But every part of the fig is good to eat. So it is with Torah. Every word can be savored.

In addition to figs, we enjoy other fruits that are entirely edible.

Blessing over fruits that are entirely edible.

Song: Ki Tavo-u

(When you come to the land and plant trees, each tree shall give its fruit and the land shall give its abundance. It is time to plant trees.)

I stand on the slenderness all fresh and fair,

I feel root firmness in the earth far down,

I catch the wind and loose my scent for bees that sack my throat for kisses and suck love.

What is the wind that brings my body over?

Wind? I am beautiful and sick. I long for rain that strikes and bites like cold and hurts,

Be angry, rain, for dew is kind to me when I am cool from sleep and take my bath.

Who softens the sweet earth about my feet,

Touches my face so often and brings water?

Where does she go, taller than any sunflower over the grass like birds?

Has she a root?

There are great animals that kneel to us, sent by the sun perhaps to help us grow.

I have seen death. The colors went away, the petals grasped at nothing and curled tight.

Then the whole head fell off and left the sky.

She tended me and held me by my stalk.

Yesterday I was well, and then the gleam,

The thing sharper than frost cut me in half.

I fainted and was lifted high. I feel waist deep in rain.

My face is dry and drawn.

My beauty leaks into the glass like rain.

When first I opened to the sun I thought

My colors would be parched. Where are my bees?

Must I die now?

Is this a part of life? (Karl Shapiro, "A Cut Flower")

Let the trees rustle in the summer on the mountain, on the slope of the valleys; let them fringe the roads and give shade by day to the wanderer and shelter to the tired laborer. (Chaim Nachman Bialik)

The Fourth Cup-Dark Red Wine-The Cup of Thankfulness

In summer the flowers are in full bloom, field and tree yield their fruit. Our wine is completely red. In its richness we sense the full glow of summer. The crops will grow, and the flowers will bloom. We drink this cup of wine in thanks for the richness of God's land.

Blessing over the fourth cup of wine.

There is a very old legend which teaches us that the things people do to one another have an impact on nature. The legend tells us that originally Hashem created each tree so that it could yield different kinds of fruit. In that way they produced hundred more different kinds of fruit than we have now. Then a terrible thing happened. Cain killed his brother Abel and the trees went into mourning. They refused to yield their fruit on account of their grief over Abel. Did not Hashem say that the voice of Abel's blood cries out from the ground and that the earth will no longer yield its full strength? From then on each tree would yield just one kind of fruit. Only in the world to come will they return to their full fruitfulness.

Master of the universe, grant us the ability to be alone; may it be our custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass, among all growing things, and there may we be alone and enter into prayer. There may we express all that is in our hearts, talking with the One to whom we belong. And may all grasses, trees, and plants awake at our coming. Send the power of their life into our words of prayer making whole our hearts and our speech (Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav)

May it be your will, our God and God of our ancestors, that our blessing and eating of fruits this day, inspire in us a deeper sensitivity to nature's gifts.

May the day soon come when the trees of Israel will renew themselves by blossoming and growing, and that we will see that living globe of our earth as a comfortable place for all Your creatures.

Song: Haskeidiyah Porachat

(The tree is blooming beneath the golden sun. Birds sing from every roof telling us the time has come. Tu B'Shevat has come, the holiday of trees.)

This Seder features readings from:

Haggadah for Tu B'Shvat written by Rabbi Mark Hurvitz

Seder Tu Bishvat: The Festival of Trees, written by Adam Fisher and published by the CCAR Press

Seder Tu BiShvat: A Haggadah for Celebrating the New Year of the Trees, written by Rachel Barenblat

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