

A note to the participant:

In ancient Israel, the 15th of Shevat -- in Hebrew, Tu B'Shevat -- was the day on which agricultural taxes were levied, in early spring so that one might easily assess what the coming harvest would bring. After the Second Temple was destroyed in the year 70 CE, Jews scattered across the globe yearned to link themselves in meaningful and spiritual ways to their ancient, lost home.

Obtaining fruits and nuts that grew in Eretz Yisrael served for many centuries as a physical connection to the land. Sixteen- and seventeenth-century Kabbalists -- Jewish mystics -- created an elaborate ritual, similar to the Pesach Seder, incorporating not only the fruits and nuts, but readings from the Tanakh, the Talmud, and the mystical Zohar. It is easy to understand how this age-old celebration of the trees has become, today, a time for planting new trees in Israel.

As well, Tu B'Shevat presents us all with a challenge and opportunity to celebrate another "fruit" we gather from trees ... homes. Tu B'Shevat is a time for us to renew our commitment to providing decent, affordable housing to all. In fact, Tu B'Shevat is clearly a time to reaffirm our commitment to caring for the entire planet. Trees, homes, and every other renewable or non-renewable resource, including the lives of billions of people and countless animals, are all our responsibility.

Tu B'Shevat comes each year, for us, in the dead of winter -- when nature lies dormant, awaiting spring's return -- calling us to conscience, and to assume and resume the task of being God's partner in the ongoing Creation of the world.

Creation

The holiday of Tu B'Shevat is celebrated in the middle of winter. The air is cold and the ground is frozen, sometimes even covered with snow. Most of the birds have flown off to warmer winter homes.

But in Israel, where Tu B'Shevat began more than two thousand years ago, spring has arrived. The winter rains are ending. The sap is beginning to rise, bringing food to the trees. Young buds appear, promising green leaves and the color-burst of flowers in bloom.

It gave God great joy to create our beautiful world -- the sky, the earth, the oceans and the rivers. The Midrash teaches us that God told the first human beings: "Look at how lovely My Creation is. Everything I have made, I have made for you. Enjoy it all. But be very careful. Don't hurt it in any way -- for if you do, there will be no one to repair it."

The festival of Tu B'Shevat is a celebration. We celebrate the beauty of our remarkable planet. But Tu B'Shevat is also a reminder. We are reminded that we must always take care God's beautiful Creation.

[blessing for Creation]

This Is Very Good

When God made the world, God made it full of light --
The sun to shine by day, the moon and stars by night.
God made it full of life -- lilies, oaks and trout,
Tiger and bears, sparrows, hawks and apes.
And God took clay from earth's four corners
To give it the breath of life, and God said:

This is very good! This is very good!
Man, woman and child -- all are good.
This is very good! This is very good!
Man, woman and child -- all are good.

Man, woman and child, resemble God.

Like God, we love. Like God, we think. Like God, we care.

Shabbat Candles

(Light Candles)

When God created the world, God knew that everything in it would need to rest. And so, the seventh day became Shabbat -- a day of rest.

On Shabbat, we are given time to see, and to feel, the beauty of God's world.

On Shabbat, we light candles -- to remind us to see, and to feel, that beauty.

As these candles give light and warmth to all who see them, so may we -- by the lives that we live -- give light and warmth to all who see us.

[candle blessing]

First Cup -- White

As in our Pesach Seder, here too we drink four cups of wine or juice. On Tu B'Shevat, however, we begin with a cup whose contents are white, reminding us of the snows of winter.

In time, snow and cold will give way to rain and warmth, and spring will burst forth with the color of renewed life.

With each additional cup, we will add more and more color. As the color grows deeper and richer, we will be reminded that although nature is now asleep, it will awaken in the spring and return to us the beauty and the gifts for which we give thanks.

We praise You, God, Creator of the universe, who causes juicy grapes to grow.

[full Kiddush]

(Drink First Cup -- White)

Second Cup -- Pink

In the early spring, the earth becomes warmer. The snow melts, and the ground begins to thaw.

We add a little red to our white cup as the earth changes its winter clothing, and spring flowers begin to appear. We praise You, God, Creator of the universe, who causes juicy grapes to grow.

[short kiddush]

(Drink Second Cup -- Pink)

[Side-by-side: Atzey Zeytim, Let's Go Plant Today]

Fruits of God's Earth

Three kinds of fruit grow in Israel.

Fruit with shells, fruit with pits, and those fruits we can entirely eat.

Israeli fruit with shells include nuts, pomegranates, oranges, grapefruit and etrogim.

Our rabbis teach us that God is present in all Creation. But like the outer shell which hides the sweet fruit inside, sometimes it can be difficult for us to see God in our world. Fruit with shells remind us that there is sweetness in everything.

Israeli fruit with pits include dates, olives, apricots, peaches and plums.

The mystical Kabbalah teaches us about fruit with pits. They are sweet and delicious on the outside, because of the strong, nurturing seed which hides deep within. We too are like the pitted fruit -- our lives are filled with happiness and creative spirit, but inside, we must keep our bodies healthy, so they can give us strength and energy.

Israeli fruit we can entirely eat include figs, grapes, strawberries, apples, pears and carob.

The Kabbalah teaches us about fruit we can entirely eat. There is no shell to hide the sweetness. There is no pit concealed within. The entire fruit is for us to enjoy. May the time not be distant ... when all the world will become like the fig or the grape, when it will be completely filled with the sweetness of human kindness, and its blessings will truly be available for all to enjoy.

[blessing of fruit]

(Enjoy Each Of The Three Kinds Of Fruit)

Third Cup -- Light Red

As early spring becomes late spring, the first fruits of Israel are ripening. Strawberries, melons and apricots are picked, while red flowers blanket the now-warmed earth.

Our third cup contains more red than white. As spring moves to summer, the ground is soft and the farmer plants seeds. Water, sunshine, and time will work in harmony to create new life. We praise You, God, Creator of the universe, who causes juicy grapes to grow.

[kiddush]

(Drink Third Cup -- Light Red)

Fourth Cup -- Dark Red

Summer arrives, and with it, the full color of an entire *world* in bloom!

Our fourth cup is completely red, reminding us of the deep, rich beauty our world gives to us. For blossoming flowers, for leaf-covered trees, and fields that are covered with crops which will become the food on our tables -- we praise You, God, Creator of the universe, who causes juicy grapes -- and all Creation! -- to grow.

[kiddush]

(Drink Fourth Cup -- Dark Red)

[Side-by-side: Eretz Zavot Chalav, This Pretty Planet]

Giving Thanks

Fueled by a million man-made wings of fire --
The rocket tore a tunnel through the sky --
And everyone cheered.

*Fueled only by a thought from God --
The seedling urged its way through the thickness of black.
And as it pierced the heavy ceiling of the soil --
Up into outer space --
No one even clapped.*

In the Talmud, a story is told of Honi, who once saw an old man planting a carob tree. Honi asked him how long it would take the tree to bear fruit. The man answered, "Seventy years." Honi then said to him, "Are you certain you will live another seventy years?"

The man said to Honi, "As my ancestors planted for me, I will plant for my children." As there are hope and life when we enter this world, there will be hope and life when we leave it.

May it be your will, O God, that all earth's trees be filled with beautiful buds and blossoms.

May they be renewed each year, to grow and to give the fruits of sweetness and goodness.

May we all take good care of Your world.

So we can share and enjoy the fruit of Your earth.

And may we each do what we can to secure our children's future -- especially including, on Tu B'Shevat, the planting of new trees -- a gift from us, to the children of the future.

[planting prayer]

(Come And Plant!)

It is customary to celebrate Tu B'Shevat by planting trees in Israel through the Jewish National Fund, the agency responsible for afforestation and land reclamation in Israel. To purchase trees, tree-planting forms may be obtained through our Religious School office.

[planting songs: Dreamer, It Is A Tree of Life, This Pretty Planet]

Ha-Motzi

[Ha-Motzi]

(Meal Is Served)

Birkat

[Birkat Hamazon]

[Follow with pages of take-home materials]

[Be sure "Avi Chai" notation is placed on back cover, inside or out]