Tu b’Shvat

Haggadah

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The Holy One led Adam through the Garden of Eden and
said: "I created all my beautiful and glorious works for your sake. Take heed not to corrupt and destroy My world."

May it be your will, our God and God of our ancestors, that our blessing and eating of the 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 the living globe of our earth as a comfortable home for all Your creatures.

(credit unknown)
Blessed are You Living-Breathing-Presence-Within-the-Universe our God, Sovereign of all space and time, who enables us to bring out the juice from the fruit of the vine.

[All drink the fourth cup of wine/grape juice.]

Artza alinu; K'var kharashnu, v'gam zara'nu; Aval od lo katzarnu.

We have gone up to the land; we have plowed and sown, but we have not yet harvested.

Once upon a time the trees decided to anoint one of themselves king. They said to the olive tree:

Reign over us.

The olive tree said to them,

"Should I leave my oil, with which God and the world are honored, to rule over the trees?"

Then the trees said to the fig tree:

Come you, and reign over us.

But the fig tree answered,

"Should I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit, to wear out myself ruling over the trees?"

Then the trees said to the vine:

Come and reign over us.

But the vine answered,

"Should I leave my wine, which cheers God and all the world to hold sway over the trees?"

Then all the trees said to the bramble:

Come you, and rule over us.

And the bramble answered, "If in truth you anoint me king over you, then you must come and take refuge in my shade, or else a fire will come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon."

( Judges 9:8-15)

For a thousand years we lived in Zion, but for two thousand years Zion lived in us. Throughout the exile and our wanderings, Zion was the center of our life. For a thousand years we lived in Zion, but for two thousand years we lived in Zion, yet we have not yet received our restoration of the fullness of life.

Our hope was to see the fulfillment of the biblical promise:

And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit thereof. (Amos 9:14)

Today we come together to reaffirm our bond with the life of Israel and rejoice in the rebirth occurring in our Land. Tu b'Shvat, the 10th of Shevat marks the awakening of nature after its winter slumber. Mazel tov to those who have planted trees.

Our hope was to see the fulfillment of the biblical promise:

they shall make gardens and drink the wine thereof; and they shall build houses and dwell therein; and they shall build houses and dwell therein; and I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, their sons, who were carried away captive among the nations. (Proverbs 3:17-18)

Just as Torah is a tree of life to those who hold fast, living trees are models for how we nurture our lives so that they may become pathways of pleasantness and peace. As we celebrate a new year for the trees, so let us examine our lives, the choices we have made, and our actions of the past year.

Human life springs from the tree.
I stand on slenderness all fresh and fair,
I feel root firmness in the earth far down,
I catch the wind and lose my scent for bees
That sack my throat for kisses and ... 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,
Who touches my face so often and brings water?
Where does she go, taller than any sunflower
Over the grass like birds?
Has she ... death. The colors when 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 ... 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")

Our drink is completely red. In its richness we sense the full
glow of summer. The crops will grow and the flowers will
bloom. We are about to leave our gathering to where the
reality of our lives will be a forest of willows.
We drink liquid earth. The liquid earth will
flow over the earth. The stop will change and the flowers will
Our drink is completely red. In its richness we sense the full...
Blessed are You Living-Breathing-Presence-Within-the-Universe our God, Sovereign of all space and time, who enables us to bring out the juice from the fruit of the vine.

[All drink the third cup of wine/grape juice.]

Our friends become dear. 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. Now, together we can raise a future.

Every fruit has in it something inedible; dates have pits, grapes have seeds, pomegranates have skin. But every part of the fig is good to eat. So it is also with Torah.

(Yalkut Shimoni Joshua 1)

Blessed are You Living-Breathing-Presence-Within-the-Universe our God, Sovereign of all space and time, who enables us to harvest the fruit of the tree.

[All eat the figs.]

The tender roots of the fig split the hard rock of the crag.

(source unknown)

Blessed are You Living-Breathing-Presence-Within-the-Universe our God, Sovereign of all space and time, who enables us to harvest the fruit of the trees.

[All eat the almonds.]

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, “I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted for me. So will I do for my children.”

(Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai used to say: “If you should have a sapling in your hand and be suddenly told that the Messiah has come, plant the sapling first and afterwards go to welcome the Messiah.”)

The tender roots of the fig split the hard rock of the crag.

(source unknown)

For Adonai your God brings you into a good land of brooks, of water, of fountains and springs flourishing in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates; a land of olive trees and honey.

(Deuteronomy 8:6-8)

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The tender roots of the fig split the hard rock of the crag.

(source unknown)

I think that I shall never see

A poem 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 poem lovely as a tree.
A poem tender, sweet, as a tree
I think that I shall never see

(Joyce Kilmer, “Trees”)
in his most warmth
becomes soft. The farmers turn the soil and place their seeds
without we see passsing. A spring arrives the earth
Now our drink is red with a hint of the winter’s

[III] the third cup with red wine/grape juice mixed with a few drops

May all your saplings be like you.
therefore be:
your fruit is already sweet, may your shade be pleasant — it is
already pleasant. And were I to say "May your fruit be sweet" —
see, it is already sweet. May your fruit be sweet, may your shade be pleasant.

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:
Oh tree how can I bless you?
If I were to say "May your fruit be sweet," see, it is already
sweet. Were I to say "May your shade be pleasant" — it is
already pleasant. And were I 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.

(Taanit 5)

[III] the third cup with red wine/grape juice mixed with a few drops

Blessed are You Living-Breathing-Presence-Within-the-
Universe our God, Sovereign of all space and time, who enables
us to harvest the fruit of the trees.

(Bereshit Rabbah 41)