

# Tu BiShvat Seder!

RW by Robert Weissberg

## *PREPARATIONS FOR THE SEDER:*

*Gather, wash, the three categories of fruit/nuts (non-edible peel/shells, edible outside, non-edible pits, fully edible), and have available the fragrant spices/oil, as per shopping list. Also, have white and red wine/grape juice ready.*

*Divide the categories of fruits and nuts into separate plates or bowls. Make the table setting appealing. Maybe a white or colorful table cloth. Consider showing your arrangement to the assembled group.*

## **Here we go!**

It is Winter, but the days are visibly longer! In the land of Israel, it is still raining, but a bit less than before. Deep in the earth, the roots of the trees are drawing in the water, and the sap is beginning to rise. The almond trees in Israel are already blooming! The 15th of Shvat, Tu BiShvat, marks the full moon of Shvat, roughly midway between the full moons of Tevet and Adar. So, at this time, the turn of the year, mid-Winter, has arrived. Tu BiShvat, designated in Talmud as the ***New Year For Trees***, begins a three-month series (in years without a leap year) of holidays that occur on the mid-month full moons that culminate in Passover.

Shvat is a time of the early warming the world, and Tu BiShevat is a day to welcome and honor the rising sap—the water in the trees that allows life to return. Tu BiShevat represents the rising life force as the year moves toward spring—this day is a celebration of the inner fire that waits to burst into air. — *adapted from Rabbi Jill Hammer*

Over the centuries, Jews found ways to recognize and honor this special time in the year, although not commanded in Torah or Mishna as such, other than designating it as the New Year for trees. A practice developed during the 1500's among a circle of mystics in the town of Safed (Tzvat) in Palestine/Israel, to celebrate and taste, accompanied by proper

blessings, the fruits of the Land of Israel, including figs, dates, grapes, olives, pomegranates, along with almonds, pistachios, and other fruits and nuts. The mid-winter fruit feast, accompanied by white and red wine, and the study of sacred texts (spiritual wine), developed into a seder-like celebration. The physical elements of the seder, as with the seder of Pesach, were linked symbolically to the physical elements, and concepts of Four Worlds and 10 Sefirot/Divine Emanations, called the Etz Chayim/Tree of Life. This is all part of the mystical system of Kabbalah that had been handed down to, and refined by, the Jewish mystics of Tzvat, and other communities. The seder tonight will draw upon these practices and ideas, as a way of honoring this special time, and seeking to make the underlying teachings accessible.

*How do we do this?*

As taught in Kabbalah, the Universe G!D has created, and continues to create, may be experienced through a structure of 4 "worlds," which exist in a metaphysical sense. These are the world of Assiyah, or Action, Yetzirah, or Formation, Briyah, or Creation, and Atzilut, or Emanation. They can also be considered the worlds of Doing/Manifestation, Emotion, Thought, and Intimacy-with-G!D. Our Seder will be structured based on this system, relating to the types of wine and fruits consumed, as well as the order that we follow. Let us begin!

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We express our gratitude at having reached this special occasion, recognizing the new experiences which await us.

**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיָּמנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה:**

Blessed are You Adonoy our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

A blessing for the study of Torah:

**בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה:**

Blessed are You, Adonoy our God, Sovreign of the Universe, Who sanctified - us with His

commandments and commanded us to be engrossed in the words of Torah.

**Mishna Rosh Hashana 2a:1-4** - There are four new years: The first of Nisan is the new year for kings and for festivals. The first of Elul is the new year for the tithe of beasts. Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say: the first of Tishri. The first of Tishri is the new year for years, for shmitta and jubilee years, for planting and for [tithe of] vegetables. The first of Shevat is the new year for trees, according to the words of Bet Shammai. Bet Hillel says: on the fifteenth of that month.

ויקרא י"ט:כ"ג-כ"ה

(כג) וְכִי־תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ וְנִטְעַתֶּם כָּל־עֵץ מֵאֵכָל וְעֵרְלֹתֶם עֵרְלָתוֹ אֶת־פְּרִי שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים  
יְהִי לָכֶם עֵרְלִים לֹא יֵאָכֵל: (כד) וּבִשְׁנָה הָרְבִיעִת יְהִי כָל־פְּרִי קָדָשׁ הַלִּוּלִים לַיהוָה:  
(כה) וּבִשְׁנָה הַחֲמִישִׁת תֹּאכְלוּ אֶת־פְּרִי לְהוֹסִיף לָכֶם תְּבוּאָתוֹ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Leviticus 19:23-25

(23) When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. (24) In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before the LORD; (25) and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit—that its yield to you may be increased: I the LORD am your God.

**Deuteronomy 8:6-8**

וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִלְכֹת בְּדַרְכָּיו וּלְרָאֹה אֹתוֹ:

Therefore keep the commandments of the LORD your God: walk in His ways and revere Him.

כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ גִּלְיָ מַיִם עֲנִיָּה וְתַהֲלֹמֹת יִצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָר:

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill;

אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וְשִׁעְרָה וְגִפְּזוֹ וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ־זֵית וְדִבְשׁ:

a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and

honey;

### From Psalm 104:13-17

מִשְׁקֵה הָרִים מִעֲלֵיוֹתָיו מִפְּרִי מַעֲשֶׂיךָ תִּשְׁבֶּעַ הָאָרֶץ:

You water the mountains from Your lofts; the earth is sated from the fruit of Your work.

מִצִּמֵּי חַיִּיר | לִבְהֶמָּה וְעֶשֶׂב לְעֹבְדֵת הָאָדָם לְהוֹצִיא לָהֶם מִן־הָאָרֶץ:

You make the grass grow for the cattle, and herbage for man's labor that he may get food out of the earth—

וַיֵּן | יִשְׂמַח לִב־אָנוּשׁ לְהַצְהִיל פָּנִים מִשָּׁמֶן וְלֶחֶם לִב־אָנוּשׁ יִסְעֵד:

wine that cheers the hearts of men oil that makes the face shine, and bread that sustains man's life.

יִשְׁבְּעוּ עֵצֵי יְהוָה אֲרָזֵי לְבָנוֹן אֲשֶׁר נָטַע:

The trees of the LORD drink their fill, the cedars of Lebanon, His own planting,

אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם צִפְרִים יִקְנְנוּ חֲסִידָה בְּרוּשִׁים בֵּיתָה:

where birds make their nests; the stork has her home in the junipers.

Tu BiShvat is an opportunity to savor and appreciate, the bounty of this world, and to give thanks for all the ways that trees provide us with food, shelter, beauty, and air. The Tu BiShvat seder is a celebration of our relationship with nature and with fruit trees in particular, and a time for reflection. As we celebrate together, we remember that we are partners in shaping, cultivating, and healing the natural world.

The fruit is the product of the previous generation, containing the seed for the next generation. It is a symbol of the awesome moment in which the flow of life is renewed. There is a basic principle in Judaism that humans are to be partners in creation and our proper actions, such as mitzvot, are essential to the workings of that which is created. Underlying the practices of Tu BiShvat is the idea that, if humans consume the fruit in a holy way, with the proper intentions/kavanah and blessings, in partnership with G!D, the

flow of creation is maintained and strengthened.

*adapted, R. Arthur Waskow, "Seasons of Our Joy" 1990*

A person should intend [on Tu B'Shvat], when reciting a blessing, to channel divine life-energy to all creations and creatures—inanimate, plant, animal and human. He should believe with perfect faith that God, blessed be He, gives life to them all and that there is a spark of divine life-energy in every thing, which gives it existence, enlivens it, and causes it to grow.

*Rabbi Avraham Yaakov of Sadiger (19th c.), Beit Yisrael, Emet LeYaakov, 38b*

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*Let us begin, by pouring a cup of pure white wine or juice.*

We live in the world of **Assiyah**. This is the world of tangible physicality. Each of the Four Worlds is associated with a season and an element; this world is associated with Winter and with earth. In Winter, for our region, the ground is frozen, but we know it contains the life of the spirit below. The white wine or juice we drink symbolizes winter's pale light and white snow.

*We bless, then drink from, the 1st cup:*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

**Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.**

In Winter here, we layer ourselves in clothing, blanketing ourselves from the cold just as the earth is insulated by snow. The fruit we eat for the world of Assiyah likewise has a protective outside and soft interior. Removing the hard shells or skins of pomegranates, walnuts, almonds, coconuts, pecans, hazel nuts, citrus fruits, etc., exposes a vulnerable inside.

The shell which conceals these fruits also protects. We know what that feels like. In the

world of school, work, and everyday activity, our spiritual selves require protection and nurturing. Sometimes we wrap ourselves in a tough outer shell, to protect our feelings and our hearts. As we eat these fruits representing Assiyah, may we find healing in our physical lives: in our relationships with our bodies, in our strength, in all matters physical and practical, in our environment.

*With these intentions in mind, we recite the blessing for the fruits of Assiyah, then taste one or more:*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

**Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.**

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*Pour the second cup, of white wine or juice, with a splash of red.*

We live in the world of **Yetzirah**: change, emotion, transformation. In this world we turn clay into bricks, iron into plows, words into poetry. In this sphere we celebrate creative power: both ours, and God's. The world of Yetzirah is the world of emotions and heart. In this realm we celebrate change and creativity, flux and flow. This world is associated with the season of Spring and the element of water. To symbolize this world, we drink white wine or juice with a dash of red. This gradual deepening of color parallels the reawakening of colors in nature as the sun brings the earth back to life. In spring the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth and the first flowers appear on the hillsides. As we drink the second cup of wine or juice, white with a dash of red, may we, like the flowers, blossom into our full potential.

*We bless, then drink from, the 2nd Cup:*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

**Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.**

The world of Yetzirah is connected with springtime. We eat fruits without protective shells — olives, dates, apricots, peaches, plums, cherries, apples, pears, etc. — to symbolize how, in Spring, we will forget our protective attire and expose our soft bodies to the sun. Still, these fruits contain pits, reminding us that we may still have hardness around our hearts. Despite the wondrous expressions of our spirit, each of us is still tied to the hard stone of ego. We still feel the need to protect what makes us vulnerable.

As we eat the fruit of Yetzirah, may our hearts be open to the feelings and needs of ourselves and others, allowing the warmth of our care to extend to the whole the world.

May we find healing in the realm of emotions; may we find healing in our hearts.

*With these intentions in mind, we recite the blessing for the fruits of Yetzirah, then taste one or more:*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

**Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.**

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*Pour the third cup, half white and half red wine or juice.*

We live in the world of **Briyah**: air, thought, contemplation. We recall the words of Genesis: “Adonai formed a human from the dust of the Earth, and blew into its nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being...placed in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and protect it.” We recognize the Unity of G!D in the Sh'mah. The world of Briyah is the ethereal realm of thought; it is associated with the season of Summer and the element of air. One name for God is “The Breath of Life/*Ruach Chai*” We breathe out what the trees breathe in; God breathes in us and through us. Briyah is the world of the holy breath of creation. In the world of Briyah, we drink a 1:1 mixture of red and white wine, reminding us that as the land becomes warmer and the colors of the fruits deepen as they ripen, we too become warmer and more open.

We bless, then drink from, the 3rd Cup:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

**Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.**

We eat soft fruits -- berries, figs, seedless grapes/raisins, kumquat, star fruit, some include apples & pears, etc.-- to remind ourselves to relinquish both our shells and the stones we carry inside us. In our deepest relationships, may we be like the fruit of Briyah, with no inner shell and no outer façade.

As we eat the fruits representing Briyah, may we find healing in our intellectual lives: in our minds, in our thoughts, in the heat of passionate argument and the light of brilliant insight.

With these intentions in mind, we recite the blessing(s) for the fruits of Briyah, then taste one or more:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.

*and/or*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאָדָמָה

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha adamah.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

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*Pour the fourth cup, of red wine or juice, with a splash of white.*

We approach and live in the world of **Atzilut**, essence, divine emanation. Physics tells us that what seems solid is actually filled with impossibly small spaces. Atzilut affirms this



knowing: what seems like creation is actually "just" God.

[מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ: The whole world is filled with His Glory.]

The world of Atzilut is the world of essence and spirit. This world is associated with the season of Fall and the element of fire. This is the world of that which is intangible. To represent Atzilut, we drink deep red wine or juice, with a splash of white. The pure red liquid represents the full bloom of nature before the cold winter. As nature expends its last bit of energy in an explosion of colorful leaves, a full cycle is completed. As we drink the fourth cup, with the splash of white reminding us of our continued connection with the physical, may we become strong, like healthy trees, with solid roots in the ground and with our arms open to the love that surrounds us.

*We bless, then drink from, the 4th Cup:*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

**Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.**

In the world of Atzilut we eat no fruit, for this world cannot be represented by any fruit. Instead, we inhale through our noses, recalling the Breath of Life, the fragrance of spices and essential oils. In this spiritual world, we become aware of God's love, mercy, and wisdom perceived with our hearts, not our senses. Our hearts are full and we praise the Source that renews all creation. The Four Worlds (Action, Emotion, Thought, and Spirit) are each nested inside each of the others. We live in all four realms at once. Sometimes we have hard shells, like the nuts of Assiyah. Sometimes we have a rock inside us, like the stone fruits of Yetzirah. Sometimes we are soft all the way through, like the fruits of Briyah. And sometimes we are so connected with the Holy One of Blessing, as Yud-Hay-Vav-Hay, which we may not limit by pronouncing it, that we melt beyond our bodies altogether, living in Atzilut. May we find blessing in each of these four ways of being, each of these four seasons, each of these four worlds.

With these understandings and intentions in mind, we recite the blessing for the fragrant

spices, enjoying their scents, to remind us of the world of Atzilut:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, בורא מיני בשמים

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei minei b'samim.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of fragrant spices.

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**As we come to the final part of our seder, we offer Blessings of Gratitude.**

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, על הגפן ועל פרי הגפן העץ ועל פרי העץ ועל תנובת השדה ועל ארץ חמדה טובה ורחבה שרצית והנחלת לאבותינו לאכול מפריה ולשבוע מטובה. רחם יי אלהינו על ישראל עמך ועל ירושלים עירך ועל ציון משכן כבודך, ועל מזבחך, ועל היכלך. ובנה ירושלים עיר הקדש במהרה בימינו. והעלנו לתוכה ושמחנו בבנינה, ונאכל מפריה ונשבוע מטובה ונברכך עליה בקדשה ובטהרה כי אתה טוב ומטיב לכל ונודה לך יי אלהינו על הארץ ועל פרי הגפן ועל הפרות. ברוך אתה יי, על הארץ ועל פרי הגפן ועל הפרות: ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא נפשות רבות וחסרונן על כל מה שבראת להחיות בהם נפש כל חי ברוך חי העולמים:

We praise you, יי our God, Ruler of Time and Space, for the vine and its fruit, for the tree and its fruit. We thank you for the Earth's bounty, and for the pleasing, good and spacious land which You gave to our ancestors, that they might eat of its produce and be satisfied from its goodly yield. Have mercy, יי our God, for Jerusalem Your city, for Zion the home of your Glory. Fully restore Jerusalem soon and in our day, bringing us rejoicing in its restoration, to eat there of the land's good fruit in its abundance, and to praise You in holiness.

Blessed be You Who created so many different living things, all needing each other, to make one Life interwoven through them all, as one Soul. Blessed be the Life of all the worlds.

**Hallel for Tu B'Shevat**

by Debbie Perlman, z”l

Upon the winter's barren branches,  
You paint the leaves of imagination  
To welcome Tu B'Shevat,  
To sing the coming of new trees.

*Sing praises to the Eternal,  
Who renews life in its cycles,  
Sing praises.*

Stretching forth our minds,  
We see Your winter fields in furrows,  
We watch as young saplings take their places,  
Row on row to guard the soil.

*Sing praises to the Eternal,  
Who enriches dust to nourish growing,  
Sing praises.*

You defend the tillers as they work,  
Digging the desert rich and lush and green;  
You call those who watch to offer support,  
And share in the promise of the Land.

*Sing praises to the Eternal,  
Who guards the toilers and the givers,  
Sing praises.*

*Sing praises to the Eternal,  
Whose Branches shelter over us,  
Sing praises.*

**A concluding prayer:**

O God, who makes, forms, creates, and emanates the highest worlds! You made the trees and grasses grow from the ground in the shape and pattern of these highest worlds. And this full moon is the beginning of Your work to renew and ripen the fruit trees, to bring forth the fruit of 'the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden.' May it be Your will that our eating and blessing and meditating on these fruits will strengthen the flow of love and blessing over the trees, to make them grow and bloom, for good life, for blessing and for peace. May all Creation return to its original strength and may we see the rainbow rejoicing in its colors. And may all the sparks of divine energy, whether scattered by our hands, or by the hands of our ancestors, or by the sin of the first human against the fruit of the tree, be returned and included in the majestic might of the Tree of Life. *{Pri Etz Hadar}*

May the **New Year For Trees** begin a year of growth and renewal, for the trees, and for us.

### ***NEXT YEAR IN PERSON!***

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#### More on 4 Worlds:

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<u><b>Ha Shem</b></u>	<u><b>World</b></u>	<u><b>Activity</b></u>	<u><b>Element</b></u>	<u><b>Soul Aspect</b></u>
Yod - י	Atzilut	Emation/Being	Fire	Yechida/Chayah
Hey - ה	Briyah	Creation/Thought	Air	Neshama
Vav - ו	Yetzirah	Formation/Feeling	Water	Ruach
Hey - ה	Assiyah	Action/Manifestation	Earth	Nefesh

#### **Assiyah:**

Something. World of doing and material/physical manifestation. The physical body.  
Davenning (shacharit)—preliminary prayers

#### **Yetzirah:**

Something from Something. The Divine Flow/Shefa comes “down” and begins to take shape. World of feelings, emotion, passion, Song, Halleluyah. Davenning—Psukei d’Zimrah(shacharit)/Psalms

### **Briyah:**

Something from Nothing. Understanding; concepts; thought; knowing; miracles. Place of Creation in every moment. Davenning—Borechu, Shema (shacharit, maariv)

### **Atzilut:**

Non-Being/All-Being. No boundaries; transcendence; Cosmic Unity; intimacy with G!D. Davenning—Amidah

*Acknowledgements and sources : NeoHasid.org/R. David Seidenberg; Wikipedia; Sefaria, including source sheets from R. David G. Winship and R. Rachel Barenblat, and translation of "Pri Etz Hadar" by R. Miles Krassen; "The Jewish Book of Days, A Companion for All Seasons," R. Jill Hammer; "Flames To Heaven," Debbie Perlman z"l; "Seasons of Our Joy," R. Arthur Waskow; Alexandra Schmidt; Stephen Schmidt; R. Rafi Spitzer*