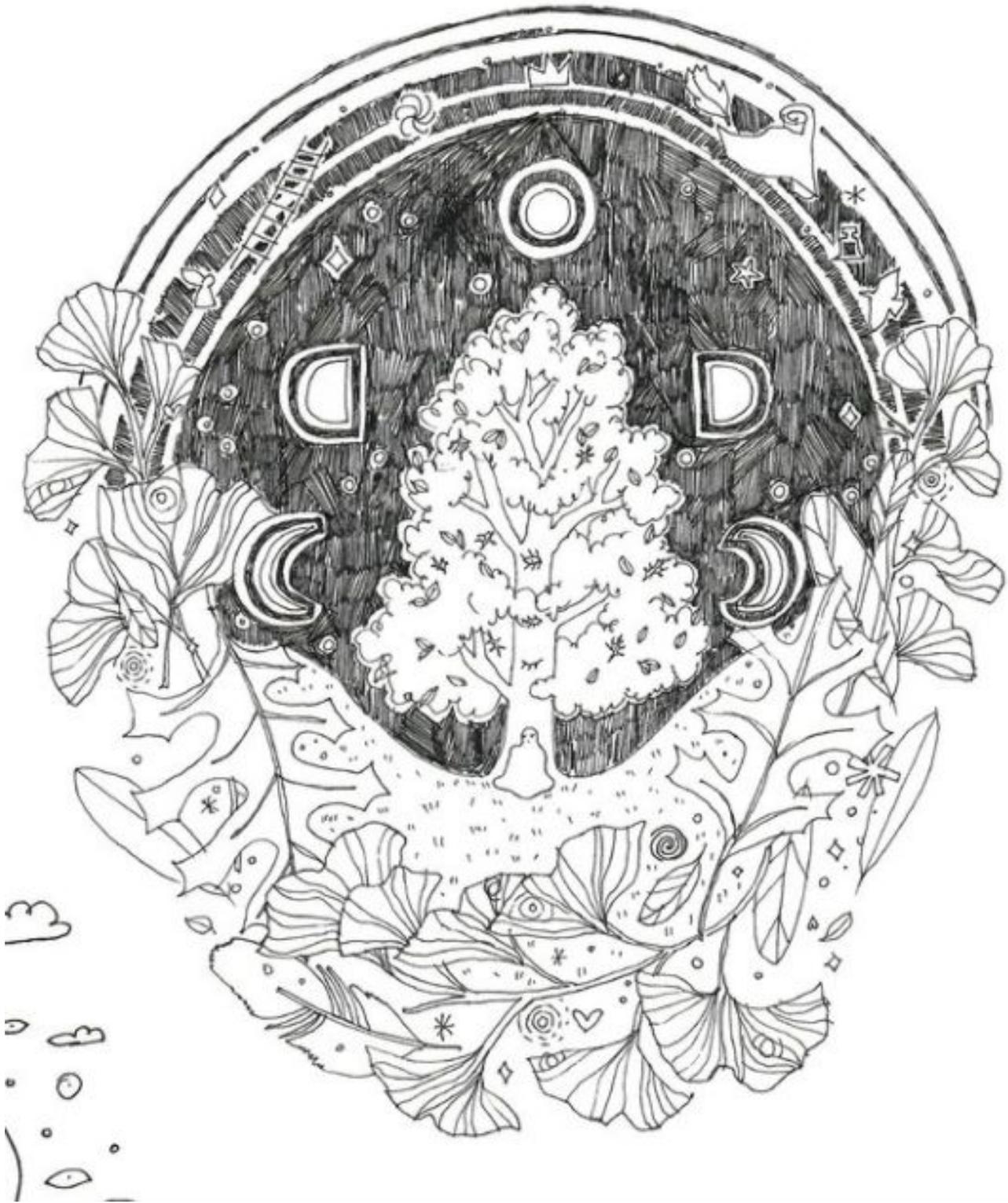


Our Tu B'Shevat Seder 2021/5781
Columbia Jewish Congregation



Compiled by Rabbinic Intern Mickey Hess Welber

As We Begin...
...We Pause and Ground Ourselves.

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Tu B'Shevat Niggun - composed by Batya Levine



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The Babylonian Talmud (Rosh haShanah 2a) lists a variety of new years, pertaining to plants, animals, and time itself. The fifteenth of the month of Shevat, or Tu B'Shevat in Hebrew, is the new year for trees. Tu B'Shevat always falls on the full moon of midwinter ... halfway between the first of the month of Tevet (the first day of winter) and the first of the month of Nissan (the first day of spring). Tu B'Shevat is a liminal doorway between the seasons.

– Rabbi Jill Hammer

Leader: When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, 2000 years ago, Tu B'Shevat was considered the *New Year for Trees* for the purpose of tithing.¹ On this date, Israelite farmers counted all their trees one year older.

Why was it important to count?

For the first three years of a tree's life, no fruit would be taken from it.

In its fourth year, its fruits were given to the Temple in gratitude to G!d for providing nourishment. Some of these fruits were eaten by the priests and some were given to the poor.

It was only in the fifth year of a tree's life that a farmer could begin to consume its fruits.

¹ Tithing - In ancient Israel, one tenth of annual produce grown was given as a mandatory offering to the Temple.

In 70 CE, after the destruction of the second Temple, the system of ritual offerings ended and Tu B'Shevat was no longer relevant until the 16th century, when the kabbalists of Tzfat reimagined the holiday...²

The kabbalists saw Tu B'Shevat as the New Year for the Tree of Life itself -- for G!d's own self, for the tree whose roots are Heaven and whose fruits are the world and in all G!d's creatures. To honor the reawakening of that Tree and of all trees in deep midwinter, they created a mystical seder.

– Rabbi Rami Shapiro

Their seder centered around the four kabbalistic worlds (Assiyah, Yetzirah, Beriyah and Atzilut) through which the kabbalists believed divine energy flows. This energy is the sap flowing through the Tree of Life.

THE FOUR WORLDS OF TU B'SHVAT

– Hazon's Seder & Sourcebook



	FIRST WORLD	SECOND WORLD	THIRD WORLD	FOURTH WORLD
SPHERE (KABBALAH)	ASSYAH } ACTION (עשייה)	YETZIRAH } FORMATION (יצירה)	B'RIYAH } THOUGHT (בריאה)	ATZILUT } SPIRIT (אצילות)
KAVANAH	GROUNDENESS DEFENSE	GROWTH CREATIVITY	OPENNESS ABUNDANCE	MYSTERY WHOLENESS
ELEMENT	EARTH	WATER	AIR	FIRE
SEASON	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
SYMBOLIC FOODS	Inedible outside, edible inside: orange, banana, walnut, almond, pomegranate	Edible outside, inedible inside: Dates, olives, apricots, plums	Entirely edible: Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries	Only spiritual sustenance
WINE	WHITE	1/2 WHITE 1/2 RED	1/4 WHITE 3/4 RED	RED WITH A DROP OF WHITE
ASPECTS OF SELF	PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	INTELLECTUAL	SPIRITUAL

² Kabbalists - followers of the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah.

On Tu B'Shevat the sap begins to rise....



LEADER: On this day, says Jewish tradition, sap begins to rise from the ground and trees begin to nourish themselves in order to bloom anew.

We cannot see the sap rising with our eyes but we trust that change is happening in unseen ways. We can sense it...

In Hebrew, the word for sap is saraf, which means fire. The Hebrew month of Shevat is a time of warming - the days get longer and, even though it is still cold outside, the land begins to warm and our bodies and minds begin to emerge from hibernation. If we pay attention, we can begin to tune into the early signs of life, of spring, in the world around us.

Tu B'Shevat is a day to welcome and honor the sap – the water within trees that allows life to return. Tu B'Shevat represents the rising life force as our year moves toward spring.

—Rabbi Jill Hammer

REFLECTION QUESTION: What spiritual sap do you yearn to see rising in you? What new growth do you hope to realize within yourself as spring approaches?

Preparation

by Marge Piercy

It is the New Year of the Trees, but here
the ground is frozen under the crust of snow.
The trees snooze, their buds tight as nuts.
Rhododendron leaves roll up their stiff scrolls.

In the white and green north of the diaspora
I am stirred by a season that will not arrive
for six weeks or more, as wines on far continents prickle
to bubbles when their native vines bloom.

What blossoms here are birds jostling
at feeders, picking sunflower seeds
and millet through the snow: tulip red
cardinal, daffodil finch, larkspur jay

the pansybed of sparrows and juncos, all hungry.
They too are planters of trees, spreading seeds
of favorites along fences. On the earth closed
to us all a book in a language we cannot yet read

the seeds, the bulbs, the eggs
of the fervid green year await release.
Over them on [January's] cold table I spread
a feast. Wings rustle like summer leaves.

—from *The Art of Blessing the Day*



The Four Worlds

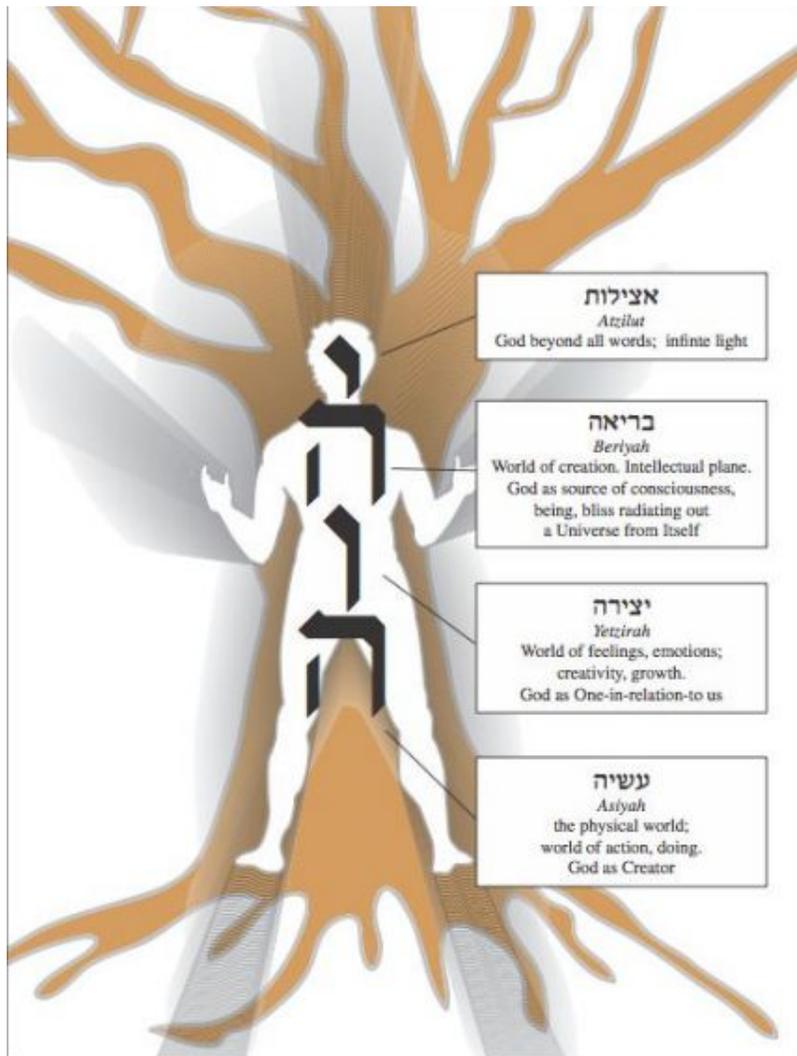
LEADER: We begin our journey now through the Four Worlds. Like the sap, we will move up the Tree of Life from the roots of the material world to the branches in the world of the spirit.

Our journey will take us through:

- the world of *Assiyah* (action and rootedness),
- the world of *Yetzirah* (emotion and formation),
- the world of *Briyah* (thought and creation),
- and the world of *Atzilut* (spirit and essence).

We will enact these four worlds through drinking four cups of wine or grape juice, tasting four courses of fruit, and reflecting as we go along.

We are also engaging in another, newer tradition - that of connecting Tu B'Shevat with an ecological awareness. The imagery of the Tree of Life reminds us to appreciate the trees, the cycles of nature and the world around us.



The kabbalists created the seder of Tu B'Shevat as a “tikun” — a ritual of repair.

Tonight, by drinking and eating fruits and nuts with mindfulness, we strive to repair our own spiritual brokenness and the brokenness of a world which is not yet as we and G!d wish it to be. Today, we celebrate Tu B'Shevat as a way to renew our spirits and prepare ourselves, and the world, for the arrival of spring.

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Olam Ha'Assiyah
עולם העשייה
The World of Action // Roots

We live in the world of Assiyah - action and physicality - the tangible world of flesh and stone and wood. Like the trees, we ground ourselves here, in the earth.



Put Your Roots Down – composer unknown

Put your roots down
put your feet on the ground
you can hear the earth sing if you listen x2

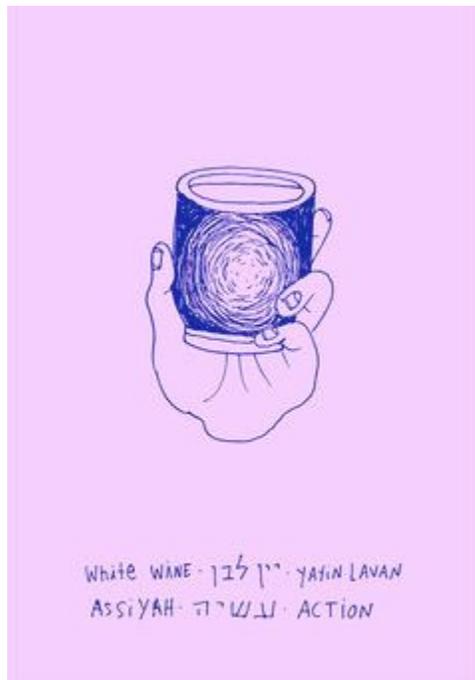
'Cause the sound of the river
as it moves across the stones
Is the same sound as the blood in your body
as it moves across your bones

Are you listenin' x2



Winter

“Ice cracks and melts. Though there still may be a chill on the earth, it is an invigorating cold, one that inspires us to move.” - Rabbi Jill Hammer



LEADER: The World of Assiyah is associated with winter.

In winter the ground is frozen, but we know it contains life below.

We begin tonight with white wine/grape juice, as a sign of winter's snow and pale light. We see clearly through the wine, as through the leafless branches of the tree. But we know, while leafless, the bare branches are not lifeless.

May we become strong, like healthy trees that can survive cold, with solid roots in the ground and with our arms stretched toward new growth.

Time to Bless...

LEADER: Together, tonight, we will say many blessings.

A person should intend [on Tu B'Shevat], when reciting a blessing, to channel divine life-energy to all creations and creatures – inanimate, plant, animal and human. Believe with perfect faith that G!d gives life to them all, that there is a spark of divine life in everything – giving it existence, enlivening it, causing it to grow.

–Rabbi Avraham Yaakov of Sadiger (19th century)



We say our first blessing now, over the first cup of wine or grape juice.

(Fill your cup with white wine or white grape juice)

We recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

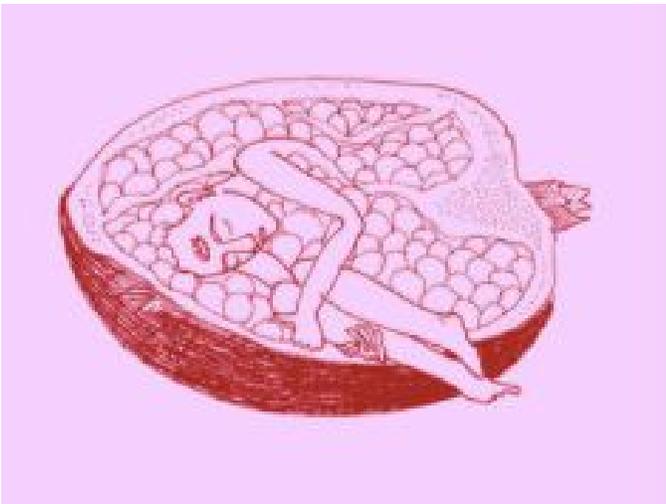
Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Eternal our G!d, Life of the Worlds, who creates fruit of the vine.

Tough Shells are Protective Shells

LEADER: In winter we shelter ourselves with protective outer layers. We wear coats and thick clothing. Animals store fat in their bodies to keep themselves warm. Snow insulates the earth. In every season, the earth protects us, with an atmosphere that sustains us.

Likewise, the fruit we eat for the world of Assiyah has a tough, protective covering. Removing these hard shells exposes a soft, vulnerable inside. Like the fruit inside, we too are soft and vulnerable.



The shell that conceals also protects. We know what that feels like. In the world of school, work, politics and relationships our physical and spiritual selves require protection.

As we eat these fruits may our “shells” maintain integrity to keep us safe and whole and may we discern safe and holy times to allow ourselves to unwrap and crack open.

(Raise a fruit with a hard shell or inedible outer layer)

We recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

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

Blessed are You, Eternal our G!d, Life of the Worlds, who creates fruit of the tree.

REFLECTIVE MEDITATION: Close your eyes. Imagine that you can see your protective outer “shell.” What does it look like? When does it serve you well, and when does it inhibit you? When are the times and what are the spaces when you can peel your shell away and reveal your soft insides?

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Olam HaYetzrah
עולם היצירה
The World of Formation // Water

We live in the world of yetzrah: change, emotion, transformation.
We move and change - sometimes fast and sometimes slow - like
the water in a river.



Psalm 93 – melody by Hazzan Jessi Roemer

Mikolot mayim rabim
Adir ba-marom
Yah

[Louder than the sound of mighty waters,
raised up on high are you, Yah]



Spring



LEADER: Yetzirah is the world of emotions and heart. Here we experience change & creativity, flux & flow, spring & water.

To symbolize this realm, we drink white wine or grape juice with a dash of red. This deepening of color reminds us of how the natural world wakes and becomes vibrant in the spring. How the sap is beginning to flow as spring begins to arrive.

As we drink the second cup of wine or juice may we, like spring flowers, blossom into our full potential.

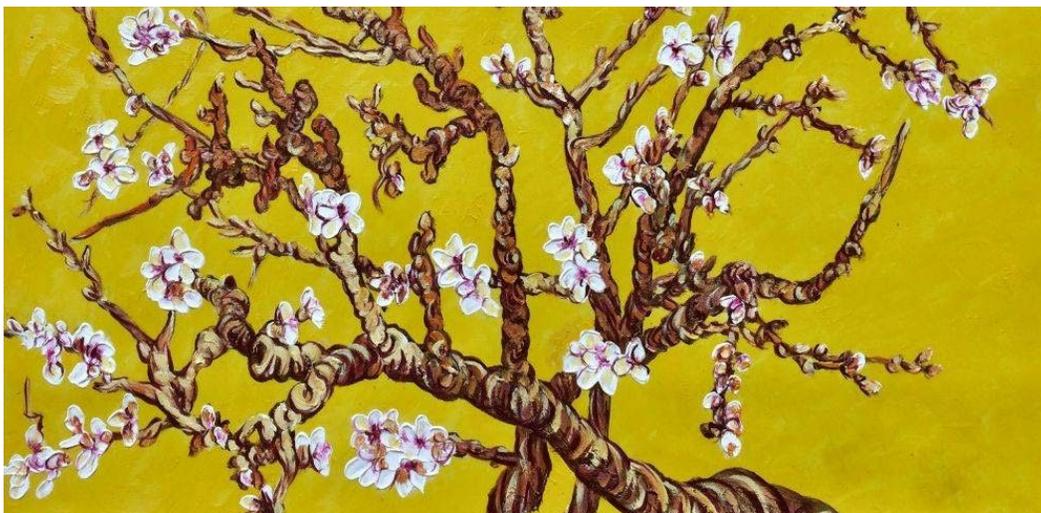
(Fill your cup with white wine or grape juice - adding just a splash of red)

We recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

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

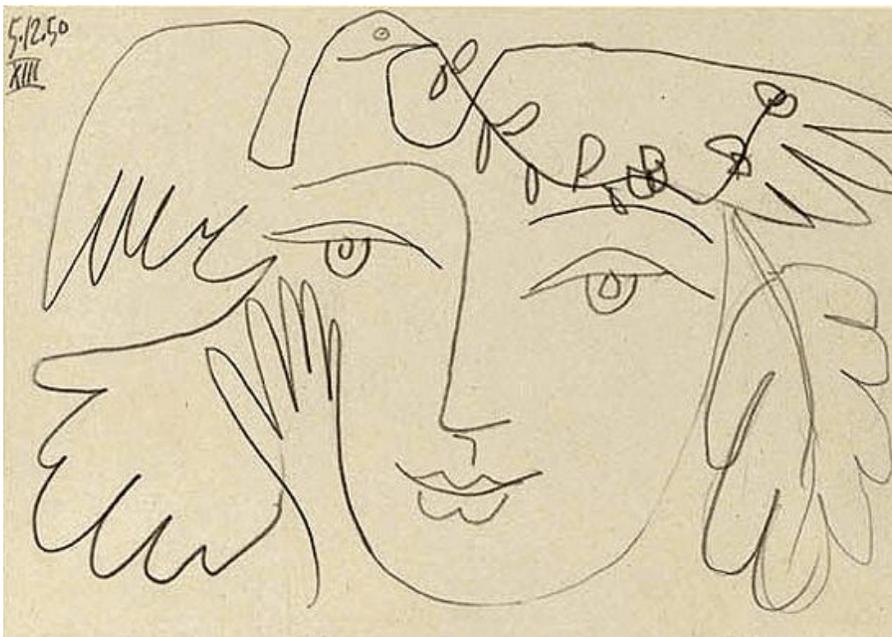
Blessed are You, Eternal our G!d, Life of the Worlds, who creates the fruit of the vine.



Even when we are blossoming we still have hard places inside....

The world of Yetzirah is connected with springtime. We eat fruits without protective shells, anticipating how, in spring, we will remove our coats and bask in the sun. Still, these fruits contain pits - a hardness at their center. Even as we unfold, we may still have hardness around our hearts.

One of the tree fruits with a hard pit is the olive, a sign of hope. When the great flood began to subside, Noah sent out a dove. "The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a leaf it had picked from an olive tree." (Gen. 8:11). As we eat the fruit of Yetzirah, may our hearts open to hope and to ever-emerging possibility.



**REFLECTIVE
MEDITATION:**

Close your eyes. Imagine that you can see the stone you carry deep inside. What does it look like? What is bound up in the tight place hidden inside you?

(Raise a fruit with a soft outside and a hard inner pit)
We recite together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

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

Blessed are You, Eternal our G!d, Life of the Worlds, who creates fruit of the tree.

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Olam HaBriyah

עולם הבריאה

The World of Creation // Breath, Wind and Air

We live in the world of Briyah: thoughts and ideas. We think, we plan, we contemplate. Briyah is also the world of the holy breath of creation. Just as G!d imagined us into being, so we imagine new worlds into being.

G!d created humans from the dust of the ground, G!d breathed into the nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)

In Hebrew, the words for wind, breath, and inspiration are all the same. Ruach is the air that moves through our world, the breath that we exchange with the trees, and the spirit that gives our lives meaning.

– Rabbi Jill Hammer



Elohai neshama shenatah bi tehora hi

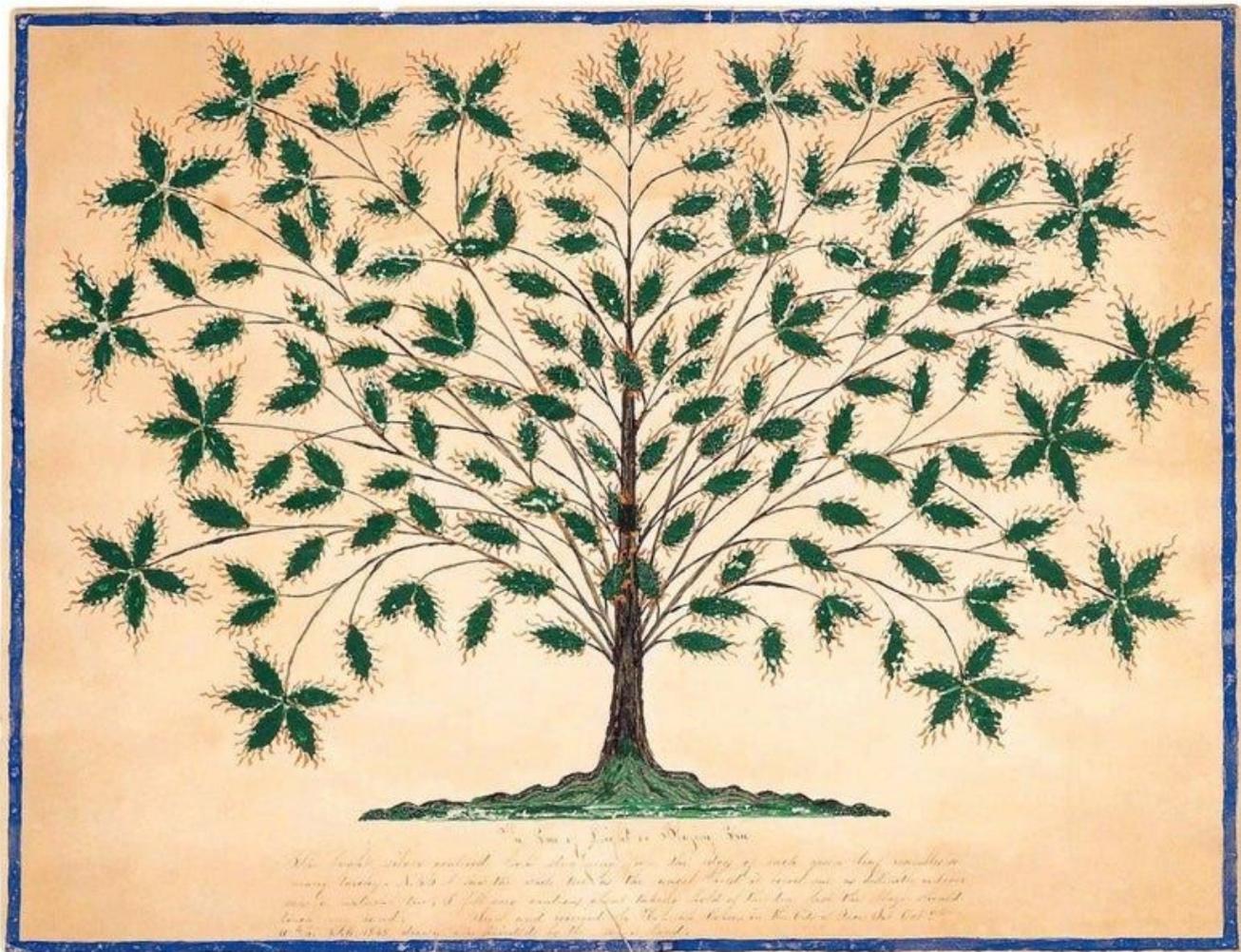
[My God, the soul you gave to me is pure.
Talmud Bavli Berakhot 60b]



If we try to pronounce YHWH (יהויה) without any vowels, what we hear is not quite a pronunciation but a breath. A breath that appears ...not only in human languages but in every life form on our planet.

No living creature on our planet breathes in a little bubble. We breathe each other into being. Into living. What we breathe in is what the trees breathe out. What the trees breathe in is what we breathe out. G'd is the Interbreathing of all life.

– Rabbi Arthur Waskow



Summer

LEADER: The world of Briyah is associated with summer. In the summer, trees are full of leaves and fruit is ripe.

We drink red wine or grape juice with a dash of white, reminding us that, as the land warms and the colors of ripening fruits deepen, we too become warmer and more open to the world that surrounds us.



(Fill your cup with red wine/grape juice with a splash of white)

We recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

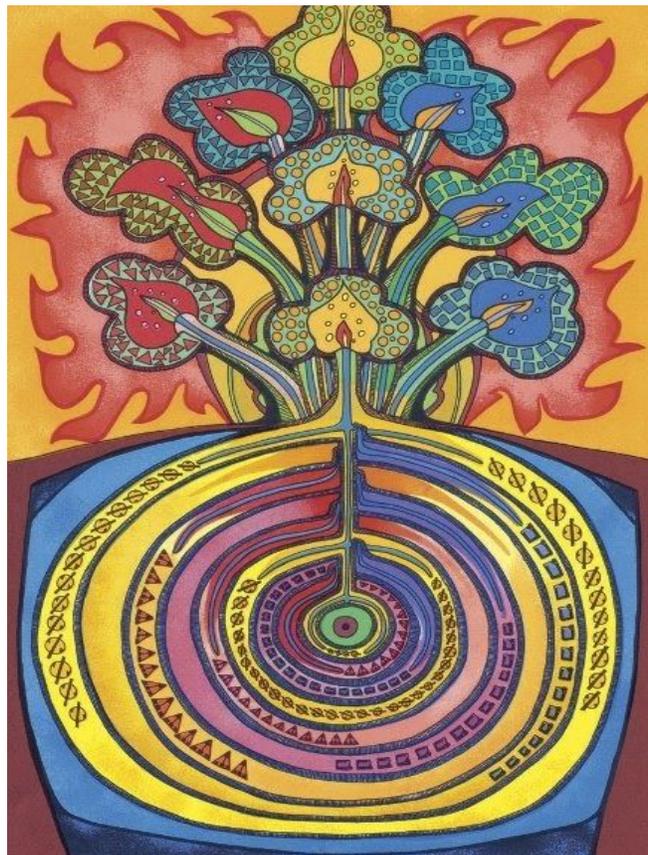
Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Eternal our G!d, Life of the Worlds, who creates fruit of the vine.

May our outsides match our innermost hearts...

In our deepest and truest relationships, may we be like the fruit of Briyah, with no inner stone and no outer façade. May we be surrounded with the love and safety we need for our outsides to match our innermost heart.

REFLECTIVE MEDITATION: Close your eyes. Imagine that you are soft all the way through: no shell, no stone. How does that feel? What reverberates in you, what flows through you, when you soften like this?



(Raise up a fruit that is completely soft - with no shells or stones.)

We eat it in gratitude for each sacred breath and the flexibility and imagination of our minds.

We recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

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

Blessed are You, Eternal our G'd, Life of the Worlds, who creates fruit of the tree

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Olam Ha'atzilut

עולם האצילות

The World of Essence // Fire

We live in the world of Atzilut - essence and spirit, fire and sun. Physics tells us that what seems solid is actually filled with atoms and the spaces between them. Atzilut affirms this knowing. Creation may seem ordinary but it is suffused with Mystery.



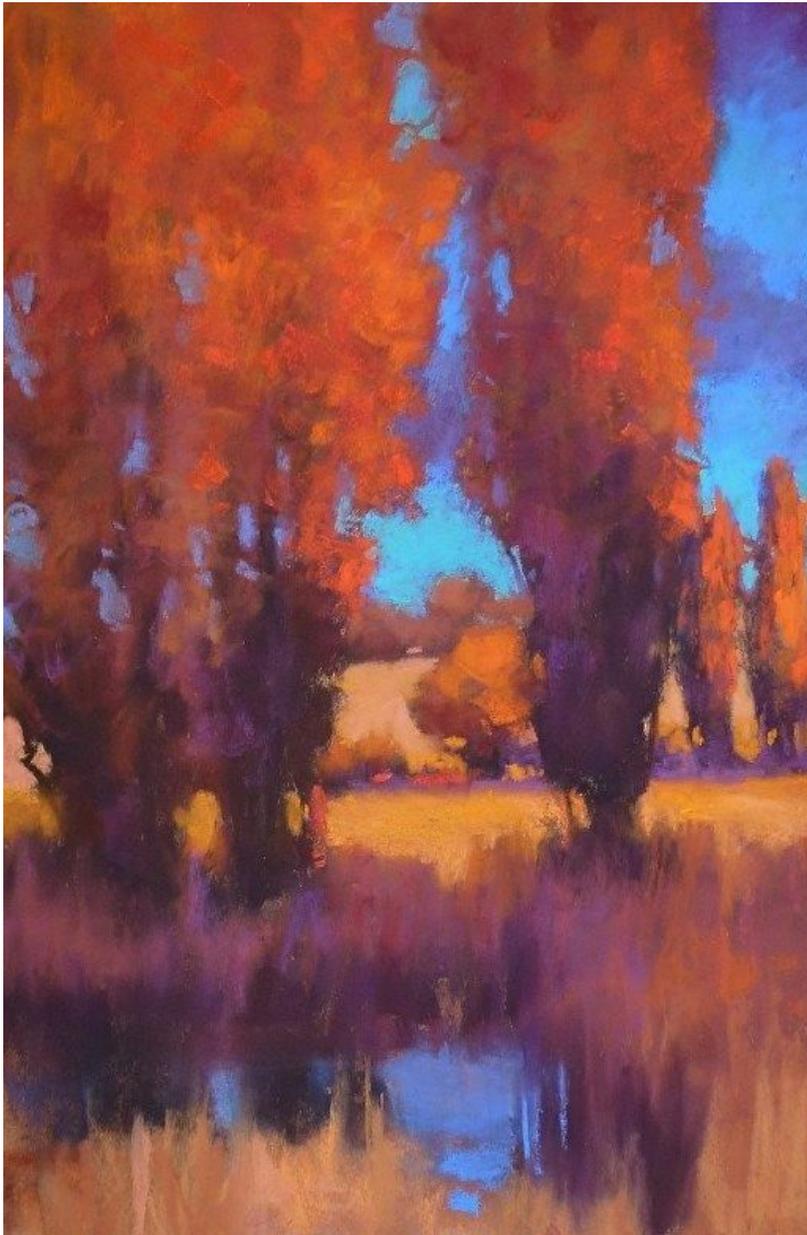
Psalm 97

Or zarua la-tzadik
u-l'yishrei lev simcha

[Light beams are seeded for the righteous
Happiness for those steadfast of heart]



Autumn



LEADER: Atzilut is associated with autumn.

For the fourth cup, we pour only red wine or grape juice into our cups as a reminder of the fire of the sun and the full glory of the burning red leaves of fall. As nature expends energy in an explosion of color, the cycle is complete.

As we drink the fourth cup, we offer thanks for the fire of the sun that provides the light to feed our trees and feed us from their bounty. We are grateful for the warmth we feel within and for the radiance of our souls.

(Fill your glass with red wine or grape juice)

We recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

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

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Life of the Worlds, who creates fruit of the vine.

We Perceive with the Heart...

LEADER: In the world of Atzilut we eat no fruit, for the world of essence and spirit cannot be represented through taste, smell or touch.

In this spiritual world, we become aware of the divine by perceiving not with our physical senses but with our hearts. The heart is the source of the inner vision that allows the sap of life within us to rise.



REFLECTIVE MEDITATION: Close your eyes. Feel the spark of spirit that burns deep within you. Cup your hands around that light. What do you want to illuminate with that light as spring draws near?

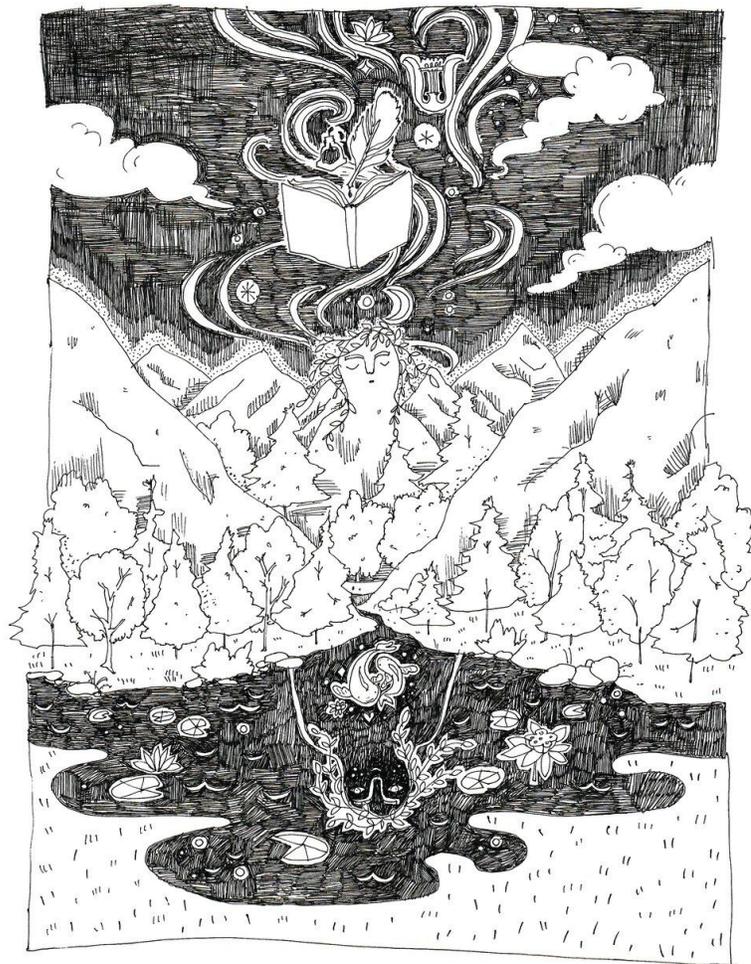
Closing Prayer

Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone. May it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass, among all growing things, and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer, to talk with the One to whom I belong.

May I express there everything in my heart, and may all the foliage of the field — all grasses, trees, and plants — awake at my coming, to send the powers of their life into the words of my prayer so that my prayer and speech are made whole through the life and spirit of all growing things, which are made as one by their transcendent Source. May I then pour out my heart before your Presence like water, O G!d!

May it be Your will, O G!d of our ancestors, that through our eating of the fruits You have created, the trees be filled with the glory of their ability to renew themselves for new blossoming, from the start of the year to its end, so that our lives too will be renewed and filled with goodness, blessings, and peace. And we say together: AMEN.

- *Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav*



Thanks and Attributions

Cover Art: Jessica Tamar Deutsch

Page 5: Hazzan Shoshana Brown and Les Shachter - *Four Worlds*

Page 7: Top - Keith Webber Jr - *White Birch Trees in Winter*,

Bottom - Jessica Tamar Deutsch - *Tarot*

Page 8: Andrea Dee - *Winter Birch Trees*

Page 9: Jessica Tamar Deutsch - *Tarot*

Page 11: Top - Jessica Tamar Deutsch - *Tarot*, Bottom - Vincent

Van Gogh - *Almond Blossoms, Yellow*

Page 12: Pablo Picasso - *Dove with Olive Branch*

Page 14: Hannah Cohoon - *Tree of Life*

Page 15: Left: Jasmin Joseph - *The Monkey and the Fruit Tree*,

Right: Jessica Tamar Deutsch - *Tarot*

Page 16: David Friedman - *The Tree of Life*

Page 18: Teresa Saia

Page 19: Jessica Tamar Deutsch - *Tarot*

Page 20: Jessica Tamar Deutsch

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