

## A Concise Tu B'shvat Haggadah



### הגדה של טו בשבט



#### *Background*

Named for the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Shvat, this festival is known as **the New Year of the Trees or the Trees' Birthday**. Although it's hard to believe that this time of year is the beginning of spring in the Middle East. The first almond blossoms have opened and the sap in the trees is beginning to rise. Therefore, it's traditional to eat fruits from Israel on Tu B'Shvat: figs, dates, grapes, olives, pomegranates. It is also traditional to eat fruits we haven't tasted in a long time (or ever), and to say the *Shehekheyanu* (a blessing for experiencing something new.) **While the holiday has changed over the centuries, today in the U.S., it is seen as a time to celebrate nature and affirm our relationship to the Earth.**

#### *Activities*

**Take a walk** with friends or family. **Plant a tree** or some seeds. **Make a family donation** to your favorite environmental cause. Another beautiful action that is becoming more and more common is to **have a Tu B'Shvat seder**.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Kabbalists, the Jewish mystics, created this seder with songs, readings, wine and fruits. Like the Passover seder, this one uses experiential learning, **four cups of wine**, and special foods. Each cup of wine represents different aspects of the fruit tree and of ourselves. As the seder progresses, we change the color of the wine in the cups (like the changing of the seasons) – from the whiteness of winter to the fullness of spring. The color gets more and more red and we look forward to the fully red wine of the Passover seder.

Of course, there are many interpretations and ways to find meaning in a Tu B'Shvat seder. The cups can represent the tree's growth from seed to sapling, to continued growth, and to bearing fruit. Or they can symbolize the kinds of relationships we can have with Nature and with each other. There are the four directions, the four seasons, the four elements — all are possible interpretations.

The traditional Tu B'Shvat seder also includes a special order for eating **different kinds of fruits**, each kind representing a different ways that trees give to us, as well as representing our own spiritual growth. Before eating each kind of fruit, one thing some people do is to ask themselves or each other a spiritual question related to that kind of fruit. The seder here follows that model.

However we celebrate Tu B'Shvat, this holiday 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, air, and valuable life lessons.

(Song)



### Basic Blessings To Accompany The Tu B'Shvat Seder

אשרינו בירשתנו שמורה לנו לאהוב את האדמה ואת אוצרי התבע

#### 1. Ashreinu bi'rushateinu she'morah lanu le'ehov et ha-adama v'et otsrei-ha'teva.

We rejoice in our heritage which teaches us to love our earth and the riches of nature.

אשרינו בירשתנו הכוח שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

#### 2. Ashreinu bi'rushateinu ha-koakh shehekheyenu, v'ki'y'manu, v'higi'anu lazman hazeh.

We rejoice in our heritage that has given us the indomitable spirit that has preserved our people, sustained us, and brought us forward to this moment.

אשרינו בירשתנו שמורה לנו לאהוב את האדמה מצמיחת פרי העץ

### 3. Ashreinu bi'rushateinu she'morah lanu le'ehov et ha'adama matsmikhat pri ha'ets.

We rejoice in our heritage which teaches us to love our earth which gives us the fruit of the trees.

*(Tu B'shvat Blessings by Rabbi Judith Seid)*

## ❧ A TU B'SHVAT SEDER - של טו בשבט ❧

The Tu B'Shvat seder is a celebration of our relationship with nature and with fruit trees in particular, and a time for reflection. Today, as we celebrate together, let us envision ourselves as partners in shaping, cultivating, and healing the natural world. The Tu B'Shvat Seder is split into four sections, each reflecting the seasons and symbolizing different aspects of the trees and our own lives. Each section is connected to one of the four worlds of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, and represents the transition from the most physical to the most spiritual.



### First Cup – The World of Asiyah (Actualization)



### Fruits and nuts with a hard outside and an edible inside

*[Pour a glass of white wine and drink half or more.]*

Although seemingly inedible from the outside, each of the foods eaten at the level of Asiyah, when peeled or shelled, hold gifts that transcend their outward appearance. Like winter, where everything lays dormant and hidden, these fruits and nuts contain inside them the potential to reveal what is hidden within. Because of their hard exterior, these foods can represent the human tendency to judge others by their outer appearance. They can also represent the ways we separate ourselves from other people. Eating these fruits reminds us that whoever we are, we all carry the same spark of life within.

*Discuss: When have you “judged a book by its cover” only to realize that you were mistaken?*

## Eat: Walnuts | Almonds | Pomegranates | Coconuts | Pistachios

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### Second Cup – The World of Yetzirah (Formation)



#### Fruits with pits at their center

*[Add a few drops of red wine and fill the rest with white. Drink half or more.]*

We now drink our second cup of wine. Just as each new stream begins with a trickle, each flower with a single bud, just a few drops of color transform the hue of our wine. Although we discard the pits of these fruits, they are the seeds, the means to rebirth. These fruits can remind us that every flowering tree was once bare and that the means to growth can sometimes come from the innermost overlooked places. They can symbolize the potential within us that we have not tapped.

*Discuss: What is something you have done or created that started out very small and became bigger or more important over time?*

## Eat: Cherries | Olives | Plums | Apricots | Avocado

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### Third Cup – The World of Beriah (Creation)



#### Fruits that are entirely edible

*[Refill the glass so that there is now half red and half white wine. Drink half or more.]*

We drink our third cup of wine. We now have half a cup of red wine and half a cup of white – even though the trees will be full and green and their flowers will blossom, their growth is not complete. So much more will be created; so much more is to come.

These fruits can remind us of the wholeness of the world, where nothing is wasted and everything nourishes everything else. We can take this time to look at the fruit of our own creations and actions and consider how to deepen our relationships in the world and with the earth.

*Discuss: When do you feel truly whole and happy?*

**Eat: Grapes | Raisins | Apples | Pears | Blueberries | Raspberries**

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**Fourth Cup – The World of Atzilut** (Presence, Birth)



*[Pour a nearly full glass of red wine again and add just a few drops of white. Drink all.]*

We now come to our final cup; the drops of white in the red remind us of the first cup of this seder and of the cyclical nature of the seasons.

This final section represents what is invisible to the eye. *Instead of eating fruit, we may enjoy sweet smells like cinnamon and rosemary.* Beyond the cycle of eating is the cycle of breathing, when something lives both within and without us at the same time, when it is so much a part of us that we cannot even see it. At this level all things are already part of each other. We all have this kind of connection with the mystery of life. Like smells, the ways we remember this connection are subtle: the feel of the soil or the smell of dew, the color of the changing leaves, the sounds of birds migrating, or the clasp of a hand.

*Discuss: What helps you remember and appreciate what you cannot see?*

**Smell: Cinnamon | Rosemary | Bay Leaf | Cedar**



(Song)

In every seed there is the promise of new life. May the New Year of The Trees begin a year of growth; may it be a year of renewal for the trees and for us; and may our blessings give strength to the trees and may our eyes be opened to the wonders of creation, may we nurture the world that nurtures us, and may we, in our own lives plant seeds of wisdom, friendship, and peace.

לשנה טובה וברכה פרי ותנובה

Le-shana tova u-ve-ra-cha p'ri u-te-nu-va!

*May the year be fruitful and blessed!*



*(Haggadah by Rabbi David Seidenberg and Janet Kaplan Bucciarelli, adapted)*



*Haggadah adapted by Rabbi Frank Tamburello - 2016 / 5776*