

A KABBALIST'S FEAST

The Tu B'Shvat Seder



"...A Person is a tree of the field..." (Deut. 20:19)

A tree is constantly growing and so must we. A tree produces fruit and so must we. On Tu b'Shvat we must renew personal growth, just as the trees on Tu b'Shvat begin to draw moisture from the earth.

Tu B'Shvat — Shabbat 2007 (4th Edition)

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🌀 Supplies for the Seder 🌀

Red wine, white wine, at least two challahs, salt, olives, dates, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, other fruits with inedible shells or peels, fruits with edible skins, but have seeds, fruits that are totally eaten, fragrant fruits. As many different kinds of fruit as you can find.

🌀 The Tu B' Shvat Seder 🌀

A PARTICIPANT ASKS: Why do Jews celebrate the New Year for fruit trees on Tu B'Shvat?

ALL: Tu B'Shvat marks the time when sap starts to flow upward, nourishing the trees, starting new growth.

PARTICIPANT: OK, so what's that got to do with me? I am not a tree.

ALL: Since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, Jewish people could no longer bring First Fruit offerings (*Bikkurim*) to Jerusalem. On Tu B'Shvat we offer instead the "fruit of our lips," praise for all the fruit trees in the world.²

PARTICIPANT: The Talmud³ says that Tu B'Shvat is the New Year for the TREE (singular). This reference to a single tree is an allusion to "The Tree" -- the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

Meditation: "One should intend that they are eating at the celestial table before God, in the Garden of Eden before the Divine Presence."⁴

PARTICIPANT: The flow of God's beneficence is called in Kabbalah the Tree of Life—the roots, above in God; the fruit, here below. By eating fruit on this day we correct and increase this flow.⁵

ALL: Adam and Eve erred by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. To correct this mistake, we eat our fruit today with pure intentions, as if from the Tree of Life.

PARTICIPANT: Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote: My teacher, the holy Arizal, used to say that one must intend while eating the fruits at the Tu B'Shvat Seder to repair the sin of Adam who erred by eating fruit from the tree.⁶

¹ An anonymous student of the great Kabbalist of Safed, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (b.1534-d.1572), compiled a fifty page pamphlet presenting fruits to eat and passages to read arranged like a seder and deeply Kabbalistic. The Tu B'Shvat Seder has been handed down through generations, and observed by various communities.

² One of the most important authorities on Jewish Law, the *Magen Avraham*, writes in his notes to the Code of Law (131:16): "It is the custom on *Tu b'Shvat* to eat many different kinds of fruit."

³ Mishnah in Tractate *Rosh Hashana*

⁴ *Raishit Chochma* -- *Shar HaKedusha*

⁵ *Pri Etz Hadar*

⁶ The Talmud in tractate *Brachot 40b* records a discussion of what was the fruit in the Garden of Eden. "Rabbi Meir says: The fruit of (the Tree of Knowledge of Good-and-Evil) was a grape... Rabbi Nechemia says: It was a fig... Rabbi Yehuda says: It was wheat..." Isn't it funny that none of the Rabbis say apple?!

PARTICIPANT: Originally we were nourished on fruit alone. Every tree produced fruit. After our exile from Gan Eden (The Garden of Eden), we had to work for our food, cultivate the earth, and many trees stopped giving forth fruit. In the Messianic Era, all trees will once again give forth their fruit.

PARTICIPANT: In the Talmud, Rabbi Abbun said: "In the next world, a person will be judged for all the fine fruit that he saw but did not eat." Rabbi Elazar fulfilled this teaching. Although he was very poor, he saved up small coins, which he kept in a special pouch, to purchase new fruits as they came into season.

☞ WINE/GRAPE JUICE ☞

At the Tu B'Shvat seder, it is traditional to drink four cups of wine or grape juice.

Since tonight is Shabbat, we will Sanctify the Sabbath by making Kiddush on the First Cup of Wine.

Pour the First Cup of wine into a Kiddush Cup or other fine vessel.

ALL: "Wine gladdens a person's heart."⁷ This refers to the wine of Torah.

PARTICIPANT: We drink four cups of wine or grape juice which relate to four different categories of fruit. Each of these fruits also corresponds to four spiritual realms-worlds. Each level becomes more spiritual and connected to the Creator. As we eat, we elevate the fruits —and ourselves— through the various levels, rising higher and higher.

Arba'ah Olamot "The Four Worlds"⁸ and the four levels of the soul

We read responsively

The WORLD of action	—	Olam Ha' Asiah
The WORLD of formation	—	Olam Ha' Yetzirah
The WORLD of creation	—	Olam Ha' Beriah
The WORLD of emanation and pure Godliness	—	Olam Ha' Atzilut

Meditation: Wine can serve both good and bad purposes. The first encounter with wine in the Torah is when Noach becomes drunk and ends up cursing his son and grandchildren. Wine has the potential to carry curses and blessings. Thus, one who drinks wine in the company of others calls their attention to the fact that he is doing so with only the purest of intentions, and with the hopes that no damage will result from this drinking. As such, we say "savri" before making the blessing, and they reply "l'chaim" - "to life," echoing his hope that our drinking will bring only good and not evil.

⁷ Psalm 104:15

⁸ "The four worlds, Atzilut ("the world of emanation"), Beriah ("the world of creation"), Yetzirah ("the world of formation"), and Asiyah ("the world of action") all emerge out of God's infinite light (which, subsequent to the initial tzimtzum, shines through the partzuf of Adam Kadmon, as described above) and culminate in our finite physical universe." — Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh.

☞FRIDAY NIGHT KIDDUSH☞

*The leader of the Seder can recite Kiddush, Kiddush can be recited together, or individually.
English translation follows the transliteration.*

Yom ha'shishi, va'yechulu ha'shamayim ve'ha'aretz v'chol tzeva'am.
Va'yechal Elo-him ba'yom ha'shevi'iy melachto asher asa,
va'yishbot ba'yom ha'shevi'iy mikol melachto asher asa.
Va'yevarech Elo-him et yom ha'shevi'iy va'yekadesh oto,
ki vo shavat mikol melachto asher bara Elo-him laasot.

(Some Say: Savri! And others answer: L'Chaim!)
Baruch ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam, borei peri ha'gafen.

Baruch ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam,
asher kideshanu b'mitzvotav v'ratzah vanu,
v'Shabbat kodsho b'ahavah u'v'ratzon hinchilanu,
zikaron l'maaseh bereshit. Ki hu yom techilah,
le'mikraei kodesh,zeicher li'yetziat Mitzrayim.
Ki vanu vacharta v'otanu kidashta mi'kol ha'amim,
V'Shabbat kodshecha be'ahavah u've'ratzon hinchaltanu;
Baruch ata Ado-nai mekadesh Ha'Shabbat.

Of the sixth day. And the creation of the heaven and earth were completed with all of their array. On the seventh day God completed all work—creative activity, and withdrew on the seventh day from the work which God had done. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, for on it God abstained from all the work which God had created, to be developed. (Bereshit 2:1-3)
Blessed are you God, Master of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

Blessed are you God, Creator of the Universe, Who sanctified us with commandments and desired us. And God's holy Shabbat with love and pleasure God gave to us as an inheritance, as a remembrance of the Act of Creation. For Shabbat is the first of the holidays, which are remembrances of the Exodus from Egypt. For You have chosen us, and made us holy from all the nations, and You gave us Your holy Shabbat with love and pleasure. Blessed are You, Holy Master, Who sanctifies the Shabbat.

Drink the First cup.

☞ THE SEVEN SPECIES ☞

*According to the Torah the land of Israel is blessed with seven native species:
Wheat, Barley, Grapes, Olives, Figs, Pomegranates, and Dates.*

☞ GRAIN - CHALLAH☞

ALL: God gave us, "A land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olives and honey." ⁹ Since the Torah begins with grains we begin by eating food from grain—Challah:

PARTICIPANT: Challah is one of the seven charitable gifts given to the priests or eaten in purity when the holy Temple stood in Jerusalem . These seven gifts of charity rectify our emotional realm. Challah corresponds to the Realm of Kingdom, and the world of Action.

⁹ Deut. 8:8.

✧ HAMOTZI – BLESSING OVER THE BREAD ✧

Hamotzi like a Kabbalist: Prepare to recite the blessing over two whole loaves of bread and cover them with a nice cover, and have salt nearby. Keep the bread covered.

Meditation: Friday night when we rest ten fingers on the two challahs pause to consider the following: this Challah is the product of many hands and much effort; we must plant, irrigate, tend, harvest, mill, bag, mix with water and yeast, knead, shape, let rise, bake...When we lift the two challahs and proclaims God as the provider of the bread, we elevat this entire process.

Place one loaf on top of the other, and say the blessing:

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam, Ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

“Blessed are you God, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.”

Cut the lower Challah down the middle into two pieces. Cut off other pieces, dip them into the salt and pass around.

Meditation: Savor each bite of the challah. Appreciate that God loves us and created everything for our good.

✧ OLAM HA-ASSIYAH – The World Of Action ✧

PARTICIPANT: The World of Action-our realm where evil exerts a powerful attraction is represented by those fruits, which are enclosed in a totally inedible, protective shell.

Meditation: As you toss away the peels and shells, you are peeling away the effects of evil in our lives. Peel away the materialism that prevents our spiritual growth.

We now eat fruits with inedible shells or peels.

✧ OLAM HA-YETZIRAH – The World Of Formation ✧

PARTICIPANT: The World of Formation-a lesser level of purity, is represented by those fruits which all is eaten except for a pit on the inside

✧ FRUIT ✧

On Tu B'Shvat, we eat the fruit by which the Torah praises the Land of Israel.

PARTICIPANT: As the verse says: “The trees have borne their fruit, fig tree and vine have yielded their strength. Children of Zion be happy, rejoice in the Lord, your God.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Rabbi Chaim Vital (main disciple of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria) explained that there are 30 fruits which parallel the Ten *Sephirot* ("Divine Attributes") as they are manifested in each of the three lower of the four spiritual worlds.

¹¹ Yoel 2:22-23.

If you have a preference, eat the fruits in the order you most enjoy. Otherwise the order of eating should be: olives, dates, grapes, figs, and pomegranates.

The Shehechyanu: *If there is a seasonal fruit at the table which you have not yet tasted this season, say the following additional blessing before eating the fruit:*

ALL: *Baruch Ata Ado-noi, Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam, sheh-he-che-yanu vi-kee-yimanu vi-hee-gee-yanu laz-man ha-zeh. "Blessed are You God, Creator of the Universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."*

ALL: *Baruch Ata Adod-nai Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam boray pri ha-aitz. "Blessed are you God, Creator of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree."*

Action and Meditation: Take each fruit one by one, as the appropriate paragraph below is recited. Enjoy the many unique flavors and textures. God wants us to learn from everything He put into the world.

Read In Call and Response.

Olives: The Sages taught: "Just as olive oil brings light into the world, so do the Jewish People bring light into the world."¹²

Olives yield the best of its oil only when the fruit is crushed.

Dates: "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree."¹³ The righteous are fruitful and sweet, just like a date palm.

Dates are often a metaphor for the righteous, as the date tree is both lofty and fruit-bearing. Further, as the date tree is impervious to the changing winds, so too are the Jewish people.

Grapes: "Just as a vine has large and small clusters and the large ones hang lower, so too the Jewish people: Whoever labors in Torah and is greater in Torah, seems lower than his fellow [due to his humility]."¹⁴

Grapes can be turned into very different sorts of food (raisins) and drink (wine); so too, each Jew has the potential to be successful in some aspect of Torah and mitzvot observance and to be special in his or her own way.

Figs: Rabbi Yochanan said: "What is the meaning of 'He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit'?"¹⁵ Why is the Torah compared to a fruit tree? Figs on a tree do not ripen all at once, but a little each day.

¹² Midrash -- Shir HaShirim Raba 1:2.

¹³ Psalms 92:13.

¹⁴ Midrash - Vayikra Raba 36:2

¹⁵ Proverbs 27:18.

Therefore, the longer one searches in the tree, the more figs he finds. So too with Torah: The more one studies, the more knowledge and wisdom one finds.”¹⁶

*Figs must be picked as soon as they ripen, for they quickly go bad. Similarly, we must be quick to do good deeds at hand before the opportunity spoils.*¹⁷

Pomegranates: “Even the most unidentified of Jews are as full of merit as a pomegranate is pips.”¹⁸

“Let us see... if the pomegranates are in bloom,” the Rabbis comment, “These are children who are busy learning Torah; they sit in rows like pomegranate seeds.

We now eat fruits with inedible pits and drink the Second cup (light pink).

Now we eat the main Shabbat Feast

⌘ OLAM HA-BERIAH – The World Of Creation ⌘

PARTICIPANT: The World of Creation-far removed from the realm of impurity- is represented by those fruits which are wholly edible This is the highest level in the created world.¹⁹

Meditation: Sowing seeds is also like the fulfillment of good deeds. Once a seed is planted, it breaks apart and releases growth potential. In other words, it ceases to be what it was and becomes something greater. When a Jew fulfills a mitzvah, it is because God has commanded him to do so. He lets go of his ego and his inclinations and becomes something greater than he was before.

Now we eat fruits that are completely edible and drink the Third cup (dark pink).

⌘ OLAM HA-ATZILUT – The World Of Emanation/Godliness ⌘

PARTICIPANT: The World of Emanation is too purely divine to have physical representation, instead we rely on fragrance. We pray on Tu b'Shvat, when all the trees are judged, that God should make available for us a kosher and especially beautiful etrog in time for Sukkot.²⁰

Meditation: Think about being alone among the trees and grass, among all growing things, and praying, talking, to God. Imagine expressing everything in your heart in prayer. Imagine pouring out the words of your heart before God like water.

Now we eat the most fragrant fruit and drink the Fourth cup (red with a drop of white).

¹⁶ Talmud - Eruvin 54a.

¹⁷ See also Songs 2:10.

¹⁸ See Song 4:4, 6:7.

¹⁹ The three lower worlds -- *asiyah*, *yetzirah*, and *beriah* -- are referred to as *ma'aseh bereishit*, “the act of creation.”

²⁰ Benei Yissaschar.

❧ CONCLUSION ❧

PARTICIPANT: Eating 12 different fruits is significant, since this corresponds to the 12 different arrangements of the four-letter ineffable Name of God.²¹

ALL: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit each person under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."²²

Birkat Ha Mazon, The Blessing After the Meal is Recited.

PARTICIPANT: "Rabbi Abba taught: There is no more revealed redemption -- no greater indication of the impending redemption -- than that which the verse (Ezekiel 36:8) states: And you, mountains of Israel, you shall give forth your branches and you shall bear your fruit for my people Israel, for they shall soon come."²³ Rashi explains: When the Land of Israel will give fruit bountifully, this is an indication of the impending redemption, and there is no greater indication than this.

PARTICIPANT: Eating fruit reminds us that we should learn Torah with joy and pleasure, since we are giving pleasure to God. It is also an important day to learn and spread the inner dimension of Torah, wherein is found the greatest sweetness and pleasure of Torah. The fact that the full moon occurs tonight reflects the fullness and joy of Tu b'Shvat and to remind us that all Jews are sons and daughters of kings and queens until the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days.

ALL: Shana Ha'ba B'Yerushalayim!

Next year In Jerusalem!

Sources:

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²¹ Eating 15 different fruits is also significant, since this is the numerical value of *Yud-Heh*, the Name of God which connects the physical to the spiritual, between this world and the next world. In the Holy Temple, the Levites would sing each of the 15 "Shir HaMa'alot" Psalms as they ascended each of the 15 steps.

²² (Micah 4:3-4)

²³ (Talmud - Sanhedrin 98a)