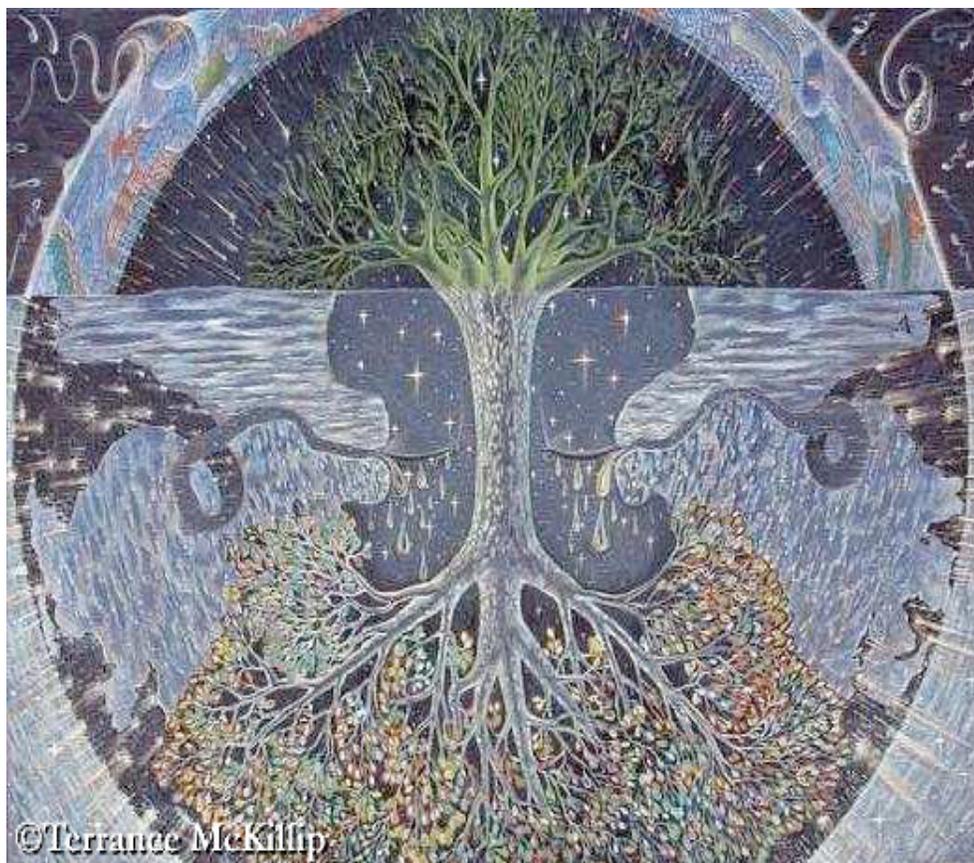


A KABBALIST'S FEAST

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.

Edited and Adapted By Rabbi Yonah Bookstein

🌀 Supplies for the Seder 🌀

Red wine, white wine, beer, cake, olives, dates, grapes, figs, pomegranates, walnuts, almonds, carob, apples, pears, and if you can, candied etrog rind. In addition, bring other fruits with inedible shells or peels, fruits with edible skins, but have seeds, fruits that are totally eaten, and fragrant fruits. Use as many different kinds of fruit as you can find, especially exotic fruit that you rarely eat.

🌀 Guidelines for the Seder 🌀

Gather a group of friends, and ask each to bring something for the feast. Set the table with a fine tablecloth, candles, flowers etc. Have a good time – there is really no “wrong” way to do the Seder. Where it says “PARTICIPANT” we suggest letting each guest recite one part and then passing the reading around to the next. Use this Seder guide as a roadmap and feel free to improvise, make additions, sing and dance!

🌀 The Tu B' Shvat Seder ' 🌀

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

ALL RECITE TOGETHER: 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

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*

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

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.

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

☞ THE SEVEN SPECIES ☞

☞ WHEAT⁷ ☞

We pass around cake or another food or another food made from wheat.

ALL: God gave us, "A land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olives and honey." ⁸ Since the Torah begins with grains we begin by eating food made from grain—cake or bread.

ALL RECITE THE BLESSING: "Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam, boray minay mezonot." "*Blessed are you God, Creator of the Universe, Who creates species of nourishment.*"

Meditation: Savor each bite of the cake. Appreciate that God loves us and created every-thing for our good.

☞ BARLEY⁹ ☞

We pass around beer or another food or drink made from barley.

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?!

⁷ When Tu B'Shvat falls on Friday night, we use a Seder guide which includes the prayers and order of blessings as on Shabbat.

⁸ Deuteronomy 8:8.

⁹ This part of the Seder has been added to reflect on the custom of counting the Omer. In addition, beer is one of the oldest known drinks to humankind and is usually brewed from barley.

ALL: During the 49 days between the second night of Passover and Shavuot we count 49 days corresponding to the barley offerings given in the Holy Temple. As it is written "*You shall count for yourselves...from the day when you bring the Omer...seven Shabbats...*"¹⁰

PARTICIPANT: The Kabbalists teach that the 49 days are also steps in personal growth, via seven attributes of the *sephirot*¹¹: Loving-kindness, discipline, harmony, endurance, humility, bonding, and leadership. Each week between Passover and Shavuot we dedicate to examining and refining our character corresponding to one of these attributes.

ALL RECITE THE BLESSING: "Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam, shehakol nee-yeh bee-dvaro." "*Blessed are you God, Creator of the Universe, through Whose word everything came to be.*"

Drink the Beer

∞ FRUIT ¹²∞

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."¹³

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 put into the world.

¹⁰ Leviticus 23:15-16

¹¹ During the counting of the Omer we refer to the lower seven *sephirot* which relate to seven conscious emotions. The ten *sephirot* in the Tree of Life are 1) *Keter* - Crown 2) *Chachma* - Wisdom 3) *Binah/Daat* - Understanding/Knowledge 4) *Chesed* - Lovingkindness 5) *Gevurah* - Strength 6) *Tiferet* - Beauty 7) *Netzach* - Victory 8) *Hod* - Splendor 9) *Yesod* - Foundation 10) *Malchut* - Kingship.

¹² 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.

¹³ Yoel 2:22-23.

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.”¹⁴

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

Dates: “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree.”¹⁵ 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].”¹⁶

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'?” Why is the Torah compared to a fruit tree? Figs on a tree do not ripen all at once, but a little each day. 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.”¹⁸

*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.*¹⁹

Pomegranates: “Even the most unidentified of Jews are as full of merit as a pomegranate is pips.”²⁰

“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.

∞ WINE/GRAPE JUICE ∞
Now pour the first cup using white wine.

ALL: “Wine gladdens a person’s heart.”²¹ This refers to the wine of Torah.

¹⁴ Midrash Shir HaShirim Raba 1:2.

¹⁵ Psalms 92:13.

¹⁶ Midrash Vayikra Raba 36:2

¹⁷ Proverbs 27:18.

¹⁸ Talmud Eruvin 54a.

¹⁹ See also Songs 2:10.

²⁰ See Song 4:4, 6:7.

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, spiritual worlds. Each level becomes more spiritually refined and connected to the Creator. As we eat, we elevate the fruits –and ourselves– through the various levels, rising higher and higher.

PARTICIPANT: The Arba'ah Olamot “The Four Worlds”²² correspond to four levels of the soul:

ALL: 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

OLAM HA-ASSIYAH – The World Of Action

PARTICIPANT: The World of Action, a 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 such as walnuts, almonds and other fruit.

ALL: *Baruch Ata Adon-ai Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam boray pri ha-gafen. Blessed are you God, Master of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.*

Drink the first cup of wine.

Meditation: Wine has the potential to carry curses and blessings. When we drink wine or other intoxicating beverages we do so with the purest of intentions. We say l'chaim, to life, echoing our hope that our drinking will bring only good.

OLAM HA-YETZIRAH – The World Of Formation

Prepare the second cup of wine by filling the glass with white wine, then add a small amount of red wine to make it light pink in color

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

²¹ Psalm 104:15

²² “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.

We now eat fruits with inedible pits and drink the second cup of white wine.

⌘ OLAM HA-BERIAH – The World Of Creation ⌘

Prepare the third cup of wine by filling the glass with half red and half white wine.

PARTICIPANT: The World of Creation is far removed from the realm of impurity and is represented by those fruits that are wholly edible. This is the highest level in the created world.²³

Meditation: Sowing seeds are 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: apple, pear, carob and drink the third cup.

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

Prepare the fourth cup of wine by filling the glass with red wine.

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.²⁴

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 fruits, for example etrog, and drink the fourth cup.

We recite the Three-fold Blessing after the Seder and can be found in all prayer books.

²³ The three lower worlds -- *asiyah*, *yetzirah*, and *briah* -- are referred to as *ma'aseh bereishit*, "the act of creation."

²⁴ Benei Yisaschar.

✧ CONCLUSION ✧

PARTICIPANT: Eating 12 different fruits is significant, since this corresponds to the 12 different arrangements of the four-letter ineffable Name of God.²⁵

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.”²⁶

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.”²⁷ 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!

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²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Micah 4:3-4

²⁷ Talmud - Sanhedrin 98a