Seder TU Bi’Shevat

Leader: Welcome to our Seder for TU Bi’Shevat.

Why a Seder for TU Bi’Shevat?
Because a Seder is a ritual that makes an idea tangible. A Seder speaks to spiritual values, and makes an idea concrete. On Pesach, we use horseradish to really taste the bitterness of slavery; we see the haroset and picture the hard labor of our ancestors. Likewise the Seder of TU B’Shevat uses symbols and ideas to teach a theme.

What are the central themes of TU B’Shevat?
G-d is the source of all life, and therefore every tiny piece of creation is infinitely valuable. Taking this idea a step further, the Seder of TU B’Shevat speaks of our responsibility towards nature and the environment. It emphasizes that everything is connected to everything else, and even very small actions that we do reverberates all over the universe ... By studying Kabbalistic metaphors we will develop this theme, connecting physically, emotionally and spiritually with something as small as a raisin or a walnut and as big as the entire universe of creation.

The second central theme of TU B’Shevat is our historical and emotional attachments to the Land of Israel, and our connection to all Jewish people everywhere. What better way to understand this theme than to study traditional Jewish writings that speak of our commitment to the environment, to each other and to all the House of Israel?

A Participant: Long ago in Biblical times our fathers and mothers worked the earth. This closeness to the earth made them aware of the transformation of nature from the long sleep of winter to the rebirth that comes with the end of the winter cycle. The month of Shevat in Eretz Israel brings the promises of the new fruits. During the month of Shevat, the trees begin to blossom. It will be several months yet before the trees will bear their fruits.

“The Lights of the World (i.e. sun, moon, stars) suffer when a good tree is harmed.”
Talmud Bavli, Sukkah, 29a

When a fruit bearing tree is chopped down, a crying voice is heard from one end of the world to the other, but the human ear cannot hear this cry.”
Pirke de R. Eliezer, 34

“Kol Israel aravim zeh B’zeh”

“We are all responsible for one another.”
Talmud B. Shevuot: 39a

Midrash Rabah Bamidbar

“If one buys a tree from his neighbor for felling he must leave of the trunk one handbreadth from the ground; of the trunk of the sycamore tree two handbreadths; of the virgin sycamore tree three handbreadths; of reeds and of vines from the knot above it; in the case, however, of date palms and cedars he may dig into the ground and uproot them because their stock does not renew itself.”
Talmud Bavli Ta’anit 25b
The first Mishnah of Tractate Rosh Hashanah discusses the four New Years in the Jewish calendar: The 1st of Nissan was designated as the New Year for Kings, and the Holidays. The first of Elul was designated as the New Year for the tithing of domestic animals. The 1st of Tishri is beginning of the civic New Year, for Release (Sh'mita), for Jubilee years (Yovel), for plantation and for tithing of vegetables. On the first of Shevat is the New Year for trees, according to the ruling of Bet Shammai; Bet Hillel however places it on the 15th of that month.

A Participant: Why did Hillel declare the New Year for trees to be 15th of Shevat? Our traditions say that the Rabbis who were familiar with the agricultural cycles concluded from their observations that the 15th of Shevat was the approximate date when trees begin to be nourished by the waters of the New Year. This also gave rise to the concept that this day as Rosh Hashanah, is a day of judgment for trees: How much rain will fall on the trees. Kabbalists designated this day as a day of introspection, as on Rosh Hashanah.

A participant: during the long night of the Diaspora, TU Bi'Shevat came to symbolize the longing of the Jewish people for The Land of Israel, for its fruits, for the good earth.

The trees that covered Eretz Israel after the destruction of the 2nd Temple in the year 70 of the Common Era gradually became destroyed during the centuries that the Jews were in exile. The land became like a desert. The earth was parched and yellow. After Israel was conquered by the crusaders, the Jewish population was almost completely destroyed and the remainder were dispersed in other countries. The tradition of celebrating Tu B'Shvat lapsed. In addition, much of the rich literature of the Gaonim period was lost, and with it the literature on Tu B'Shvat. In spite of this, a vestige of the Tu B'Shvat celebration remained in the customs of the Jews of Eastern Europe, among these was the custom to eat fruits.

An Aggadic tradition tells us that the trees saw that Man had Rosh Hashanah and envied Man. “Are Trees less than Man?” they asked. “Does it not say in the Torah: “For Man is the Tree of the field?” (Devarim: 20:19)

The trees wanted the holiday to fall during the month of Shevat because the Water Carrier, which is the Zodiac sign for the month represents the need of the trees for water. The original day for the holiday was the 1st day of the month. But the trees asked that the holiday be moved to the middle of the month to avoid having two months in a row without holidays.

Sefer Ha-Aggadah
Hayim Bialik and Yehoshua Ravitsky

In ancient days, there was a custom of planting a cedar tree for a baby boy, and a cypress tree for a baby girl. As the children grew, they tended the trees, and the trees grew along with the children. When they married, they used the wood for the poles in their Chuppah. This carried the tradition of loving trees from generation to generation in a concrete and special way.
**A Participant:** In the 16th century new meanings to TU Bi'Shevat celebration came with the Alyah of the Mekubalim, the Kabbalists of Tsefad. R. Luria Ashkenazi (The Ari) and his school wanted to infuse new life into Judaism. TU”B’Shevat became the occasion to celebrate with the trees the happiness of their holiday. The Kabbalists of sixteenth century Tsefad began the custom of holding a Tu Bi'Shvat Seder. The students of the holy Ari - Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, formulated a special Tu b'Shvat Seder in the mid 1500’s. It was set up along the lines of the Pesach (Passover) Seder. White tablecloths are placed on the tables with candle light glowing all around. Incense, preferably myrtle, which is taken during Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles), is placed on the tables. Similarly, flowers are used to decorate the tables and to give the air a pleasant fragrance.

**A Participant:** At the end of the 19th century the Jewish people began to return to the land of their forefathers. The early Chalutzim (pioneers) considered the planting of trees to be a Mitzvah or holy work. Planting trees became a symbol of the revival of the land and the nation. They worked hard to drain the swamps and plant the seedlings that would become forests. To this day, planting trees in Israel has come to be a tradition to honor the memory of someone, or celebrate a happy event.

TU Bi'Shevat is also the day that the Knesset held its first session. Since then the anniversary of the parliament of the State of Israel is celebrated every year on TU Bi'Shevat.

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For there is hope that a tree, if it is cut down, will sprout again, and that its tender branch will not cease.

Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground;

Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.

Iyuv (Job) 14:7-9

“Know that every shepherd has a unique Niggun for each of the grasses and for each place where they herd. For each and every grass has its own song and from these songs of the grasses, the shepherds compose their songs.

Would I merited hearing the sound of the songs and praises of the grasses, how every blade of grass sings to the Holy One of Blessing, wholeheartedly without reservations and without anticipation of reward.

How wonderful it is when one hears their song and how very good to be amongst them serving the creator in awe.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratislav
Leader: We begin our Seder by reciting the blessing composed by Rabbi Yossef Hayyim of Baghdad, followed by Shechechiyanu:

“Blessed are you Lo-d our G-d, Majesty of Earth, You made the world so that nothing lacks in her And You created good creatures and good trees for people to enjoy! Amen

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם שחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה (אמם)

“Baruch Ata Ad-nai Elokaynu Melech HaOlам Shechechiyanu Vekeeyamanu Vehegeyanu Lazman HaZeh”.

A Participant: The soul of the Seder concerns the “Four Worlds.” The Kabbalists who originated the tradition of TU B’Shevat seder defined four levels of meaning in all physical and spiritual experiences. These they called “worlds.” In this Seder, each world is also connected to a particular element, and an environmental aspect.

As we enter each world we will be drinking a cup of wine, each with its distinctive color, and of fruits with particular properties.

These worlds we are invited to explore together tonight are:

Hashkediya Porachat

Hashkediya porachat ve shemesh paz zorachat
Tsiporim me rosh kol gag
Mevasrot et bo he chag

Tu bishvat higia-
Chag la ilanot
Tu bishvat higia-
Chag la ilanot…

The almond tree is blooming
The golden sun is rising,
Birds sing from every roof
Telling us that Tu bishvah has come- the holiday of trees.
Assiyah, the world of Action. It is the world representing Earth, and the barrenness of autumn and winter.

Yetzirah, the world of Formation. It is also the world of emotions, of water and comes to symbolize the promises of spring and rebirth.

Briyah, the world of Creation. It is the world of thought, air, and summer.

A fourth world – Atselut (emanation) has no direct physical manifestation, it is total spirituality. It is the most Godly, and most pure, with no physical manifestation.

Leader: During the course of this evening we will also be drinking four cups of wine, each representing the colors of the four seasons.

FIRST CUP Kos Ha-Illanot—The cup of the trees. The World of Assiyah

Leader: In this world, the world of Creation we bless the physical: our bodies, our land, our homes. It is our connection with Earth that inspires action.

The first cup of wine is composed entirely of white wine, symbolizing the barrenness of the fall followed by winter. The sun is weak, the skies are gray. As we drink the fruit of the vine, we recall that nature will be dormant for many months to come, awaiting the cycle of rebirth. Kos Ha—Illanot, the cup of the trees, that has come to symbolize the beauty of the land and the fruits.

The spiritual meaning of this cup represents the world of action -Olam Ha Assiyah. It is symbolized by the Hebrew expression: "Ve ahavta le-achap -a cha Kamocha."— “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

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<th>Tsadik Katamar</th>
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<td>Tsadik ka tamar yifrach yifrach,</td>
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<td>Tsadik ka tamar yifrach (x2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ka erez ba levanon yisge ka eraz ba levanon yisge (x2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The righteous shall bloom like a date palm They thrive like cedar in Lebanon…”</td>
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(Psalms 92)

“A person who enjoys the pleasures of this world without blessing is called a thief because the blessing is what causes the continuation of the Divine flow of the world.”

Perei Eitz Hadar
Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine.
"ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הґפנ".

“Baruch Ata Adoni Elohaynu Melech HaOlam Borei Pre HaGafen”.

The first fruits we eat tonight are fruits with inedible peels, which symbolize the physical world of ACTION. The edible parts of fruit represent holiness.

A participant: We will be eating fruits that in this season will be flourishing in Israel.

Each fruit for the world of Assiyah symbolizes values directing us to manage responsibly our land, as it is said in the Torah:

“And the L-rd G-d took Man and put him in Gan Eden, the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it.”
Bereshit-Genesis: 2:15

“And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the land is Mine, And you are strangers and settlers with Me.”
Vayikra- Leviticus: 25:23

The first fruit is Wheat. Crackers symbolize this fruit here. Wheat represents the good earth and the essential food to sustain us. It is likened to Torah.

Lift up the fruit in your right hand as we recite together the blessing: "ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו בורא מיני מזונות"

“Baruch Ata Adoni Elohaynu Melech HaOlam Borei Mine Mezonot”.

The corresponding spiritual world for Assiyah is the world of Din or Accountability. All the fruits we eat here have a tough skin to remind us that we are accountable for the protection of the Earth and the preservation of our environment.
SECOND CUP- Kos ha netiot (the cup for planting trees). The World of Yetzirah

The second cup of wine is 2/3 white and 1/3 red wine, symbolizing the winter and approach of spring. In the white wine symbolizes the cold winter, the red wine signifies the emergence of color. In the sleepy nature there are the first signs of awakening appearing.

Long ago, we believed that before TU’ B’Shevat the trees drank the waters of last year’s falls. On TU B’Shevat the trees began to drink the waters accumulated under ground by the rainfall of this year.

The second cup in devoted to the tradition of planting trees on Tu bi’shvat. This tradition made a big difference in the nature of Israel.

We now take fruits from the second category. These fruits are edible on the outside, but have inedible pits, symbolizing the Kabalistic world of FORMATION.

The fruits that we are about to eat refer to the “world of Formation” - “Olam Ha Yetzira” These fruits need an external protection because their seeds create new life.

Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine. "ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן.

“Baruch Ata Adoni Elohaynu Melech HaOlam Borei Pre HaGafen”.

Once again, we eat first from the fruits of Israel. Lift up the fruit in your right hand and recite together the blessing: (if you are eating a fruit that you have not eaten in at least a year, recite the second blessing as well)

"ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ.

“Baruch Ata Adoni Elohaynu Melech HaOlam Borei Pre HaAtz.

Ki tavo-u

Ve chi tavo-u el haarets , u neta atem kol ets techila-
Ve natan ha ets piryo
Ve ha arets yevula…
Et linto-a ilanot
Et linto-a ve livnot

When you come to the land and plant trees, Each tree shall give it’s fruit and the land shel give it’s abundance. It’s time to plant trees, It’s time to plant and build.
THIRD CUP- the cup of Israel’s nature

The third cup of wine is 1/3 white and 2/3 red, symbolizing the progression of spring. The red wine symbolizes the height of the sun, the nature wakes up, the blooming is in its high point. The white wine symbolizes the rain that had bees storage in the ground, now there are more hot days and more colors in the fields. The ground has warmed to allow the seeds to take root and the plants have started to grow. Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine. "ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן" "Baruch Ata Adoni Elohaynu Melech HaOlam Borei Pre HaGafen".

Now we take the fruit form the third category, those fruits that are completely edible, symbolizing the Kabalistic world of CREATION: grapes, figs, carobs, etrogim, apples, strawberries, lemons, raspberries, and pears. The Torah may be compared to the fruits in this category.

Every part of these fruits is good to eat, and every part of the Torah is good to study and learn from.

Once again, we eat first from the fruits of Israel. Lift up the fruit in your right hand and recite together the blessing: (if you are eating a fruit that you have not eaten in at least a year, recite the second blessing as well) "ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו בורא פרי היען" "Baruch Ata Adoni Elohaynu Melech HaOlam Borei Pre HaAtz".

The people of Israel are being fabled to vine. Like vine gets better when it is being moved and planted somewhere else, and all the world is able to see, it is just like God wanted all the world to see the people of Israel so he moved them from Egypt and brought them to the desert and they got the Torah and began to success.

Hinei ma tov

Hine ma tov u ma naim
Shevet achim go yachad

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for people to be together
The Torah is being fabled to a Fig. In all the other fruits there are some scraps - pips, seeds, peeling etc. The fig is beautiful and all it’s parts are eatable, just like the Torah - there is no scrap in it.

We usually take the environment for granted. Why, today, do we focus on conservation?

Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai once said:

“If you have sapling in your hand, ready to plant, and the Messiah comes, plant the tree first and then go to greet him.”

The Torah commands us to leave fruit trees standing when we attack a city in wartime. We are also commanded to observe the mitzvah of Peah, so that the poor may glean from the fields.

As we said before - this holiday refers to the environment. It reminds us that we should take care of the environment, the nature, the growing, the living, the Earth. We should keep it in our mind and avoid pollution, and other ways of harming and destroy our planet.

FOURTH CUP- The cup for Zionism and the state of Israel.
The fourth cup of wine is all red, symbolizing the arrival of summer. The sun is shining, the days are hot and the trees are in full bloom and filled with mellow fruits.
This cup is dedicated to peace, to the love for the land of Israel and for the Israeli state. The beginning of redemption. Raising this cup we will remember our brothers and sisters that have been killed during the holocaust and the Israeli wars trying to protect the Israeli state.
Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine. "ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך ה' העולמים וארא פרי הגפן" 

“Baruch Ata Adoni Elohaynu Melech HaOlam Borei Pre HaGafen”.
The fourth Kabalistic world of **EMANATION** is purely spiritual and cannot be symbolized in any concrete way; therefore it is unrepresented by physical food. The world of Emanation relates to HaShem's love, mercy, wisdom and other essential and omnipresent realities which people perceive with their hearts rather than their five senses.

Tu Bi'Shvat marks the traditional turning point between the rainy season and the beginning of spring.

"לשנה הבא RELEASE YOUR SOUL "

“Next year it Jerusalem”
"And out of the ground, the Lo-d G-d made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food"

*Genesis - Bereshit 1:9*