

From Taxation to Creation to Preservation: the Evolution of Tu Bishvat A Limud of Masorti Israel -The Rav Siach program

Instructions for Seder Tu Bishvat.

- Set the table with wine glasses, red and white wine, and fruit (fresh and dried).
- The texts for study will be found on the pages following the instructions.
- Like at the Passover Seder, the Tu Bishvat Seder includes 4 cups of wine/grape juice, and at Tu Bishvat, we accompany the wine with a sweet tasting fruit or sweet smelling fragrance.
- There are many different customs for how to run a Tu Bishvat Seder, and in each one the cups and the fruit symbolize different aspects of our tradition.

First Cup:

In this Seder, our first cup represents the Tu Bishvat of the Temple and Talmudic periods. Because it was a day that marked the people's connection to the Land of Israel and its agricultural, we start with a glass of Israeli wine and eat one of the seven species – date, pomegranate, fig, grape, or olive.

Blessing on the wine: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן

Blessing on the fruit: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ! אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Text:

"There are four New Years. On the first of Nisan is the New Year for Kings and for Festivals; on the first of Elul is the New Year for the tithe of animals—R. Eliezer and R. Shimon say, On the first of Tishrei—on the first of Tishrei is the New Year for the years, for Sabbatical Years, for Jubilee Years, for planting and for vegetables; and on the first of Shvat is the New Year for Trees, according to the view of the School of Shammai, but the School of Hillel say, On the fifteenth thereof.

Our Rabbis taught: If the fruit of a tree blossoms before the fifteenth of Shvat, it is tithed for the outgoing year; if after the fifteenth of Shvat, it is tithed for the incoming year"

(b. Rosh HaShanah 15b)

"ארבעה ראשי שנים הם באחד בניסן ר"ה למלכים ולרגלים באחד באלול ראש השנה למעשר בהמה ר' אלעזר ור"ש אומרים באחד בתשרי. באחד בתשרי ראש השנה לשנים ולשמיטין וליובלות לנטיעה ולירקות באחד בשבט ראש השנה לאילן כדברי בית שמאי בית הלל אומרים בחמשה עשר בו: ת"ר אילן שחנטו פירותיו קודם ט"ו בשבט מתעשר לשנה שעברה אחר ט"ו בשבט מתעשר לשנה הבאה." (תלמוד בבלי, ראש השנה טו ע"ב)

The text refers to the laws of tithing, in which people had to give a percentage of the fruit that they grew in a given year, and therefore they had to know what year their fruit belongs to (similar to the payment of an annual income tax). It was also important to know the age of a tree in order to know when its fruit becomes permitted to eat (from its fourth year and onward), according to Tu Bishvat and not according to the specific date of the planting of the tree. This text refers to a period in which there was a deep connection between the Jewish people and their land.

Questions for Discussion:

- What was the meaning of Tu Bishvat according to the Mishna?
- Does their Tu Bishvat have relevance and meaning to us today, when we do not have a Temple or active Kohanim and Levi'im who receive our tithes?

Second Cup:

Today, the second cup represents the Tu Bishvat of the *Mekubalim*, the mystics of Safed, who created the first Tu Bishvat seder, known as *Pri Etz Hadar*. Their seder focused on *tikun*, repairing the world, through the act of eating fruits, making blessings, and reciting Biblical texts. They would mix red and white wine to represent tasting all that the world offers and would divide the fruits into kinds that could be eaten fully, fruit that had inedible pits and fruit that inedible peels. For our seder, we will mix together the two types of wine, and eat one of each kinds of fruit.

Inedible pits: peaches, cherries, plums, apricots, persimmons

Inedible exteriors: walnuts, almonds, pistachio, chestnuts, hazelnuts, coconuts, peanuts

Fully edible fruit: apples, pears, strawberries, carob

Text:

(From *Pri Etz Hadar*- the Kabbalistic Tu Bishvat Seder) (Translation by Miles Krassen, from *Trees, Earth, and Torah*, ed. Elon, Hyman, Waskow)

"The meaning is that the fifteenth of Shevat is the New Year's Day for tithing the fruit of trees. For most of the year's rain has already fallen. The sap has begun to ascend through the trees, and fruit begin to take form on the trees from this time. Similarly, in the divine realm, it is the New Year's Day for the fruit of the supernal tree which bestows its holy abundance on its fruit... My teacher used to say that one should intend through eating the fruit to correct the sin that Adam committed with the fruit of the tree. Even though our intention is directed toward this end

all the days of the year, a *mitzvah* is best when observed at its proper time, and this day is the beginning for fruit of the tree. Moreover, as we have frequently stated, speech has the power to arouse the *sefirot* (the spheres of divine presence) and to cause them to shine more wondrously with a very great light that sheds abundance, favor, blessing and benefit throughout all the worlds....After this say the following prayer...: You caused trees and grass to grow from the earth, according to the structure and character of [the forms] above, so that human beings might gain wisdom and understanding through them, and thus grasp the hidden [forms]."

"והענין כי כמו שהיום ראש השנה לפירות האילן לענין המעשרות דחשבינן להו שנה מט"ו שבט דהואיל וירדו רוב גשמי שנה ועלה השרף באילנות ונמצאו פירות חונטים מעתה, כן דוגמתו למעלה ראש השנה לפירות האילן העליון להשפיע את שפעו הקדוש לפירותיו הם הם העולמות אשר מהם ישתלשל וירד פה למטה באילנות ועל משטרם, ומעשה ידינו כוננהו בכח סגולת התקון הזה הנעשה בעצם היום הזה בכח הברכות ואשר ילוה אליהם הגות סוד שורשן, תתעוררנה בקומתם וצביונם למעלה. ונוסף גם הוא כי בשפר התקון הלז מעוות לו יוכל לתקון את פגם הברית אשר לא נאמנה בבריתו, והיה בעשותו התקון לעץ פרי מחץ מכתו ירפא בפגם הצדיק עושה פרי בצרוף סגולת הימים ההם הנזכרים ונעשים לתקון פגם הברית כמו שנתבאר בפרק א'.

ומורי ז"ל היה אומר לכיין באכילת פירותיהן לתקון חטא אדם הראשון אשר חטא בפירות האילן, כי אף כי כל ימי שנה כל כוונותינו לתקון זה מכל מקום חביבה מצוה בשעתה זה היום תחלה וראש לפירות האילן. פרי עץ הדר יג ואשר להיות כבר הודענו בכמה מקומות כי יש בכח הדבור להיות מעורר כח מדות העליונות להאירן באור מופלא יתר גדול מאד להשפיע שפע רצון ברכה ונדבה בכל העולמות, על כן נכון להגות לפני אכילת כל פרי ופרי בסוד שורשו הבא בספר הזוהר ובתקונים בקצת מהם לעורר שרשיהן למעלה וקודם הכל יהגו בסדר זה"

Questions for Discussion:

- According to the Kabbalists, eating fruit on Tu Bishvat is a *tikkun* for the sin of Adam's eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. How can we make our eating an act of *tikkun*, an act that repairs parts of our broken world?

Third Cup:

Our third cup today represents the Tu Bishvat of Zionism, a holiday that celebrates the Jewish people's return to the land. Tu Bisvhat became a Jewish "Arbor Day," a day to encourage planting trees as part of the Zionist goal of settling the land of Israel. As the production of sweet wine was a hallmark of industry in the early years of the Zionist enterprise, we drink a cup of sweet wine. The sweet wine also symbolizes the sweetness of the land flowing with milk and honey. For fruit we eat Jaffa oranges which became emblems of the Israeli State, the 'Jaffa' orange is also known for lending the city of Tel Aviv-Yafo the nickname "Big Orange".

The following text, which was written by Natan Alterman in 1935, describes the challenges that faced the early Zionist pioneers in settling the land.

Listen to the song and read the text: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQGLN1alhAs>

Morning Song / Nathan Alterman

In the mountains the sun already flames,
And in the valley the dew sparkles still,
We love you, motherland,
With joy, with song and with toil.

שיר בוקר / נתן אלטרמן
בְּהָרִים כָּבֵר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מִלְהָטָה
וּבְעֵמֶק עוֹד נוֹצֵץ הַטֵּל,
אֲנִי אוֹהֲבִים אוֹתְךָ, מוֹלְדָתִי,
בְּשִׂמְחָה, בְּשִׂיר וּבְעֵמֶל.

From the slopes of the Lebanon to the Dead Sea
We will pass you with plows,
We shall plant for you and build for you,
And adorn you with beauty.

מִמּוֹרְדוֹת הַלְבָנוֹן עַד יַם הַמֶּלַח
נֵעֲבֵר אוֹתְךָ בְּמַחֲרָשׁוֹת,
אֲנִי עוֹד נֹטֵע לָךְ וְנֹבְנָה לָךְ,
אֲנִי נִיפָה אוֹתְךָ מְאוֹד.

We'll dress you a gown of concrete and cement,
And we'll spread for you carpets of gardens,
Over the redeemed earth of your fields
The crops will jingle their bells.

נִלְבִּישֶׁךָ שְׁלֵמֶת בֶּטוֹן וְנִמְלֵט
וְנִפְרֵשׁ לָךְ מַרְבְּדֵי גַנִּים,
עַל אֲדָמַת שְׂדוֹתֶיךָ הַנִּגְאָלֶת
הַדֹּגֵן יִרְנִין פְּעֵמוֹנִים.

The desert – we'll cut a road through it
The swamps – we'll dry them
What shall we give you more for glory and plenty,
What we haven't given yet – we will.

הַמִּדְבָּר – אֲנִי דֹרֵךְ בּוֹ נְחֻצְבָה,
הַבְּצוֹת – אֲנַחְנוּ נִיבְשֵׁן.
מָה נִתֵּן לָךְ עוֹד לְהוֹד וְשִׁבְעַ,
מָה עוֹד לֹא נָתַנוּ וְנִתֵּן.

In the mountains, in the mountains out light has glowed,
To the top of the mountain we'll climb.
Yesterday was left behind us,
But to tomorrow the road is long.

בְּהָרִים, בְּהָרִים זָרַח אוֹרֵנוּ,
אֲנִי נֵעֲפִילָה אֶל הָהָר.
הַיְאֻתְמוֹל נִשְׂאָר מְאַחֲזֵינוּ,
אֶךְ רַבָּה הַדֶּרֶךְ לְמִחָר.

If the road is hard and betraying,
If more than one will fall slain,
Forever we'll love you motherland
We are your in combat and in toil.

אִם קָשָׁה הִיא הַדֶּרֶךְ וּבּוֹגְדָת,
אִם גַּם לֹא אֶחָד יִפֹּל חָלָל,
עַד עוֹלָם נֹאֲהֵב אוֹתְךָ, מוֹלְדָתִי,
אֲנִי לָךְ בְּקֶרֶב וּבְעֵמֶל!

Questions for Discussion:

Altmerman writes, “We love you, Motherland,” and as a result of this love he “dresses (the land) in a gown of concrete and cement,” which is to say that he celebrates turning Israel’s fields into roads. Through the song’s lyrics, the modern reader can feel a tension between Zionism -- a desire to settle the land of Israel with the Jewish people -- and a commitment to environmental preservation.

- Is there contradiction between sustainability and Zionism?

- How do we celebrate trees and the land when we are also committed to industrializing and modernizing the society?

The Fourth Cup

The fourth cup represents a final incarnation of Tu Bishvat, a celebration of Judaism's commitment to the environment. As a New Year for the trees, Tu Bishvat allows ourselves to examine what we are doing to maintain the Earth and all that it offers us. For the fourth cup, we pour ourselves only from bottles that have already been open, and we do not eat a fruit at all. Instead, we take a sweet-smelling flower or herb, and pass it around, so that many people can enjoy the aroma and share it with others. We learn how to enjoy the resources of our world in moderation, taking only what we need and not wasting unnecessarily.

Blessing on the flower/herbs: **בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא עֵשְׂבִי בְּשָׂמִים**

Questions for Discussion:

We have discussed many different incarnations of Tu Bishvat, all of which have shown the Jewish people's attempts to connect to both the land of Israel and the Earth in general throughout their history.

- What is the best way to maintain a connection to the land and its fruit today?

Final blessing after drinking wine and eating fruit:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, עַל הַגָּפֶן וְעַל פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן, וְעַל תְּנוּבַת הַשָּׂדֶה וְעַל אֶרֶץ חֲמֵדָה טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה שְׂרָצִית וְהַנְחִלְתָּ לְאַבֹּתֵינוּ לְאָכֹל מִפְּרֵיהָ וְלִשְׂבֹּעַ מִטוֹבָהּ, רַחֵם (נָא) ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמְּךָ וְעַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִירְךָ וְעַל צִיּוֹן מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדְךָ וְעַל מִזְבְּחֶךָ וְעַל הַיְכָלְךָ, וּבְנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ וְהַעֲלֵנוּ לְתוֹכָהּ וְשִׂמְחָנוּ בְּבִגְיָנָהּ וְנֹאכַל מִפְּרֵיהָ וְנִשְׂבַּע מִטוֹבָהּ וְנִבְרַכְךָ עָלֶיהָ בְּקִדְשָׁהּ וּבְטָהֳרָהּ: כִּי אַתָּה ה' טוֹב וְיָמִיב לְכָל וְנוֹדֶה לְךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ וְעַל פְּרֵי גִפְנָהּ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' עַל הָאָרֶץ וְעַל פְּרֵי גִפְנָהּ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא נִפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחִסְרוֹן עַל כָּל מֵה שֶׁבְּרָאת לְהַחְיֹת בָּהֶם נֶפֶשׁ כָּל חַי. בְּרוּךְ חַי הַעוֹלָמִים: