



Anthology of sources and songs for the holiday

Tu B'Shvat Seder

Seder for the 15th of Shvat

There are four days in the year that serve as the New Year: On the first of Nisan is the New Year for kings; ...On the first of Elul is the New Year for animal tithes ...On the first of Tishrei is the New Year for counting years, for calculating Shmita Years and Jubilee Years, for planting, and for vegetables. ...On the first of Shevat is the New Year for the tree ...this ruling is in accordance to Beit Shammai, But Beit Hillel say: The New Year for trees is on the fifteenth of Shevat.

Mishna, Rosh Hashana, 1, 1



During the period of Second Temple the 15th day of Shvat (Tu B'Shvat) was designated as the close of the year for tithes and required offerings from fruit trees. It was also the date for most of the mitzvot connected to Eretz Yisrael the Land of Israel. After the destruction of the Temple the day eventually became a day of prayer focusing on the fruit trees of the Eretz Yisrael. During the long years in the diaspora Tu B'Shvat became associated with the memory and praise of Eretz Yisrael. A tradition evolved that we eat dried fruits from Israel. With the renewal of the settlement of Eretz Yisrael Tu B'Shvat became a symbol of the renewed claim to the land. In 1884, for the first time, trees were planted by the pioneers of Yesod Ha-Ma'alah and this practice was adopted by the Federation of Hebrew Teachers and it came to symbolize the holiday. In the past years, along with the renewal of the tradition of the Tikkun Leil Shavuot (a Kabbalistic ritual) and the Tu B'Shvat Seder (modelled after the Passover seder) initiated somewhat by Reform rabbis and congregations, the holiday became a symbol of the commitment to environmental activism.

A festive table is set filled with dried and fresh fruit and bottles of white and red wine.

First Cup

A cup of white wine symbolizes the winter in its fullness. We drink this cup in honor of those who shaped this holiday, the Sages, Rabbis and artists throughout the generations.

Barukh are You Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-'olam, borei peri ha-gafen.

Lift the plate of dried fruit and recite:

These are the dried fruit that our ancestors ate in the diaspora as they remembered Eretz Yisrael.

In the past as slaves, this year free people. In the past - in the diaspora, this year in Eretz Yisrael. In the past -with dried fruit, this year with fresh fruit grown in this good land.



How is Tu B'Shvat night different from all other nights?

In the 16th century the disciples of the ARI (Rabbi Isaac Luria) from Safed prepared a seder with prayer and learning specially designed for Tu B'Shvat. It incorporated eating thirty kinds of fruit and drinking glasses of white or red wine that symbolized the transition from winter to spring. There were three categories of fruit. Every type represented a different level of creation according to the world view of the Kabbalists. Before eating the fruit, Biblical verses were recited and midrashim and parables that mentioned the fruit were studied. These seders were printed as booklets called "Chemdat Yamim" (Precious Days) and "Pri Etz Hadar" (citrus). Their popularity spread throughout the Jewish world.

Fruit representing the world of "asiyah" (action) - Fruit that needs a protective covering. Their peel or shell are discarded, and their content is eaten. As we eat them let us recall the things that are precious to us in our lives that need protection and the important lesson "Don't judge a book by its cover".

Walnuts - Edible fruits when one takes one out of the sack, it goes unnoticed. But with a walnut, when you take one out, the other walnuts take notice. So it is with then people of Israel, if one of them is imprisoned, all Jews are aroused and are moved to redeem them. (Based on Psikta Rabati 11)

Almonds - The blossoming of the almond tree has become the symbol of Tu B'Shvat in Eretz Yisrael.

Let us bless the fruit of the world of asiyah, action: walnuts, almonds, citrus, pomegranates, pineapple, bananas and more!

Baruch are You Adonai our God, sovereign of the universe, who created the fruit of the trees.

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-'olam, borei pri ha-etz.



The Almond Tree is Blooming

Lyrics: Israel Dushman Music: Menashe Ravina

The almond tree is blooming
And the sun is shining,
Birds atop each roof
Announce the arrival of the holiday.

We'll plant on every mountain,
From Dan to Be'er Sheva,
We shall inherit our land again,
Land of olives, olive oil and honey.
Tu B'Shvat has arrived, the festival of trees.

*Ha-shkeidiyah porachat
Ve-shemesh paz zorachat,
Tziporim meirosh kol gag
Mevarshot et bo hechag.*

*Nita kol har va-geva
mi-Dan ad Be'er Sheva
Ve-artzenu shuv nirash
Eretz zeit, yitzhar u-dvash.*

*Tu B'Shvat higia - chag La-ilanot.
Tu B'Shvat higia - chag La-ilanot.*

Second Cup

This cup is mostly white wine with a little red wine. It symbolizes the buds and blossoms that are on the trees. We drink this cup to honor our ancestors who dwelled in foreign lands yet they never forgot Eretz Yisrael. They praised it and yearned for it.

Barukh are You Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-'olam, borei peri ha-gafen.

During a festive Tu Bi-Shvat meal filled with fruits from Eretz Yisrael the Rebbe of Kotzk asked his disciple, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir, to say a few appropriate words about the meaning of the day. Rabbi Meir delivered a complicated talk on the Talmudic passage on Tu B'Shvat in the style of pilpul - posing questions and answering them, refuting the answers and offering new ones. Rabbi Mendel said to him: If we were in Eretz Yisrael it would be enough to walk out to a field and gaze on the trees and we would understand why this is the Rosh Hashana for trees - simply, without the need for pilpul.

“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon”



Fruits of the 15th

Lyrics and music: Naomi Shemer

Snow over my city, resting all the night.
My love has gone to the warm lands.
Snow over my city, and the night is cold.
From the warm countries he will bring me a date.

The honey of the fig, the sweetness of carob.
And a caravan of camels laden with all good things.
Surely my heart's sun will return here.
And from there, he will bring an orange.

Snow over my city, resting like a tallit.
From the warm lands, what have you brought me?
Snow on my city, snow on my face.
And within the fruit are all my longings.

*Sheleg al iri kol ha-laila nach.
El artzot hachom ahuvi halach.
Sheleg al iri vehalaila kar,
Me-artzot hachom li yavi tamar.*

*Dvash hate'eina, metek hecharuv
Ve-orchat gmalim amusei kol tuv.
Heina shuv yashuv shemesh levavi
U-mi-sham tapuach zahav yavi.*

*Sheleg al iri nach kmo talit.
Me-artzot hachom ma heveita li?
Sheleg al iri, sheleg al panai.
U-ve-toch hapri kol ga'agu'ai.*

Fruits of the world of “yetzira” (creativity) – These are the fruits whose flesh we eat and there is a seed or a kernel in the center. As we eat them let us recognize the power of creativity and the renewal of creation and the connection between the material and the spiritual.

Olives - Just as the olive tree never sheds its leaves, not in the heat of summer nor in the rains of winter, so the people of Israel will not be lost – in this world and the next. (Bavli, Menachot 53, 2)



Dates – “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon”- (Psalm 92). This is to teach us that there are two kinds of righteous people: those who are involved in the lives of others and those who are isolated and keep to themselves. The first are like the date palm, they bear fruit that nurtures all creatures. The latter are like the cedars – tall and imposing but barren of fruit. (According to Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezeritch as is told in Martin Buber’s Hidden Light)

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon.

Tzadiq ka-tamar yifrach ke-erez ba-Levanon yisgeh.

Let’s eat from the fruit of the world of yetzira, creativity – olives, dates, apples, pears, apricots and more!

Third Cup

A cup of mostly red wine with a little white wine added. This cup symbolizes the spring that is approaching. Carpets of anemone and buttercups cover the fields. We drink this cup in honor of the pioneers and immigrants who caused the fields to bloom. They planted trees and built their homes – our homes.

Barukh are You Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-'olam, borei peri ha-gafen.



After forced exile from their land, the people kept the faith in all the lands of the Diaspora. They never stopped praying for a return to their land and for restored sovereignty. Thus every generation maintained the historical and moral yearning to return and claim their ancient homeland. In recent times, they returned in great numbers, chalutzim, illegal immigrants and defenders restored desolate places, revived the Hebrew language, settled towns and villages and built a great and growing enterprise and a thriving economy and culture. (From Israel's Declaration of Independence)

The Holy Blessed One said to the people of Israel: Even though you will find the land filled with wonderful things, don't say, "Let's settle but not bother planting." Be careful to plant! Just as you entered the land and found it filled with trees that others planted, so you should plant for future generations. (Vaikra Rabbah, 25)

The Planters

Lyrics: Yitzchak Shenhar music: Yedidia Admon

The planters (of trees) walk this way:
With song in their hearts, spades in their hands,
from the city and from the country,
from the valley, from the mountains -
on Tu B'Shvat .

Why did you come here, planters?
We shall strike the soil and stones.
Dig seedbeds all around
in the mountains and the plains
on Tu B'Shvat .

What will be here, planters?
A seedling in each bed,
A mighty forest shall arise
over our forlorn land -
on Tu B'Shvat .

*Kach holchim ha-shotlim:
ron ba-leiv ve-eit bayad,
min ha-ir u-min ha-kfar,
min ha-emek, min ha-har
be-tu B'Shvat , be-tu B'Shvat .*

*Lamah batem, ha-shotlim?
nach ba-karka u-va-tzor,
ve-gumot saviv nachfor
be-harim u-va-mishor -
be-tu B'Shvat , be-tu B'Shvat .*

*Mah yehe po, ha-shotlim?
Shtil yavo bechol gumah,
ya'ar ad yifros tzilo,
al artzeinu agumah -
be-tu B'Shvat , be-tu B'Shvat .*



Fruits of the world of “briyah” (creation) - These fruits are consumed in their entirety. As we eat them let us remember that everything in our world has purpose and value.

Grapevine – Why is Israel compared to a grapevine? When you want to improve its fruit, you dig it up and replant it elsewhere and it improves. So, when the Holy Blessed One wanted to make Israel known in the world, what did God do? Uprooted them to the wilderness where they flourished. They received the Torah and became known in the world. (Shemot Rabbah, 44)

Fig - Rami bar Yehezkel happened to come to Bnei Brak. He saw goats grazing beneath a fig tree, and there was honey oozing from the figs and milk dripping from the goats, and the two were mixing together. He said: This is the meaning of the verse “A land flowing with milk and honey”. (Bavli, Ktuvat, 111, 2)

Carob - One day, Honi Ha-Me’aggel was walking along the road. He saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi said to him: This tree, after how many years will it bear fruit? The man answered: Not before seventy years will pass. Honi said to him: Do you know that you will live another seventy years? The man answered: I found a world abound with carob trees, just as my ancestors planted for me, I too am planting for my descendants. (Bavli, Ta’anit, 23, 1)

Let’s eat from the fruits of the world of bri-yah, creation: Grapes and raisins, figs fresh and dried, carobs and more!



Fourth Cup

A cup full of red wine only. This cup symbolizes lengthening of the days and the warmth of spring days. As we drink this cup, we commit ourselves to strive to preserve our world and all of creation threatened by the human negligence and greed.

Barukh are You Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-'olam, borei peri ha-gafen.

When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: "Look at my works! See how beautiful they are – how excellent! I created them for your sake. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world, for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it." (Kohelet Rabbah, 7, 19)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: Three things are equally important: earth, humanity, and rain. Rabbi Levi said: In Hebrew these three words are each composed of three letters to teach that without the earth there is no rain, without the rain there is no earth, and without them both there is no humanity. (Bereishit Rabbah 13, 3)

When people cut down a fruit yielding tree, its cry goes from one end of the world to the other, and its voice goes unheard. (Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, 34)



Environmental Confession – Ashamnu

We **abrogated** the delicate covenant balancing human needs and nature. We **accumulated** mountains of garbage near our homes and in the wilderness. We **banished** birds from their natural habitats and flight paths. We built industries at the expense of air and water. We **burned** forests on the altar of our hatred. We **cut down** primeval forests for quick profit. We **defiled** sources of water with sewage. We selfishly **exploited** gifts of nature till there were none left. We **endangered** the existence of the world with nuclear arms. We **filled** Your world with pollution, smog and smoke. We **gave up** on the quality of life of our children. We **impoverished** the population of wild animals. We **littered** nature reserves, beaches, trails and summits. We **mortgaged** the future of Your world because of apathy and lack of vision. We have **pained** you and Your creatures with our irresponsibility. We have **plucked** wildflowers and they are lost forever. We **polluted** the air, the water, and the land. We **punctured** a hole in the ozone layer protecting our world. We **squandered** precious natural resources. We **stole** the expansive horizons, filling them with ugly construction. We **split open** mountain ranges with rock quarries. We have arrogantly **trampled** field and furrow. For all these, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement – we squandered away Your treasures – all for nothing. (Rabbi Mordechai Rotem)



Closing the Seder

The last blessing after drinking wine and eating fruit from Eretz Israel.

Barukh are You Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, for the sustenance and the nourishment, for the vine and the fruit of the vine, for the tree and the fruit of the tree, for the produce of the field, for the precious, good and spacious land that You wanted and granted as an inheritance to our ancestors; so they could eat of its fruit and be satiated from its goodness. Have mercy Adonai our God on Israel Your people, on Jerusalem Your city, and complete the rebuilding of Jerusalem speedily in our days. Let us rejoice in the building of the state of Israel, that we may eat of its fruit and be satiated from its goodness, we will bless You for it with holiness and purity. For you, Adonai, are good and is good to all. We thank You for the land, and for the sustenance, for the fruit of its vine and its fruits. Barukh are You Adonai for the land, for the sustenance and the nourishment, for the fruit of its vine and its fruits.

Piyyut for Tu B'Shvat by Moshe Chalava, according to the tradition of Moroccan Jews

May this day be celebrated forever
Tu B'Shvat is a great day for us
I shall choose from the fruit of the land
Save them, God, from trouble
Fill the whole world with glory
May the humble be satiated
May You bring beauty to this year
As I find shelter under Your wing
May wheat, barley and grapes
Be fresh and abundant
I shall break out in song

On this New Year for trees
Protect the holy trees
From any kind of calamities
Fill their domain with Your goodness
With choice and finest fruit
I shall eat, and be abundantly satisfied
My mind refreshed and at ease
Figs, olives and pomegranates
Filled with all that's good



For All These

Lyrics and music: Naomi Shemer

The honey and the sting,
the bitter and the sweet,
and our baby daughter,
my Good God, keep these safe.

The burning flame,
the pure water,
and the man returning home from afar,
Keep all of these safe, my Good God.

Keep all of these safe, my Good God:
the honey and the sting,
the bitter and the sweet.
Do not uproot what has been planted,
do not forget the hope.
Bring me back, and I shall return to the
good land.

My God, keep this house,
this garden - this wall,
from sorrow, from unexpected fear
and from war.

Keep safe what little I have,
the light and the children,
the unripe fruit
that has been picked.

A tree rustles in the wind.
A star cascades in the distance.
And now in the darkness
my heart's desires are recorded.

Please keep all of these safe for me.
Keep safe the ones I love,
the silence, the crying,
and this very song.

Four conversed about the pine tree.

One defined it according to genus, species and variety.

One held forth concerning its shortcomings in the lumber industry.

One cited poems about pine trees in numerous languages.

One struck root, stretched out branches and rustled.

(Dan Pagis)