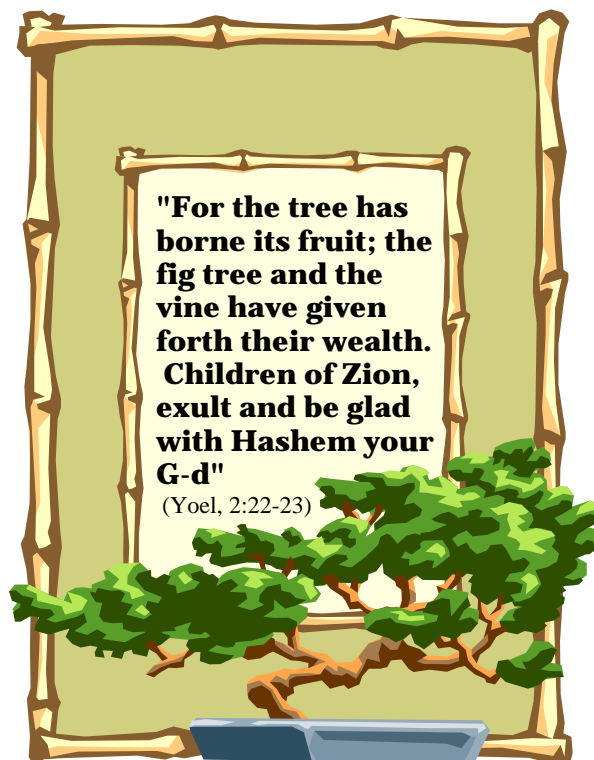


Kumah's Tu B'Shevat Seder



The Mishnah proclaims the 15th day of the month of Shevat as the New Year for the Trees. Two thousand years ago, during the time of the Holy Temple, Tu B'Shevat marked the beginning of a new year for calculating the agricultural *ma'asrot* (tithes, one-tenth of each person's harvest)

After the Temple was destroyed, and the Jews were exiled from their land, we no longer gave tithes from the produce of the Land of Israel. Yet Jews around the world yearned to return to their land and to its unique and holy bounty. They continued to mark Tu B'Shevat by eating the seven special fruits of Eretz Yisrael, the *shiv'at haminim* (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates).

On Tu B'Shevat, we also remember G-d's greatest gift to the Jewish people - the Torah, which is compared to the Tree of Life. And just as the Torah is likened to the Tree of Life, it is also true that many forms of life are dependent upon trees. The tree is also a symbol for the flourishing Jewish people. Our roots are our ancestors, and the traditions and knowledge they passed down to us. We are the trunk, connecting the roots to their branches, our children and grandchildren. The Torah teaches that everything in this world was created for the sake of mankind. Which means that "New Year for the Trees" is in some respect a "day of judgement" for each of us as well. In fact, the Torah in various places compares a person to a tree:

"A person is like the tree of a field..." (Deuteronomy 20:19)

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"For as the days of a tree shall be the days of my people." (Isaiah 65:22)

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"He will be like a tree planted near water..." (Jeremiah 17:8)

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"A person whose wisdom exceeds his good deeds is likened to a tree whose branches are numerous, but whose roots are few. The wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down. But a person whose good deeds exceed his wisdom is likened to a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are numerous. Even if all the winds of the world were to come and blow against it, they could not budge it from its place."

(Pirkei Avot 3:22)

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Tonight, we continue the ancient Jewish tradition of the Tu B'Shevat seder by holding one of our own. We will begin with the drinking of the fruit of the vine. We will pour grape juice or wine into our cups four times. Each color we will use will remind us of a different season in the year, and each cup will represent a different state of being.

White wine represents nature in potential. Red wine represents nature in full bloom. On this day, we begin to leave the winter behind and move into a period of renewal and life. As we progress from white to red, we move from potential to actuality. We are able to appreciate God's judgment as well as His kindness. We see God's design and goodness in the world with increasing clarity.

Pour a cup of white wine for the person on your right



The First Cup

As we begin, each of us is like a farmer looking at a barren field in winter. We raise this cup in tribute to the farmer who sees potential abundance emerging from the stark field and decides to plant. The Jewish people are blessed with abundant sources and resources of hope. Our tradition teaches that four thousand years ago, G-d established a covenant with the Jewish people and promised that we would become a great nation and a blessing for all humanity. The acts we perform on behalf of our fellow Jew or our fellow man ripple around the world, as a fulfillment of G-d's promise. Just as we place our ideas and efforts into the world, with the hope of infusing it with goodness, so does Hashem plant a day in each week within which to shower us with blessings. We will now recite the Kiddush, the sanctification of the Shabbat, and drink our first cup of wine.

KIDDUSH



Rise and Wash for Eating Bread

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The Bread

The verse says: 'When you eat the bread of the Land, you shall bring an offering to G-d' (Numbers 15:19). This refers to the waving (*tenufah*) of the Omer. *Tenufah* can be read as *tenu feh* -- give a mouth. The mouth is symbolic of the honor we give to G-d. Hence the Omer was waved to show that we give to G-d this mouth, since the chief praise of G-d is when the Jewish people give Him honor and glory. We too give our mouths, in service to G-d, the Land of Israel, and the Jewish people. In return, G-d fills our mouths tonight with not just one or two types of bland foods which will enable us to survive, but with countless delicious fruits, vegetables, and delicacies, in order to increase our enjoyment of life.

The First Fruit

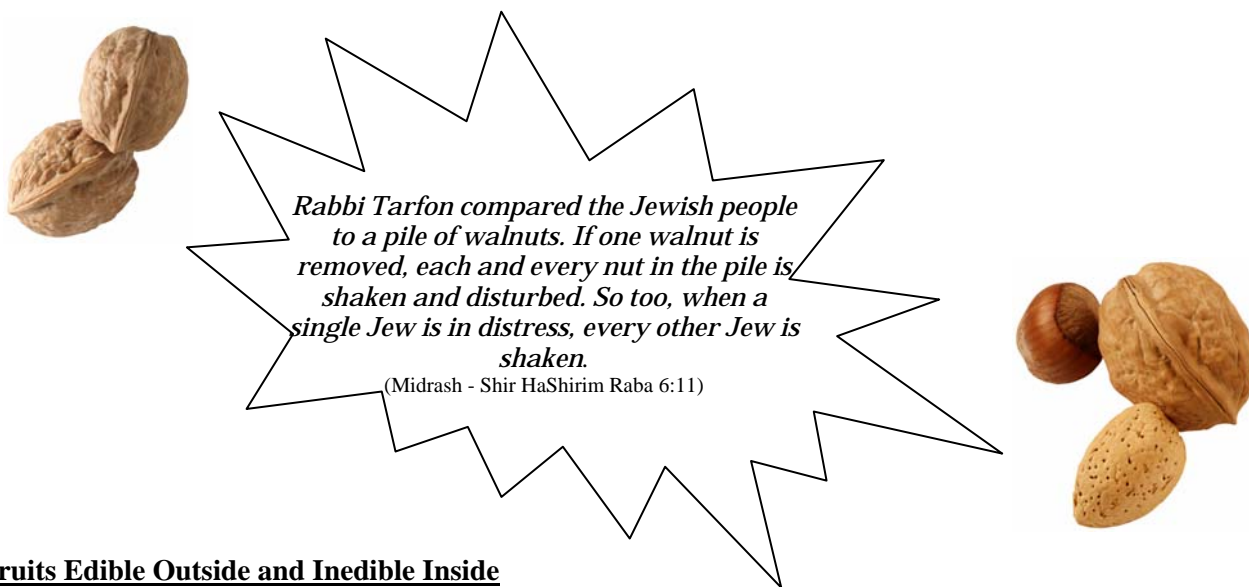
Now let us take a fruit we haven't eaten since before Rosh Hashanah, and make two blessings – one on the fruit, and one on the privilege of eating a new fruit (keep in mind that the blessing you say now will apply to all the fruits you eat tonight):

Say blessing over fruit, and Shehechyanu

Fruit Edible Inside, But Not Outside

We now eat **fruits with inedible shells or peels**, represented by almonds and walnuts. In the kabbalah, our evil – our deficiencies or sins - are called klipah, husks. As Jews, we strive to remove the tough barrier which often covers over the good and the holy. A deeper look, however, may also show that evil sometimes hides good away from the eye, allowing it to cultivate in secret, until it is perfected.

Removing the husk from our lives isn't always easy. The Hebrew word for almond, "shaked" (whose Tu b'Shevat-time blossoming signals the beginning of spring) comes from the same root as shakdan, which means a diligent, hardworking person. No coincidence...

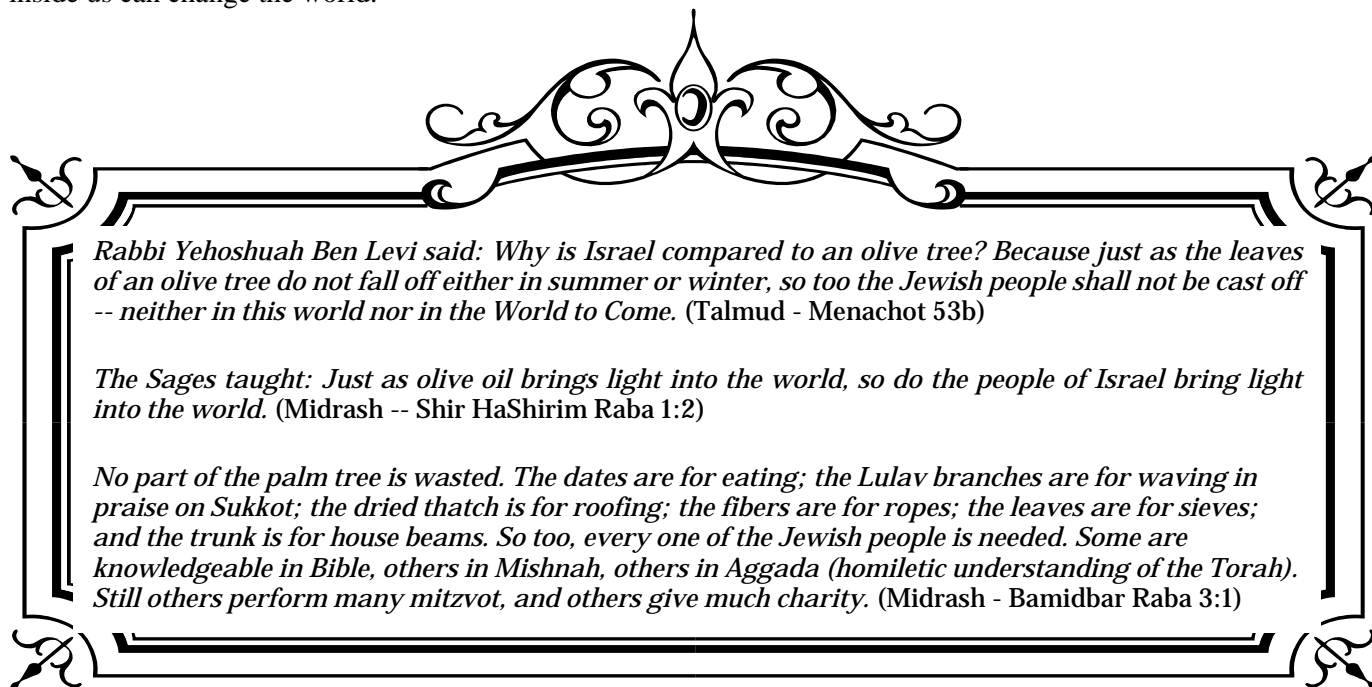


Fruits Edible Outside and Inedible Inside

In every generation, heroes change the world. Avraham and Sarah revolutionized religion by recognizing the one G-d, Who desires goodness. Moshe took upon himself the burdens of a nation, and stood up to a tyrant who had broken the spirit of our people, and then delivered G-d's laws

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and values, spreading truth which has transformed civilizations. Still other Jewish greats are at work today, attempting to affect serious positive development in the world. We can compare these people to **fruits with large seeds or pits (represented tonight by dates and olives)**; the large ideas and deeds inside us can change the world.



Eat Olives and Dates

Pour white wine with a splash of red into the cup of the person on your right



The Second Cup

After the farmer toils in the barren winter, preparing the ground and planting the seed, spring comes to his assistance. The ground gives way, soft rains fall, and the seeds in the ground begin to blossom. But the farmer's hard work has not yet given fruit. He must continue to pray that his efforts will result in beautiful fruit.

So too we try hard to affect our communities, neighborhoods, and families. We must be gratified by the first small signs of progress or change, and maintain faith that even more wonderful growth and potential

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is waiting to burst forth from under the soil, if we only continue to nurture what we have planted, and pray for assistance from each other, and from above.

For Lovers of the Land of Israel, this cup represents the reawakening love of the Jewish people for their homeland. Much as the spring begins with tiny buds of green, so is the revival of the Jewish people just peeking through the surface, ready to grow strong and proud.

Drink

The Third Fruit

We can seed hope, enthusiasm, and joy in others with small, selfless actions. We can perform acts of kindness for neighbors, use encouraging words with our siblings, take care of the environment, give tzedakah, or set an example as a successful oleh. Each deed is like a tiny seed, destined to nurture good feelings and serve as an example for others to follow. Notice that there is no relationship between the size of the seed and the size of the tree into which it grows. We learn from this that we can't anticipate how much our small actions can mean to another person.

Let's pass the plate of fruits with many small seeds, represented by the pomegranate - to represent the small and important actions we can take every day to instill goodness and hope.



Eat Pomegranate

Pour a cup of red wine with a splash of white for the person on your right



The Third Cup

In the summer, the produce of winter and spring finally blooms, assuring the farmer that the work of his hands will be rewarded. Summer is a time of quick and vibrant growth! Changes come quickly, providing a picture of what will be harvested. Through continued hard work and fair weather, everything will take shape! With so many bountiful fruits and vegetables available in the summer, we are reminded of the richness of our lives.

Drink

Fruits Which Are Completely Edible

In this world, where G-d's protection is close at hand, we can let go of all barriers and try on real freedom. As co-creators with G-d, each of our thoughts can become action. These fruits, represented by figs and grapes, also allude to our other Jewish nature holiday – Sukkot – and its most prized fruit, the Etrog, which symbolizes the person with both Torah knowledge AND good deeds. In Leviticus 23:40, the Etrog is described as *pri aitz hadar* -- fruit of the majestic tree. The Etrog is the most spiritual of all trees, as its fruit and bark both have fine taste and smell. On Tu B'Shvat, when all trees are judged, it is fitting to pray for a beautiful Etrog during the coming Sukkot.

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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].
(Midrash - Vayikra Raba 36:2)

Rabbi Chiyya ben Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: Whoever keeps the fig tree shall eat of its fruit. The fruit of the fig tree does not ripen all at once. The more one searches, the more figs one finds in it. So it is with the words of the Torah. The more one studies them, the more relish one finds in them. (Eruvin 54, a,b)



Eat Figs and Grapes

Pour Red Wine into the Cup of the Person on Your Right



The Fourth Cup

The last cup, completely red, symbolizes the glow of autumn. The crops are ready, and the leaves are full of color. Plants are preparing seed for the next cycle of nature. The farmer's hard efforts have been bountifully rewarded.

It is the time of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – a time to take stock of ourselves. It is the time of Sukkot and the celebration of the harvest. What goals do we plan as Jewish people? In what directions do we want to grow during the new year? The final cup of the Passover Seder follows the Hallel praise portion of the seder, and immediately precedes the ardent wish – Next Year in Jerusalem! We are very blessed to be conducting this seder tonight just kilometers from the increasingly rebuilt Jerusalem, in the abundant, bountiful Land of Israel. Our great Torah commentator, Rashi, explains that there is no greater indication of an impending redemption than when the Land of Israel will once again bear her fruit.

Tonight, we sat in the holy biblical city of Beit El, eating fruits, and drinking wine, all grown in the Land of Israel. Surely, we must have no greater cause for optimism and hope. ***L'CHAIM!***

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