



# *A Tu b'Shevat Seder*

by Rabbi Dennis & Julia Beck-Berman

## Introduction

**Reader 1:** According to the Mishnah, *Tu b'Shevat* is known as *Rosh HaShanah la'ilan* — “the New Year for the tree” (*Rosh HaShanah* 1.1). It falls on the fifteenth day of the month of *Shevat*. Any fruit that ripened before *Tu b'Shevat* would be considered part of the previous year for tithing purposes. At this time in Israel the winter rains are ending. The sap starts to rise in the trees and the first buds emerge. A spring-like awakening permeates the land. *Rosh HaShanah la'ilan* really does feel like a new year.

**Reader 2:** The *Tu b'Shevat* seder originated among the 16th-century Kabbalists in Safed, who breathed new life into a somewhat neglected holiday. The seder became a popular Sefardic custom. “The tree” in the Mishnah becomes the Tree — the Cosmic Tree of Life — which symbolizes the divine flow emanating down to the lowest level of the material world, becoming diversified and entering into and vitalizing all creation.

**Reader 3:** The Jewish mystics gathered in the evening around elegantly decorated tables full of sweet smelling flowers, fruits, wine and candles. They sang, danced, ate and studied late into the night. Today, we assemble as our ancestors did in a celebration of the awesome miracles of nature. The themes of the meal include appreciating the beauty of the world, the cycle of the seasons and our special love for the land. We are also cognizant of the environmental challenges that we face in the 20th century.

**Reader 4:** Underlying the kabbalistic seder is a statement in the Palestinian Talmud (end *Qiddushin*):

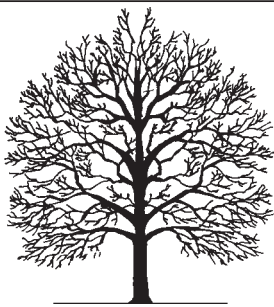
R. Hezekiah and R. Kohen said in the name of Rav: “A person is destined to give strict account [in the next world] for every [good] thing that they saw but did not partake.” R. Elazar heeded that teaching, and would save up small coins and with them [purchase and] partake of every [good] thing once a year.

**Reader 5:** What an amazing idea! On Judgment Day, God will take strict account of us for all of life's legitimate pleasures that we neglected to enjoy. For it is by experiencing and appreciating these delights that we remember the God who created them.

## The Four Cups

**Reader 6:** No seder is complete without four cups of wine (a fruit derivative), one of the greatest worldly delights. We begin with white wine and gradually add more red wine to the mixture. The increasing redness symbolizes the change in the colors of nature as spring arrives and trees produce their fruits.

*The  
Cosmic  
Tree of Life*  
divine mind  
flows into space  
energized matter emerges  
a universe sustained by love  
sunlight streams into plants  
feeding a world  
our world  
we eat  
live  
laugh  
love  
and  
serve  
God  
to restore  
spiritual sparks  
holy mind energy  
to the Root of Being  
*Rabbi Dennis Beck-Berman*



### *Artzi — My Land*

Rachel (an early Zionist pioneer)

Land of Mine,  
I have never sung to you  
Nor glorified your name  
With heroic deeds  
Or the spoils of battle.  
All I have done is plant a tree  
On the silent shores of the Jordan  
And my feet have trodden a path  
Across the fields.



I thank you God  
for this most amazing day  
for the leaping greenly  
spirits of trees  
and a blue true  
dream of sky;  
and for everything  
which is natural  
which is infinite  
which is yes.  
*e.e.cummings*

Similarly, people ripen and mature as they go through life's experiences and pleasures. And just as a little drop of white wine remains in the fourth cup, so we never attain total perfection in this world.

## *Assiyah — The World of Earth/Action*

### **The First Cup of Wine**

**Reader 7:** This cup of white wine or grape juice symbolizes winter and the mystical dimension of atzilut, or emanation, at which God's energy infused the creation process with initial life. In winter, when nature is asleep, the earth is barren, sometimes covered with snow.

**All:** *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei peri ha-gafen.*

Praised are You, Lord, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

**Reader 8:** *Look at the work of God! For who can repair what he has ruined?* (Ecclesiastes 7:13) When God created Adam He took him around to all the trees in the Garden of Eden and said to him: "Look how lovely and praiseworthy are My works! Yet everything I created, I created for you. Be careful that you do not ruin and destroy My world, for if you ruin it, there is no one after you who can repair it. (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13)

### **The First Fruit**

**Reader 9:** For *Assiyah*, the world of Earth, we eat nuts and fruits with a tough skin (such as walnuts, almonds, pistachios, oranges, and bananas) to remind us of the protection the earth gives. Through this act, we acknowledge that we need protection in life, both physical and emotional. We bless our defense systems. They are holdovers from an earlier time when they helped us to survive.

**All:** *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei peri ha-etz.* Praised are You, Lord, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

(for bananas: *Barukh ... borei peri ha-adamah.* Praised ... Creator of the fruit of the land.)

**Reader 10:** But many do not remember God's fine work nor heed the divine command. So there arose plagues of humanity's own creation — the Ten Plagues of our world. (Spill a drop of wine for each one.)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>All:</b> 1. Acid rain                      | 6. Destruction of the ozone layer        |
| 2. Destruction of the rain forests            | 7. Extinction of species                 |
| 3. Pollution of the oceans, lakes, and rivers | 8. Over-consumption of energy            |
| 4. Pollution of the air                       | 9. Overpopulation                        |
| 5. Creating garbage landfills                 | 10. Apathy to the problems of the planet |

## *Yetzirah — The World of Water/Feeling*

**Reader 11:** *Yetzirah*, the World of Water, is the world of formation and birth. Water, the fluid element, gives shape to all matter. From water, the heart, pours forth blessing and emotion. *Draw water in joy from the wells of salvation* (Isaiah 12:3). As we celebrate, we are aware of the valuable resources both in Israel and in the United States.

**Reader 12:** Think of the delicate ecological balance of our world. We know that without water, a tree's roots cannot grasp the soil, its trunk and limbs cannot grow strong, its leaves cannot shine with rich, vibrant colors. We are aware of the need to preserve our natural resources and insure adequate water supplies for ourselves as well as the world community. We can each do our part in our own community. We can advocate to protect and to preserve our life-giving natural resources for ourselves and for future generations.

### **The Second Cup of Wine**

**Reader 13:** As spring approaches, the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth. Gradually the land changes its colors from white to red, as the first flowers appear on the hillsides. So, our second cup will be a bit darker. We pour a little red wine into the white.

**Reader 14:** This cup of wine or grape juice is mostly white, with a little red mixed in, to symbolize the passing of the seasons and the mystical concept of formation and birth, often associated with water.

**All:** *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei peri ha-gafen.*

Praised are You, Lord, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

### **The Second Fruit**

**Reader 15:** For *Yetzirah*, we eat fruits with a hard inner pit and a soft outer layer (such as olives, dates, cherries, apricots, plums). Through this act we acknowledge the need to fortify our hearts. With a strong heart and a pure vision we can remove our protective outer shell. We can then grow richer and deeper as we become available to the miracles of nature which surround us.

**All:** *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei peri ha-etz.*

Praised are You, Lord, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

**Reader 16:** R. Yochanan b. Zakkai, after the terrible destruction in the war with Rome, advised: If you have a sapling in your hand and are told, "Look, the messiah is here!" you should first plant the sapling and then go out to welcome the messiah. (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan*, Version B, ch. 31).



### *Tu b'Shevat*

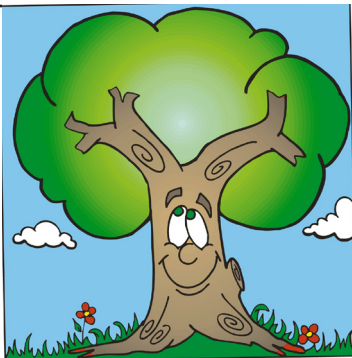
Sh. Shalom

On the fifteenth of Shevat  
With the coming of spring,  
An angel with ledger in hand comes down,  
Each bud, each tree, each twig writes down,  
And all of our garden's planting.

From town to town and place to place  
The swift-winged one does soar,  
Searching the vale, inspecting the hill,  
But crossing the desert hastily idle,  
He returns to Heaven once more.

And when with tree, bush and bud  
The ledger is filled up;  
When the desert forms fields from sand  
And a lush garden fills our entire land,  
The Messiah will show up.

(Translated by Rabbi Dennis Beck-Berman)



### Trees

Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.  
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;  
A tree that looks at God all day  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;  
A tree that may in summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;  
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

## Beriyah — The World of Air/Mind

**Reader 17:** *Briyah*, the world of the air. Air is the stuff hopes and dreams are made of. Air is the Word manifesting as the World. Close your eyes and take a breath. As you inhale, know you are being breathed by the earth. Let the breath out and visualize your next step to beautify the Garden.

**Reader 18:** “The breath of life” — of course that is its name! We breathe and the trees breathe. We breathe in what the trees breathe out. So we breathe each other into existence: we, and the galaxies, and the arrays of science and the codes of law and the plays of music, we are breathing each other into existence. And the breath, of course, goes in a cycle.

### The Third Cup of Wine

**Reader 19:** This cup of wine is half red and half white and symbolizes once again the change of seasons and the mystical concept of *Beriah*. In summer, when vegetables are abundant, we are reminded of the richness of life.

**All:** *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei peri ha-gafen.*

Praised are You, Lord, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

**Reader 20:** It is forbidden to cut down fruit-bearing trees outside a besieged city .... It may be cut down, however, if it

causes damage to other trees or to a field belonging to another person or if its value for other purposes is greater. The Torah forbids only wanton destruction... Not only one who cuts down trees, but also one who smashes household goods, tears clothes, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or destroys articles of food with destructive intent transgresses the command *You must not destroy*. (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and Wars 6:8,10)

### The Third Fruit

**Reader 21:** For *Briyah* we taste fruits that are completely edible (such as apples, pears, grapes, raisins, figs, and strawberries). In this world, where God's protection is close at hand, we can let go of all barriers and try on freedom. We are co-creators with God and each of our thoughts becomes action.

**All:** *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei peri ha-etz.*

Praised are You, Lord, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

(for strawberries: *Barukh ... borei peri ha-adamah*. Praised ... Creator of the fruit of the land.)

**Reader 22:** When Rabbi Nachman was about to take leave of Rabbi Isaac, he said, “Please, master, bless me.” R. Isaac replied, “Let me tell you a parable by which I would respond to your request: A parable of a man who was journeying in the desert. He was hungry, weary, and thirsty, and he lighted upon a tree whose fruits were delicious and its shade pleasant, and a stream of water was flowing beneath it. He ate of its fruits, drank water from the stream, and rested under the tree's shade.

**Reader 23:** When he was about to continue his journey, he said: “Tree, O tree, what blessing shall I bestow upon you? If I say to you, ‘May your fruits be delicious,’ behold, they are delicious. If I say, ‘May your shade be pleasant,’ behold, it is pleasant. If I say, ‘May a stream of water flow beneath you,’ behold, a stream of water does flow beneath you. Therefore I say, ‘May it be God’s will that all the seedlings taken from you be like you.’”

**Reader 24:** “You, too, dear Nachman. What blessing shall I bestow upon you? Knowledge of Torah? Behold, you already possess such knowledge. Eminence? You are already eminent. Honor? You are already honored. Riches? You are already rich. Children? You already have children. Hence I say, ‘May it be [God’s] will that your offspring be like you.’” (*Ta’anit* 5b-6a)

## ***Atzilut — The World of Fire/Spirit***

**Reader 25:** *Atzilut*, the World of Fire: *By Your light do we see light* (Psalm 36:10). As summer turns to fall, plants are preparing seed for the next cycle of nature. We too must nourish the world for the coming generation.

**Reader 26:** Just as the natural world goes through changes to achieve its full potential, we also need to change. We need to get rid of anger, envy and greed so that we can be free to grow. When we do this, we will become like strong, healthy trees, with solid roots in the ground and our arms open to the love that is all around us.

## **The Fourth Cup of Wine**

**Reader 27:** This cup is red with a dash of white, symbolizing the mystical concept of fire and the idea that within all living things dwells a spark of God.

**All:** *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei peri ha-gafen.*

Praised are You, Lord, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

**Reader 28:** *For is the tree of the field a person?* (Deut. 20:20) Translate: For is the tree of the field (not necessary for) a person?” This teaches that there can be no human life without the tree. (*Sifre* Deuteronomy §203) Indeed, fruits and nuts are essential to our health, and trees are an integral part of our ecological system.

**Reader 29:** There is an ancient custom of planting a cedar sapling upon a boy’s birth and a cypress sapling upon a girl’s birth and later using branches from both trees to suspend the wedding canopy (*Gittin* 57a). In Israel trees are



Master of the Universe: Grant me the ability to be alone. May it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass, among all growing things, and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer to talk with the one to Whom I belong.

*Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav*



Once when Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Palestine, was walking in the fields, lost deep in thought, the young student with him inadvertently plucked a leaf off a branch. Rav Kook was visibly shaken by this act, and turning to his companion he said gently, “Believe me when I tell you I never simply pluck a leaf or a blade of grass or any living thing, unless I have to.” He explained further, “Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song and breathing forth a secret of the divine mystery of the Creation.” For the first time the young student understood what it means to show compassion to all creatures.”

A. Unterman, *Wisdom of the Jewish Mystics*, 80 f.

planted on Tu b'Shevat. This custom goes back to the early pioneers and gained popularity largely under the influence of the American Arbor Day.

### The Fourth Fruit

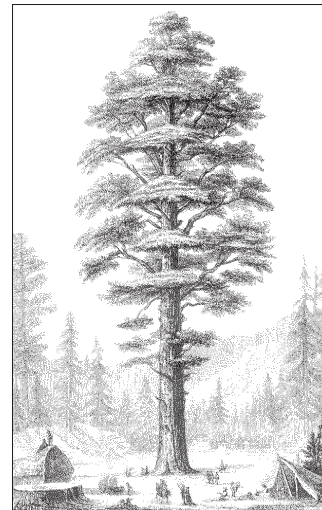
**Reader 30:** There is no totally edible fruit, but there are fruits of the earth whose aroma we can partake (such as cinnamon, cloves) or which can be made into wholly edible foods (such as chocolate candy). These symbolizes the mystery of the world and our study of Torah. We are constantly seeking to uncover her secrets, and are continually nourished by her fruits.

**All:** *Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei minei vesamim. Praised are You, Lord, Creator of many spices.*  
(for candy: *Barukh ... shehakol niyeh bidvaro. Praised ... by whose Word all things exist.*)

### Conclusion

**Reader 31:** We praise You, *Adonai* our God, sovereign of the universe, for nourishment and sustenance, for the fruits of the vine and tree. We thank You for the wonderful land You gave our ancestors, for the covenant and the Torah, for life and health. As the Torah says: *You shall eat and be satisfied, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.* Praised are You, *Adonai*, for all the earth's bounty by which we live.

**Reader 32:** In the coming weeks, when you see a tree's buds beginning to blossom, remember to say the blessing: Praised are You, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who left nothing lacking in the world and created in it beautiful creatures and beautiful trees to give people pleasure.



When you walk across the fields with your mind pure and holy, then from all the stones, and all growing things, and all animals, the sparks of their soul come out and cling to you, and then they are purified and become a holy fire in you.  
Hassidic saying



### SOURCES

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*Celebrating Tu B'Shevat with Hadassah* (New York, 2001)

Lois Silverman, *The Fruits of Our World: A Tu B'Shvat Seder* (New York)

Arthur Waskow, et al., editors, *Trees, Earth and Torah* (Phildelphia, 1999)

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# SPRING

Fire, Chokhmah **חכמה**

**פרי Fruit**

**אצילות Atsilut**  
Emanation, Birthing  
Being Next To God

**יין WINE**

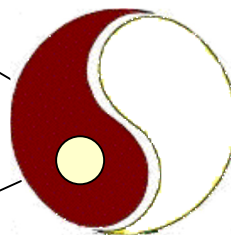
Drink wine at the beginning of each level, starting from the bottom

*The One-Page  
Save-The-Trees  
Tu B'sh'vat Haggadah*

by Rabbi David Seidenberg  
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rebduvid86@hotmail.com

*A special blessing can be made when we move from one kind of wine to a higher quality wine or liquor: who is good and does good hatov v'hametiv*

8. Level beyond physical fruit  
enjoy sweet smells like cinnamon, bay leaf, or special tastes like scotch



**סוד Sod**  
Secret, Transcendent  
Mysticism, Kabbalah

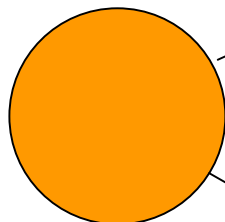
How to do the seder

For each level:  
1. Drink the wine  
2. Learn a Torah text  
3. Eat the fruit  
4. Share songs, poems and meditations

**בריה Briyah**

World of Creation  
Creating Something from Nothing

Air, Binah **בינה**

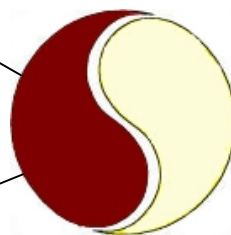


7. red with a drop of white

*About the four elements:*

The order here reflects standard medieval science. However, in Kabbalah, the usual order is: water-Chokhmah, fire-Gevurah, air-Tiferet, earth-Malkhut.

6. Fruit completely edible  
No Shells  
Open on all levels  
eat apples, pears, oranges, grapes

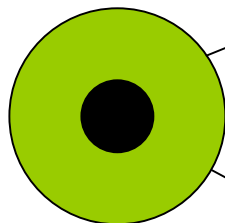


**דרש D'rash**  
Mythic  
Midrashic  
Poetry, Anagogy

**יצירה Yetsirah**

World of Formation  
Crafting One Thing From Another Thing

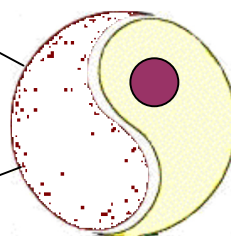
Water, Tiferet **תפארת**



5. half red half white

Some people begin or end the seder with grains that grow in Israel: barley, crackers from wheat, etc.

4. Fruit with a pit:  
Shell on the inside  
Inner Defenses  
eat olives, date, avocado, cherry

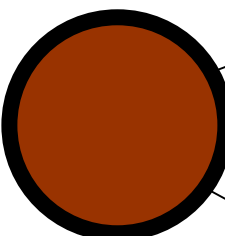


**רמז Remez**  
Moral, Ethical  
Parable, Allegory

**עשיה Asiyah**

World of Doing and Making

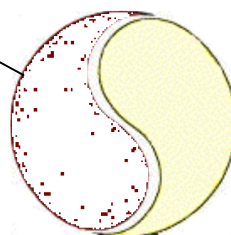
Earth, Malkhut, Shekhinah **—**



3. white with a drop of red

**blessings for eating:**  
wine: *borei p'ri hagafen*  
drinks: *shebakol nihyeh bid'varo*  
tree fruit: *borei p'ri ha'ets*  
grains: *borei miney m'zonot*  
vegetables and fruit of perennials: *borei p'ri ha'adamah*

2. Fruit with hard outside shell  
Outer Defenses  
eat walnuts, almonds, coconuts, pomegranates



**פשט P'shat**  
Simple  
Literal

*Sweetest All-Purpose Blessing After Eating:*

Blessed be you YHVH our God Ruler of the World, who created many souls and what they lack, for everything you created, to give life through them to the soul/being of all life. Blessed be the Life of the Worlds.

# WINTER

1. all white  
make the blessing here for all 4 cups

Some people start the seder with washing and *hamotsi* – the blessing over bread, and end with *birkat hamazon*. If you do this then there will be 15 steps, including teaching at each level, corresponding to **י"ה**=Tu