



Tu B' Shvat Seder

Compiled and edited by
David Jay Derovan
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OU Israel Center
Seymour J. Abrams Orthodox Union Jerusalem World Center

Tu B'Shvat Seder

Shopping list

Wheat (Cookies, cake or crackers)
Olives
Dates
Grapes or Raisins
Figs
Pomegranates
Etrog or Orange
Apple
Walnuts
Almonds
Carobs
Pears

Note

The following Tu B'Shvat Seder can be easily divided among those present so that everyone can read a paragraph. It is important that there be one person who "leads" the Seder by assigning the readings and generating and leading the discussions.

Even with short discussions of one paragraph or another, it takes a little over an hour to go through the entire Tu B'Shvat Seder.

Tu B' Shvat Seder

Introduction

ארבעה ראשי שנים הם. באחד בניסן ראש השנה למלכים ולרגלים. באחד באלול ראש השנה למעשר בהמה. רבי אלעזר ורבי שמעון אומרים, באחד בתשרי. באחד בתשרי ראש השנה לשנים ולשמטין וליובלות, לנטיעה ולירקות. באחד בשבט, ראש השנה לאילן, כדברי בית שמאי. בית הלל אומרים, בחמשה עשר בו:

ראש השנה, פרק א, משנה א

There are four *Rosh HaShanahs*. The first of *Nisan* is the *Rosh HaShanah* for kings and holidays. The first of *Elul* is the *Rosh HaShanah* for tithing animals. Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon said, "The first of *Tishray* [is the *Rosh HaShanah* for tithing animals]." The first of *Tishray* is the *Rosh HaShanah* for years, *Shemita*, *Yovel*, for planting and for vegetables. The first of *Shvat* is the *Rosh HaShanah* for trees, according to Beit Shamai. Beit Hillel says it is on the fifteenth [of the month].

(*Rosh HaShanah* chapter 1, *Mishnah* 1)

The First Glass of Wine

Pour a glass of white wine.

Leave it in front of you as we read about

Wheat

Olives

Dates

Raisins

Wheat

"A stalk of wheat will one day rise high like a palm, and will reach up to the mountaintops." (*Ketubot* 111)

"Cake? Why cake? Wheat is a product of Israel, but what does it have to do with trees? Yet here it is in the first place of the *Tu B' Shvat Celebration!*

There is an opinion in the *Gemara* that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was a wheat tree. In *Gan Eden*, wheat grew on trees, ready to eat in the form of rich cakes. When Adam was cursed with eating by the sweat of his brow, wheat became the ultimate hard work food. It must be planted in plowed ground, cared for, harvested, winnowed,

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ground, sifted, kneaded and baked: a long and difficult process. (It's even longer and more difficult if you are the grain of wheat.) The process of becoming bread is one hard transformation after another.

Wheat is our most basic food, the most universal symbol of eating. Making bread is the epitome of all the work we do to get our food. It is also a demonstration to us of what it means to be refined and transformed over and over until we become what we are meant to become.

Everyone at the table can take some cake or a cracker and say the *Beracha* of *Mezonot*:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי מִזּוֹנוֹת:

Since it is appropriate halachically to recite the *Beracha* for the wine before the *Beracha* for fruit, everyone present can raise their cup of wine and sip from it after reciting the following *Beracha*. Please do not drink all of the wine at this time. The cup of wine will be finished at the end of this section of the celebration:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:

Olives

“To the smell are your fragrant oils pleasant like precious oil poured in your name.”

“These are two oils, the oil for anointing *Kohanim*, and the oil for anointing kings.”

“Why is Israel compared to an olive? To tell you that just as you cannot see the oil in an olive unless you crush it, so Israel does not return to He who takes care of them except through difficulties and hardship.”

“The dove returned to him in the evening and there was a freshly plucked olive leaf in its beak.” (*Berayshit*) Where did the dove get it? Rav Bay said, “the gates of Gan Eden were opened for her and she brought it from there.” (*Berayshit Rabba* 33)

Take an olive and make a *Beracha* over it. Before reciting the *Beracha*, have in mind that this *Beracha* is being recited for all the other fruits you will eat at the celebration. If you do not eat olives and will only be eating a different fruit, remember to recite the *Beracha* before eating that fruit:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ:

Dates

“Thy stature is like a palm tree and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof.”

(*Song of Songs*)

A palm tree flowers upward. Its head and heart face upward. So the soul faces upward and her desire is towards her Husband in heaven.

(*Malbim*)

“The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that are planted in the house of the L-rd shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age.”

(*Psalm 92*)

Cut the date open and check it for insects before eating it.

Grapes

Just as the vine has grapes and raisins, so Israel has masters of *Tanach*, masters of *Mishnah*, masters of *Talmud*, and masters of *Aggadah*.

Just as the vine is the lowest of all trees, but rules all trees, so Israel seems to be the least of nations, but in the future she will inherit the whole world from one end to the other.

Just as grapes are first pressed under the feet and then served on the King's table, so too Israel is downtrodden in this world and in the next is taken in by the King.

The First Glass of Wine

Take the cup of white wine and say the following:

In the *Shema* we read, “You shall gather in your grain, your wine and your oil.” The corn refers to satisfaction, the wine to joy, and the oil to inner shining.

“Wine gladdens the heart of man.” (*Mishlay*)

“Wine makes life joyful.” (*Kohelet*)

“There is no joy except for wine.” (*Talmud, Pesachim*)

On Tu B'Shvat we use wine to praise *Eretz Yisra'el*.

On Purim we use wine to wipe out Amalek.

On Pesach we use wine to celebrate our redemption.

Drink the wine.

The Second Glass of Wine

Pour the second cup of wine: three quarters white wine and one quarter red wine.

Before drinking the second cup, we will read about

Figs
Pomegranates
Etrog
Apple

Figs

“Rami the son of Yechezkel visited Bnei Brak and he saw goats grazing under a fig tree. Honey dripped from the fig tree and milk from the goats and both intermingled. He said, “Behold! A land flowing with milk and honey.” (*Ketubot* III)

“A person had a row of fig trees. He came and found a fence of honey around them...”
(*Jerusalem Talmud, Pe'ah* 7)

“Why is Torah compared to a fig? Every fruit has something inedible in it: dates have pits, grapes have seeds, pomegranates have skin, but every part of the fig is good to eat.”
(*Yalkut Shimoni, Joshua* 1)

“Take the fig tree. As long as you search, you can find figs. So also with words of Torah. As long as a person meditates on them, he will find meaning in them.”
(*Eruvin* 54)

“Why is Torah compared to a fig tree? Because most trees, like olives, grapes and dates, have their fruit picked at one time. But the fig tree is picked gradually. So it is with Torah. One learns a little today...and most of it later. It is not learned in only one year, or even in many years.”
(*Midrash Rabbah*)

Cut the fig open and check it for insects before eating it.

Pomegranate

“Like a half pomegranate is your cheek behind your veil. (*Song of Songs*)

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, “Don’t read רקתך (your cheek), but ריקתך (your empty ones), because even the empty ones of Israel are as full of *Mitzvot* as a pomegranate is filled with seeds.”
(*Eruvin* 19)

“The pomegranate is filled with 613 seeds, which represent the 613 *Mitzvot*. So the essential soul is filled up with the lights of spiritual understanding.”
(*Malbim*)

Take some pomegranate and eat it.

Etrog

“And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the beautiful tree (*Hadar*), branches of palm trees and the boughs of thick-leaved trees and willows of the brook and you shall rejoice before the L-rd your God seven days.” The “עץ הדר - beautiful tree” is the Etrog tree.

According to one interpretation the *Lulav* or palm branch is the spine, the myrtle represents the eyes, the willow represents the lips, and the Etrog represents the heart of a person.

According to another *Midrash*, the palm branch bears sweet fruit but has no fragrance: it is like Jews with learning but no acts of kindness. The myrtle has a sweet smell, but no fruit, so it represents Jews with acts of kindness but no learning. The willow has no fragrance and no fruit, so it represents Jews with neither learning nor good deeds. The Etrog tree has fragrance and taste, so it represents people with both learning and acts of kindness. What does God do with them? He binds them all together so these may atone for those.

There is a tradition on *Tu B'Shvat* to pray that God will provide us with a beautiful, kosher Etrog for the fulfillment of the Mitzvah of the *Arba'ah Minim*. The Etrog that we obtain is dependent on the merit of each person.

Eat a piece of Etrog.

Apple

“As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”
(*Song of Songs*)

Rav Chiya cited the verse: “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.” (*Song of Songs* 2:3) “Why,” he said, “does the Community Israel praise God by comparing Him to an apple tree? Because it combines all goodness. Just as it is healing for all, so is God healing for all. Just as it combines two colors, so, too, God combines two attributes. Just as the apple has a more delicate scent than other trees, so it is written concerning God, ‘His scent is like Lebanon’ (*Hoshe’a* 14:7). Just as the apple has a sweet taste, so of God it is written, ‘His mouth is most sweet’ (*Song of Songs* 5:16).”

God gave some of His life and influence to the forces of nature. Therefore, the directing influence of God is hidden and enveloped in those natural forces. He appears among them as an apple tree among the trees of the forest. Their trunks are large and they have many long branches, which cover up the apple tree, whose trunk is relatively short. So also, the earth and the planets influence us in a way that is easily perceived, while the influence of God is hidden from the eye.

Behold, the scent of my son is the scent of the field. The *Midrash* says when Yitzchak blessed Ya'akov, he smelled the scent of apple orchards.

Take a piece of apple and eat it.

The Second Glass of Wine

“Wine is compared to wisdom and deep understanding.”
(*Pirkay Avot* 4:26-27)

Rabbi Yosi, the son of Judah said, "He who learns from the young, to what is he like? To one who eats unripe grapes and drinks wine from his vat. And he who learns from the old to what is he like? To one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine."

R. Meir said, "Look not at the flask, but at what it contains; there may be a new flask full of old wine and an old flask that has not even new wine in it."

"He brought me into the House of Wine and his banner over me was love."

"Wine is the prophetic spirit. As wine is hidden in the grapes and is poured out into a goblet to rejoice the heart, so the soul rejoices when the spirit of God is poured into it."
(*Malbim*)

Drink the second cup of wine.

The Third Glass of Wine

Pour three quarters of red wine and one quarter of white wine.

Before drinking we will read about

Walnuts
Almonds
Carobs
Pears

Walnuts

Take a nut with a shell and say: "I went down to the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley." (*Song of Songs* 6:11)

Rav Berachya said: "Just as a walnut has four sections and the container in the middle, so Israel looked in the wilderness: there were four camps with the *Ohel Mo'ed* in the middle."

“The beauty of the princess is contained within - כל הכבוד בת מלך פנימה.” So also, the secret fruits of the nuts are contained and hidden by the shells. That which is precious is always hidden away. That is why the Torah has a cover, and then is hidden in the Ark, and even the Ark has a cover. The Torah itself is also a container hiding an even more precious beauty within it.

Eat some walnut.

Almonds

“ויהי ממחרת ויבא משה אל-אהל העדות והנה פרח מטה-אהרן לבית לוי ויצא פרח ויצץ ציץ ויגמל שקדים.
(במדבר יז:כג)

“The next day, when Moses came to the Testimony Tent, Aaron’s staff, representing the house of Levi, had blossomed. It had given forth leaves, and was [now] producing blossoms and almonds were ripening on it.”

(*Bamidbar 17:23*)

The almond tree is quickest to sprout (the first tree to blossom in spring).
(*Rashi*)

The staffs produced almonds that have a double meaning of diligence and haste. So Aaron was quick to run into the midst of the people to stop the plague. Also, when Moshe was meeting *HaShem* at the burning bush, God said, “Behold, he comes to meet you, He sees you and rejoices in his heart.” Behold has a meaning of eagerness. Everything a person does eagerly, he certainly enjoys doing. So Aaron went joyfully to meet his younger brother Moshe and didn’t feel jealous of Moshe’s position of leadership. Because of Aaron’s eagerness, he was given the leadership of priesthood.

(*Kli Yakar*)

Almonds then, represent eagerness and diligence.

Take an almond and eat it.

Carob

Once Choni, the circle-maker was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked, “How many years will it take before this tree will bear fruit?”

The man answered, “Seventy years.”

Honi asked him, “Are you so healthy that you will live seventy years to eat its fruit?”

The man replied, “I found the world full of carob trees when I came into it. As my father planted for me, so I will plant for my children.”

(*Ta’anit 23a*)

For thirteen years Shimon Bar Yochai and his son Eliezer hid from the Romans in a cave. They studied the secrets of Torah day and night by a light that appeared from heaven and they put together the holy Zohar. To sustain them, the Holy One created a spring of water and a carob tree beside the cave.

Cut the carob open lengthwise and widthwise and check it for insects before eating it.

Pears

The tradition in the *Tu B'Shvat Celebration* is to read sections of the *Mishnah*, which touch on fruit and trees through the last part of the *Celebration*.

כיצד מברכין על הפרות. על פרות האילן אומר, בורא פרי העץ, חוץ מן היין, שעל היין אומר, בורא פרי הגפן. ועל פרות הארץ אומר, בורא פרי האדמה, חוץ מן הפת, שעל הפת הוא אומר, המוציא לחם מן הארץ. ועל הירקות אומר, בורא פרי האדמה. רבי יהודה אומר, בורא מיני דשאים:
(משנה, ברכות פרק ו, משנה א)

“How do we bless fruit? On the fruit of the trees, we say, בורא פרי העץ, except for wine. On wine, we say, בורא פרי הגפן. On fruit of the ground, we say, בורא פרי האדמה, except for bread. On bread, we say, המוציא לחם מן הארץ. On vegetables, we say, בורא פרי האדמה. Rabbi Yehuda says, בורא מיני דשאים.”

(*Mishnah, Berachot* 6:1)

Take a piece of pear and eat it.

The Third Glass of Wine

Take the cup of mostly red wine and say:

We begin with a glass of white wine and add more and more red wine. The white, bare winter is gradually giving way to the pink blossoms and red poppies of spring. The bare hidden potential in the trees and in us gradually shows more and more of its rich (red) fruit.

“Rise thee up my beloved my fair one and come along. For lo, the winter is passed the rain is over and gone its way. The flowers are seen in the land; the time of the birds to sing is come and the voice of the turtledove is heard in my land. The fig tree perfumes its green figs and the vines with young grapes give forth a pleasant smell.”

Drink the wine.

The Fourth Glass of Wine

Pour a glass of red wine and wait as four more fruits are discussed.

Take a fruit that hasn't been blessed yet and say the following *Mishnah* in English or in Hebrew:

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“If one has several varieties [of fruit] before him, Rabbi Yehuda says that if there is among them something of the seven kinds for which *Eretz Yisra'el* is noted, he makes the blessing over that, but the Sages say that he may make the blessing over any kind that he pleases.”

(*Berachot* 6:4)

Eat the fruit.

Take a fruit that hasn't been eaten yet and read the next section, which is from Reb Nachman's story, *The Seven Beggars*:

The wise men once had gathered-
Each one was an expert in another shade.
Shade is very important-
Each living being needs a shade to rest in
Each shade is different-
One shade makes one living being rest
And the very same shade,
Causes another being unrest.
So it is with birds, too-
Each one likes another branch to rest on-
These wise men thought,
Is there anywhere a tree giving such shade?
That all kinds of beings would find rest in it-
All kinds of birds perch in its branches, and all is at peace?
They calculated that somewhere there must be such a tree.
They wanted to go to the tree,
since near it there is wonderful delight that is beyond all imagination.
All birds and animals are there, and none harms the other.
They all live in harmony and frolic together,
so it must be an extraordinary delight to be near that tree.

Eat the fruit.

Take a fruit that hasn't been eaten yet and read the following:

They then probed to discover which direction they must travel to reach the tree. A dispute arose regarding this, and none of them could come to a conclusion. Some said that they should head east while others said that it was to the west. One determined that the tree must be in one place, while another said that it was elsewhere. Thus, they could not decide which way to go to come to the tree.

Then a wise man came and said to them, “Why are you trying to discover in which direction the tree lies? Instead try to find out who will be able to approach the tree. Not everyone can come near it. In order to do so, one must have all the qualities of the tree. The tree has three roots. The first root is faith, the second reverence, and the third humility. The trunk of the tree is truth, and it is from there that its branches come forth. It is impossible to go to the tree unless one has these qualities.”

Eat the fruit.

Take a fruit that hasn't been eaten yet and read the following:

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The group was not quite ready to go.

There were some members who had not yet attained to the virtues of the tree, but they did love one another and prized each other's company:

So,

They all stayed on until they had all reached the high life of virtue that was required of them by the tree.

It was not easy to reach so high:

They worked hard and the others were very patient.

And when they all were ready,

they came swiftly to an agreement

about the direction in which to move toward the tree.

Eat the fruit.

The Fourth Glass of Wine

“...And they shall beat their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree: and none shall make them afraid. For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken it. For let all people walk everyone in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

(Micha)

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.

May I express there everything in my heart,

and may all the foliage of the field -

all grasses, trees, and plants -

awake at my coming,

to send the powers of their life into the words of my prayer

so that my prayer and speech are made whole

through the life and spirit of all growing things,

which are made as one by their transcendent Source.

May I then pour out the words of my heart

before your Presence like water, O Lord,

and lift up my hands to You in worship,

on my behalf, and that of my children!

Reb Nachman of Bratslav

In Conclusion

May it be Your will, O God of our mothers and fathers, that through our eating of the fruits, which we have blessed, that the trees will be filled with the glory of their ability to renew themselves, to blossom and grow, from the beginning of the year to its end. May our lives, as well, be renewed and filled with goodness, blessings, and peace.

לשנה טובה ומבורכת

May the year be fruitful and blessed!

לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה

Next year in rebuilt Jerusalem!

May our souls be rekindled
as we open our hearts to the world
and take good care of God's world.

“When you look out at the world around you,
you are looking at God;
and He is looking back at you.”
(*Reb Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro*)

Drink the wine.

End Note:

Please do not forget to recite the appropriate *Berachot Acharonot*, which appear on the following page.

ברכה אחרונה

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם על

אחרי אכלו מה' מיני דגן: המחיה ועל הכלכלה,

אחרי שתותו יין מברכין זה: הגפן ועל פרי הגפן,

אחרי אכלו א' משבעת המינים: העץ ועל פרי העץ,

ועל תנובת השדה, ועל ארץ חמדה טובה ורחבה, שרצית והנחלת לאבותינו, לאכול מפריה ולשבוע מטובה. רחם נא יי אלהינו על ישראל עמך, ועל ירושלים עירך, ועל ציון משכן כבודך, ועל מזבחך ועל היכלך. ובנה ירושלים עיר הקדש במהרה בימינו, והעלנו לתוכה, ושמחנו בבנינה ונאכל מפריה ונשבוע מטובה, ונברכך עליה בקדשה ובטהרה

בשבת ורצה והחליצנו ביום השבת הזה.

כי אתה יי טוב ומטיב לכל, ונודה לך על הארץ

על א' מחמשת מיני דגן: ועל המחיה. ברוך אתה יי על הארץ ועל המחיה:

על היין: ועל פרי הגפן. ברוך אתה יי, על הארץ ועל פרי הגפן:

על א' משבעת המינים: ועל הפרות. ברוך אתה יי על הארץ ועל הפרות:

על א' מחמשת מיני דגן ועל היין: ועל המחיה ועל פרי הגפן. ברוך אתה יי על הארץ ועל המחיה ועל פרי הגפן:

בורא נפשות

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם, בורא נפשות רבות וחסרונן, על כל מה שברא(ת) להחיות בהם נפש כל חי. ברוך חי העולמים.