

# Tu B'Shevat 2022



**Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley**

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## *Niggun*

Celebrating Tu B'Shevat, the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, as the birthday of the trees dates back to the Talmud. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century mystics in Safed created the Tu B'Shevat seder. They believed that eating fruits that bear seeds symbolized the coming birth of the next generation.

They focused on four categories of fruits:

- Those that are inedible outside but edible inside (for us that would be fruits such as coconuts, pineapple, nuts)
- Those that have an inedible pit (for our seder it could be stone fruits like olives, dates, apricots, cherries, peaches, nectarines)
- Those that are completely edible, inside and out (today that might be blueberries, strawberries, seedless grapes, raisins, figs)
- And fourth, those that are in the world to come (perfect food)

In addition to enjoying fruits, the mystics included four cups of wine to symbolize the four seasons of the year:

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- Winter – a time of preparing for renewal (pure white wine or white grape juice)
  - Spring – a time of birth (white wine/grape juice with a splash of red)
  - Summer – a time of things coming into full bloom (mostly red wine/grape juice with a splash of white)
  - Fall – a time of harvest (all red wine/grape juice)

In keeping with this ancient tradition, let us begin our own celebration of Tu B'Shevat, the birthday of the trees. There are many references in Jewish literature that express our love and appreciation for trees. In ancient Palestine, it was customary to plant a tree when a child was born: a cedar for a boy and a cypress for a girl. When the children grew up and were to be married, branches from their own trees were cut and used to support the chuppah or wedding canopy for good luck.

It was also common for people to plant trees in honor of the recently departed. Some of you may remember or still use those blue and white boxes from Jewish National Fund to collect money for planting trees in Israel.

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Trees serve infinite purpose in our world. They provide shade, shelter, and food. Can you think of other ways we use trees?

*Musical interlude – Standing Like a Tree*

As we sample the fruits of creation this evening, we remember that Nature has been asleep, awaiting the warmer weather and the annual cycle of rebirth. We also remember our role as caretakers of the Earth and our intrinsic connection to the natural world.

Fruits have long played an integral part in our annual festival cycle. Can you name a Jewish festival and the fruit associated with it?

If you haven't already laid out your fruitful feast, now is a good time to do so.

**Can anyone tell us what is the tallest tree in the world?**

**Can anyone tell us what is the oldest tree in the world?**

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Before we taste, let's recite the blessing for fruit together.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam borai p'ri ha-aitz.*

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills Creation. It is by  
Your blessing that trees bring forth their fruit.

If you are eating any of the fruits this evening for the first time this season, feel free to add the *Shehecheyanu*.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שְׁהַחַיְנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעַנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam shehecheyanu  
v'kiyimanu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.*

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills Creation.  
You have kept us alive; You have sustained us; You  
have brought us to this moment.

We start with fruits that have shells to protect their inner core. As you prepare to eat this fruit, think about the protective shell you yourself might be presenting to the world.

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Take time to appreciate each fruit's characteristics. How does it look and smell? What is its outer texture like? Is it rough or smooth? When you taste it, is the flavor sweet or tangy? Is the inner fruit chewy or soft or juicy? Does the fruit trigger any funny or sad or poignant memories?

And now we ready ourselves to drink our first cup of wine. It is pure white, symbolizing winter and the potential for creation.

Before we drink, we'll recite the blessing over wine together.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam borai p'ri ha-gafen.*

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills Creation.

It is by Your blessing that vines bring forth their fruit.

We've consumed fruits with a protective shell and drunk wine that represented a blank slate. And now we are prepared to move forward in eager anticipation of what will eventually germinate.

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Our second plate of fruit contains those with hard, inedible hearts and soft exteriors. As you prepare to eat these fruits think about the strength you have inside your own core.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

While you're appreciating the rich and varied flavors you're enjoying, think about the inedible heart. Is it protecting a single seed or a host of seeds waiting to take root? Contemplate whether your own heart is driven by a single guiding principle or a collection of core values you want to share with the world.

If this is the first time this season you've eaten this fruit, remember to recite a *Shehecheyanu*.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיּוּמֵנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנְךָ הַזֶּה.

In Deuteronomy, the Torah mentions seven species for which Israel is praised. Two of them – olives and dates – fit the category we just ate.

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## Can anyone name something else these two fruits have in common?

Let's now lift your second glass of white wine tinted with a hint of red. It represents the promise of Spring. The leaves are unfurling, the scent of blossoms fills the air. The world is finally awaking from

Winter's slumber.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

As you sip this blend, think about a time you embarked on a new beginning, the potential you hoped to achieve and how the journey made you feel.

### *Musical interlude – The Garden Song*

We now move on to our third plate of fruit which contains those that are completely edible. It represents that which is closest to shalom, wholeness. As you prepare to eat this fruit think about those times when you feel the most present in your life, when you feel most like who you are meant to be.

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בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

If this is the first time this season you've eaten this fruit, remember to recite a *Shehecheyanu*.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיּוּמנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְן הַזֶּה.

Here's a question about the berries that you might have just eaten.

**Besides filling for pies, berries are often made into spreads.**

**Can you name the four kinds of spreads and how they differ?**

Our third glass of wine is mostly red with a splash of white. It represents Summer when the branches of the trees are heavy with ripening fruit. It is a time of prolific fertility.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

As you sip, think about the productive moments in your life, when creativity abounded and great achievement was nearly within reach.

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Now we move on to our fourth and final plate which holds no fruit. It represents the highest and purest level of God's creation. Like God's self, it is beyond any physical representation. It is a symbol of our aspirations towards perfection.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שְׁנַתָּן לָנוּ הַזְדַּמְנוֹת  
לְתַקֵּן אֶת הָעוֹלָם.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam shenatan lanu  
hizdamnut l'tahkayn et ha-olam.*

Blessed is the One Who gave us the opportunity to fix  
the world.

### **Musical interlude – L'Taken**

While the plate offers nothing for us to taste, we still have one more glass of wine to sample. This fourth glass of wine is completely red. It represents the Fall harvest. It is both joyous and sad because it reminds us that winter is close at hand. Trees will soon slumber, conserving their energy until awakened by the warmth of the Spring sun.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

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Take this moment to think about your own slumbering time, an ingathering of your thoughts and energy to prepare for the next step in your life's journey.

As our seder draws to a close it is a time for us to consider planting our own trees as a symbol of our continuing faith that the world will continue beyond our lifetime.

We plant trees whose fruit we will not eat. We plant trees in whose shade we will not sit. We plant trees we may never see. We plant them in faith that G-d will provide the rain and the sun in proper measure for the tree to grow. We plant them in faith that G-d will see to it that there will be people to eat the fruit, enjoy the shade, and welcome the sight of the green leaves.

Trees are a wonder of nature, inspiring poets and artists to amazing creative expression. We'd like to introduce our own artist-in-residence, Joel Moskowitz to talk about some of his works inspired by trees.

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As we conclude our seder this evening, we give thanks to G-d – *Borei Ha'aitz Uvorei P're Ha-aitz* – the Creator of the tree and the fruit of the tree.

May it be Your will, Holy One of Blessing, that through our eating the fruits which we have blessed this night, the trees of the world will renew themselves, blossoming and growing, and sustaining the generations to come. May the trees we plant in our lifetime add to the beauty and blessing of Zion and the world which you have entrusted into our care. Amen.

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## Further activities to do with your family in commemoration of Tu B'Shevat

1. Now: Plant parsley in a small pot to use for your Passover seder.
2. Later: Plant a tree outside when the ground has thawed.
3. Anytime: Donate to the [Jewish National Fund](#) for planting trees in Israel.

### Shopping list for Tu B'Shevat seder 2022

A bottle of red wine or grape juice  
A bottle of white wine or grape juice

#### Four glasses

Glass #1 – White wine or grape juice  
Glass #2 – White with a tinge of red  
Glass #3 – Half red and half white  
Glass #4 – Red wine or grape juice

#### Four plates

Plate #1 – Edible inside, inedible outside  
Such as oranges, coconuts, pineapple, and nuts in shells  
Plate #2 – Inedible pit  
Such as olives, dates, apricots, cherries, peaches, and nectarines  
Plate #3 – Completely edible inside and out  
Such as blueberries, strawberries, seedless grapes, raisins, and figs  
Plate #4 – Empty