

# Tu B'Shevat Seder

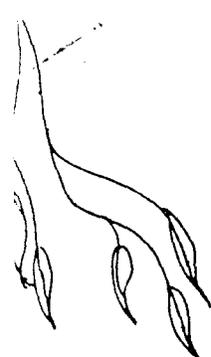
Shared with the  
Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation

by Ellen Dannin

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Let us start the New Year...

Welcome to our Tu B'Shvat Seder.

ברוך אתה "אלוהינו בלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן:

ברוך אתה "אלוהינו בלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיינו לדמן הזה:

Baruh ata adonai eloheinu meleh ha-olam borei pri ha gafen.  
Baruh ata adonai eloheinu meleh ha-olam shehekiyanu, v'kiyamanu  
v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

(Drink the first cup)



Why is this seder different from the Pesah seder?

At the Pesah seder we eat matza,

but at this seder we eat the fruit of the tree only.

At the Pesah seder we tell the story of the going out from  
Mitzraim,

but at this seder we talk of the life of trees bound  
up with our life.

At the Pesah seder we drink four cups of wine,

but at this seder we drink four cups of wine colored  
white, pink, rose, and red,  
to remind us of the change of seasons -- winter to spring to  
summer.

At the Pesah seder, we recall that our ancestors were slaves who  
became free,

but at this seder we recall the trees which have  
preserved us, sustained us, and brought us to enjoy this day.

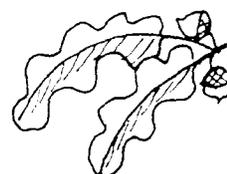
We have asked the questions. Now we begin to answer.

Because the calendar of our ancestors celebrated a New Year of  
Trees, our ancestors, the Kabalists of Z'fat asked the important  
question: how do we observe this day?

They saw that where they lived at this time, the trees returned to  
life from the dormancy of winter. They saw the trees there shake  
off the frosts and return to life.

They saw this and in a vision saw the earth and heavens connected  
by a spiritual tree, its roots in heaven and its branches  
surrounding the earth.

They believed this and believe the sap that flows in the Tree is  
our prayers and actions for the life of trees.



Therefore, at this time and at this seder what we eat and sing and say reminds us of the life of trees, and we and our actions are joined in the flow of the life of the trees.

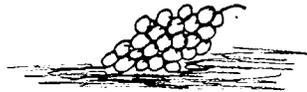
Blessed be Shkina for giving us this holiday of trees.

(Drink the second cup.)

The Torah tells us that there are four kinds of trees.



The first is the Tree in Gan Eden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This first tree gave us the power to choose to do good or evil in this earth, to do good or evil to the trees of this world.



The second tree we recall is the tree that saved us when our ancestors chose evil and learned to love it. They filled the earth with their evil until the very stones cried out to be cleansed. And God listened and sent a cleansing flood that swept away this evil people. The earth was emptied of people, except for one family.

They floated on the waves, safe in the Ark.  
They carried with them the seeds to replant life on earth.  
The Ark, the fruit of trees.



We raise our cups to those who choose the good and who therefore choose life. We rededicate ourselves to be always striving to choose the good, to be just, to choose life. (Put cups down)

We remember the tree that saved all life.

Lo yisa goi el goi herev.  
Lo yilmedu od milhema.  
And everyone 'neath the vine and figtree  
Shall live in peace and unafraid  
And into plowshares beat their swords,  
Nation shall learn war no more.

The third tree we recall is the vine that grew over the head of Jonah in Ninevah. It was only by learning to love the vine that Jonah learned to love other people.

From Jonah we learn that love and respect for others is a seed that can take root and flower, connecting all life.

Or we can root out the vine, kill its roots and learn to hate every living thing.

Jonah's vine taught him that the face of Adonai shines on all life -- not only that we choose to love or find convenient or easy to love.

Hinei ma tov u-manaim  
shevet ahim gam yahad



The fourth tree is our Torah, for we are told Eitz haim hi -- she is a tree of life for those who grasp her branches and all her ways are paths of pleasantness and peace.

Our ancestors grasped this tree and were preserved though they were scattered and despised.

Today we still strive in this place to grasp the tree.



What does the Torah teach us of trees.

The Torah teaches us to respect trees,

to bless their fruit,

not to eat without thought,

careless of how it was created.

The Torah tells us to love trees and not to harm them,

even those that sustain our enemy in war.

The Torah tells us that not all trees can be seen.

There are spiritual trees.

They grow in our hearts and our minds.

They are the fruits of our labor,

the good we do for others,

the shade and nourishment we can give to ideas and hopes  
and plans and dreams.

Some people are trees, comforting and strong.

We rest beneath them, head on their roots,

They are our shelter.

Their leaves spread over us,

A canopy of peace.

For all these trees, we lift our cups, recite the blessing and  
drink the third cup.



(Kama ma-alot tovot lamakom aleinu.)

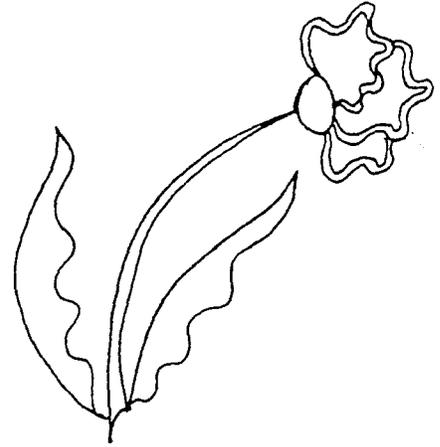
כמה מצאתי טובות למקום עלינו

How  
many

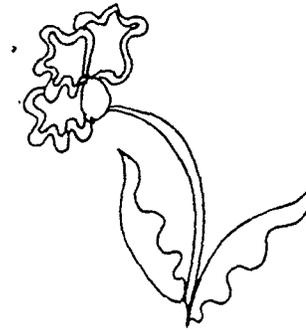
favours has  
the Almighty done for us.

[Here read any poems or readings brought by participants.]

Leaves without trees  
Must wander.  
Blood without a body  
Will not return to the basic elements,  
It will not dry on every road.  
And all words must be weaned  
From the mouths  
To find new ones.  
The earth must be cured  
Of history  
And the stones need to sleep  
Even that one  
That which killed Goliath must sleep, dark.



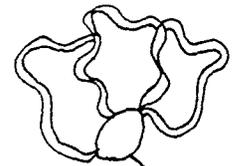
But I  
Like a garage  
Turned into a synagogue,  
And again abandoned.



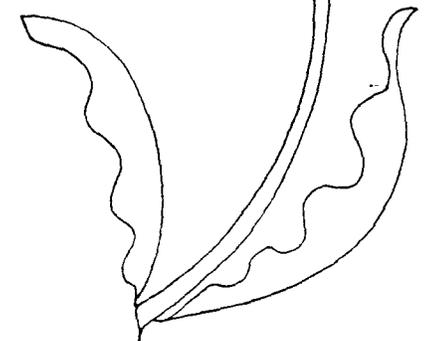
And I  
Like the surveyors  
Must drive sharpened hopes  
With black and white sticks  
Far into the desolate plain  
Before me. -- Yehuda Amichai

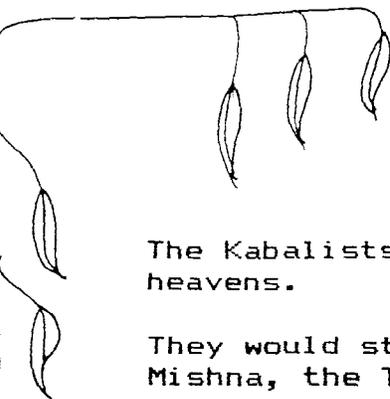
Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,  
Hath not old custom made this lifemore sweet  
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods  
More free from peril than the envious court?  
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,  
The seasons' difference; as, the icy fang  
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,  
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body  
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile, and say  
"This is no flattery; these are counsellors  
That feelingly persuade me what I am."  
Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;  
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

-- William Shakespeare



The righteous shall flourish like palms,  
grow tall like cedars in Lebanon,  
rooted in the house of God,  
they shall be ever fresh and green,  
proclaiming that God is just,  
our rock, in whom there is no wrong.





The Kabalists believed that all fruits mirrored the order of the heavens.

They would stay up all night studying passages from the Bible, the Mishna, the Talmud, and the Zohar which speak of fruit and trees.

As they studied, they ate the fruits they had studied about.

By doing this with the proper blessings, they believed they maintained the divine flow of sap in the Tree of Life.

A person who enjoys the pleasures of this world  
without blessing  
is a thief

Rabbi Chaim Vital set up a structure of 30 fruits -- 10 fruits in 3 groups.

The 10 represent the 10 s'firot (emanations) through which creation is channeled.

Each group represents a world of creation.

- ◇ Assiya (doing) the lowest level  
our physical level
- ◇ Yetsira (formation) the middle level
- ◇ Bria (creating) the penultimate level

The highest level -- Atzilut (emanation) -- is so high it cannot be represented by any fruit.

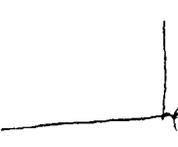
The fruits that represent these levels are:

- Assiya fruits that need protection - nuts, pomegranates, coconuts
- Yetsira fruits with an inedible pit to protect their hearts - peaches, dates
- Bria fruits that can be eaten whole - grapes, figs

(Recite the blessings and pass around the fruits to be eaten)

(. . . borei pri ha-eitz.)  
(. . . hanotein reiah tov bapeirot.)

Im ein ani li mi li. Ushan l'atmi ma ani. V'im lo ahshav eh matai,



(Raise the fourth cup)

Therefore, we are bound to thank, praise, laud, glorify, extol, honor, bless, exalt, and reverence Adonai who created trees.

Blessed are you, Adonai, Ruler of the Universe, who creates innumerable living beings and their needs, for all things you have created to sustain every living being.

Blessed are you who are the life of the universe.



(Drink the fourth cup)

Blessed are you Adonai who feeds the world with your goodness and with grace, kindness, and mercy gives food to every creature. May we never want for food as long as we remember who it was who creates and sustains trees and as long as we act in this world as people who do recall and bless their creation.

Make us worthy to behold the day of the Messiah.

Oseh shalom bimromav hu ya-aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol ha-olam.  
V'imru: Omein.

Now our Tu b'Shevat seder is complete,  
its ordinances fulfilled,  
and let us say:  
Omein.

