



Tu B'Shvat

ט"ו בשבט

ראש השנה לאילנות

Special Section page 60-79

Tu B'shvat: A History

Torah Tidbits is proud to share the following pages of teachings related to Tu B'Shvat and a Tu B'Shvat Seder provided by Torah Ve' Ha'aretz Institute

“The four new years are ... on the first of Shevat, the new year for trees, according to the words of the House of Shammai; the House of Hillel says: on the fifteenth thereof” (Mishna Rosh Hashana 1:1).

Tu B'shvat went through four significant historical developments, all revolving around the bond between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel:

Tu B'shvat in halacha—the mitzvot tied to the Land of Israel

Orlah: The Torah prohibits eating orlah fruit, that is, fruit of a tree that has not completed three years since being planted, whether in the Land of Israel or abroad. The cut-off date determining the orlah year for the fruit is Tu B'shvat, following the opinion of the House of Hillel in the Mishna. That is, fruit that blooms from Tu B'shvat and on, following three years from when the tree is planted, are no longer considered orlah and are permissible to eat.

Terumot and Ma'aserot: Fruit grown in the Land of Israel are subject to separating offerings and tithes, terumot and ma'aserot. Fruit that bloomed prior to the fifteenth of Shevat, Tu B'shvat, need to have terumot and ma'aserot set aside separately from fruit that bloomed after Tu B'shvat. There are differences between the years in the shemita cycle, including the types of ma'aserot that need to be separated (some years ma'aser sheni, the second tithe; other years, ma'aser ani, the poor man's tithe). It is necessary to separate terumot and ma'aserot (without a blessing) from fruits and vegetables exported from Israel, purchased abroad.

Tu B'shvat is considered a joyous day. Tachanun is not recited, and one does not fast.

The Tu B'shvat Seder

The 17th century kabbalists of Safed instituted a Tu B'shvat Seder, which involved eating fruit from the Land of Israel. The desire to eat fruit on Tu B'shvat that is not necessarily available in the market during this period was the reason why people purchased dried fruit. In addition, Jewish communities in the Diaspora who wanted to eat fruit from the Land of Israel generally needed to buy dried fruit, since it took a long time for the fruit to arrive. For these two reasons, the custom developed to eat dried fruit on Tu B'shvat.

Note that today it is possible to purchase fresh fruit from Israel, which is preferable to dried fruit. The point is to eat fruit from the Land of Israel; it's unnecessary to buy dried fruit that wasn't produced in Israel.

Arbor Day

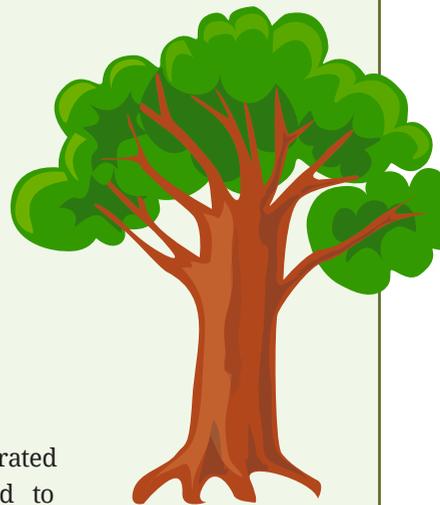
At the end of the 19th century, the Zionist movement began to celebrate Tu B'shvat as a sort of Arbor Day, dedicated to planting saplings in the Land of Israel.

Environmental Protection Day

In recent decades, Tu B'shvat has been celebrated as a Green Earth Day, a holiday dedicated to environmental protection, as God commanded Adam:

“When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, He took him for a tour of all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him: ‘Behold my creations, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are. And everything I created, I created for you. Take care not to damage and destroy my world, for if you damage it, there will be no one to fix it up after you’ (Midrash Kohelet Raba 9).

Tu B'shvat 5709 (February 14, 1949) was the date of the inauguration of the State of Israel's First Knesset!



Blessings During the Seder

The following Tu B'Shvat Seder is suggested by Torah V'Haaretz Institute. For an expanded Seder with interactive videos and activities for children see: en.toraland.org.il.

The order of the blessings

The order of blessings is the Hebrew acronym of מגע אש, maga eish (lit. "touch of fire"): mezonot, gefen, etiz, adama, shehakol. At the start of the Seder we eat a food whose blessing is mezonot, then we recite a blessing over wine (or grape juice), and then on a fruit.

If is recommended to add a vegetable whose blessing is ha'adama, and a food or drink with the blessing of shehakol, in order to say more blessings.

Some also add the blessings over pleasant scents (borei atzei besamim, isbei besamim, minei besamim, hanoten re'ach tov baferot).

Order of eating fruit

First we partake of fruit from the seven species, indigenous to the Land of Israel, Whichever fruit appears in in verse closer to the word eretz (land), comes first:



"אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וְשֵׁעֶרָה וְגִפְנוֹ וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן, אֶרֶץ זֵית שֶׁמֶן וְדִבְשׁ"

"A land of wheat and barley, of grapevines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil olives and date honey" (Duet. 8:8).

For this reason, the order for eating fruit is: olive, date, grape, fig, and pomegranate.

After eating fruit from the seven species, it is possible and laudable to eat other fruit as well. Some customarily partake of 30 (!) different types of fruit.

If eating a new (=seasonal) fruit, one should also recite shehechyanu:

בְּרִידָךְ אֲתָהּ ד', אֱלֹקֵינוּ מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה

Tu B'shvat Seder

Kiddush and Four Cups

Kiddush

Since Tu B'shvat is not a holiday, there is no special Kiddush recited. We will just say the blessing together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגָּפֶן

Blessed are You Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates fruit of the vine

Four cups of wine

There is a new custom not mentioned by the kabbalists, that parallels Tu B'shvat to the Pesach Seder, where four cups of wine are drunk. Each cup symbolizes a different season:

First cup: white wine—fall

Second cup: mostly white wine, some red wine—winter

Third cup: half white, half red—spring

Fourth cup: red wine—summer

For those who want to incorporate this practice, we recommend the following order:

Wheat and barley, first cup, olive and date, second cup, grape and fig, third cup, pomegranate, fourth cup.



Wheat

On the verse, "Your belly is like a heap of wheat" (Song of Songs 7:3), our Sages explain: Heaps of pepper and cedar fruit are much nicer than these, so why are Israel likened to

wheat? Rather, man can live without pepper and cedar fruit, but cannot live forever without wheat—just the world cannot survive without wheat, the world cannot survive without the People of Israel (Shir HaShirim Raba §7).

Let's all take a food made of wheat in our right hand, and say together aloud:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא מִיַּי מְזוֹנוֹת

Blessed are You Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates types of grains



Barley

"One who sees barley in a dream [has received a sign that] his iniquities have been taken away, as it is stated: "And your iniquity has gone away, and your sin expiated (Isaiah 6:7)" (Berachot 57a).

Barley is used for animal fodder and symbolize the animalistic part of the human being. People sin because of their animalistic drives, not because of their spiritual side. So one who dreams about barley essentially is seeing their sins leaving them, "your iniquity has gone away."

Olives

Why are the People of Israel likened to an olive tree? Just as an olive tree's leaves do not fall away, not during the summer not during the rainy season, so too the People of Israel will never cease to exist, not in this world, nor in the World to Come. (Yalkut Shimoni, Jeremiah §289)



Let's all take an olive in our right hand and say together aloud:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Blessed are You Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates fruit of the tree

Dates

"Why are the People of Israel likened to a date palm? Just as date palms produce no waste—rather dates are for eating, and lulavim are for hallel (for the four species on Sukkot), fronds are for shade, fibers for ropes ... so too are the People of Israel, they have not waste, rather: some are masters of the Bible, some masters of the Mishna, some masters of Aggada, some perform mitzvot, some perform righteous deeds" (Bereishit Raba §41).



Eating a vegetable and candy

For those interested, it's possible to add a vegetable (preferably from Israel), and say the following blessing:

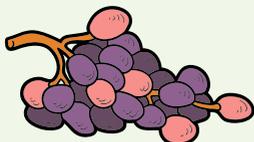
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה

Blessed are You Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates fruit of the ground.

Afterwards, take a food whose blessing is shehakol (candy, ice cream, chocolate, etc.), and say:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָ בְּדַבְּרוֹ

Blessed are You Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, everything came to be at His word

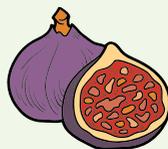


Grapes

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish says: why are the Jewish people likened to a vine? The branches of the vine are [represented by] the homeowners. The clusters, these are the Torah scholars. The leaves on it are the ignoramuses. The tendrils, these are the empty ones of the Jewish people. And they are all on the same vine. Why is this? The clusters

[represented by the Torah scholars] will ask for mercy for the leaves [the ignoramuses], since without the leaves, the clusters cannot exist (Chullin 92a).

Figs



"He who tends to a fig tree will enjoy its fruit" (Proverbs 27:18). Why is the Torah likened to a fig tree? Since most fruit trees, such as the olive tree and grapevine, are harvested all at once, while the fig tree is harvested little by little. So too, with the Torah: today one acquired a little, and tomorrow a lot, since it is not acquired in one year and not in two (Bamidbar Raba §12).

Herbs

For those interested, it is possible to add the blessing over blessings over sweet-smelling herbs.

For perennial herbs, or sweet-smelling trees:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עֲצֵי בְשָׁמִים

Blessed are you Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates sweet-smelling trees

For bushes or grasses:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עֲשָׂבֵי בְשָׁמִים

Blessed are you Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates sweet-smelling grasses

For sweet-smelling fruit (such as an etrog):

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַנוֹתֵן רִיחַ טוֹב בְּפְרוֹת

Blessed are you Lord, our G-d, King of the universe, Who gives a pleasant scent to fruit

For a pleasant aroma not from grasses or trees, say:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיְנֵי בְשָׁמִים

Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei minei besamim

Blessed are you Lord, our G-d, king of the universe, Who creates types of spices

Pomegranate



"Your temples [rakatech] are like a split pomegranate" (Song of Songs 6:7) ... Do not read: Your temples [rakatech], but rather: "Your empty ones [reikateich]," meaning that even the sinners among you are full of mitzvot like a pomegranate"(Eiruvin 19a).



Special Thanks to Rabbi Bloom and the Torah V'Haaretz Institute for this resource and for his wonderful weekly Dvar Torah in Torah Tidbits. For more information and Tu B'shvat activities see: <https://en.toraland.org.il/>