

A TU B'SHVAT SHABBAT SEDER

2021 ZOOM

COMPLIED BY JACKIE KAPLAN

Jackie - Welcoming

Shahanna: Nigun

Jackie:

On Tu B'Shvat, the 15th day of the Jewish month of Shvat, we celebrate the new year of the trees. In biblical times the middle of the month of Shvat marked the traditional turning point between the winter rainy season and the beginning of Spring.

It was still winter, but the days were visibly longer. Shvat was the month when heavy rains fell in Israel and the slopes of the hills streamed with water. The heavy rains marked the end of winter and the beginning of Spring. In the middle of the month, the severe rainstorms tapered off and signs of Spring began to appear. The weather became milder and the fields began to sprout green. A riot of flowers of every kind and color carpeted the earth.

Here, there is barely any changes to see; there is barely any changes to hear. But the turn of the year has come. The still and quiet months are over; the seed is quickening; life is reasserting itself. In this hushed moment we celebrated the new year of the trees, and the reawaking of the Tree of Life. (from "Seasons of Our Joy" by Arthur Waskow)

Tu B'shvat is a time of remembering the promise of Spring and renewal and our endless ties to the earth.

Shahanna sings:

Evening of Roses

*Evening of roses,
Let us go among the trees.
Spices ,perfumes, sweetest myrrh
Are a threshold at your feet.*

*Slowly the night time falls,
A breeze of roses from above.
Let me whisper a song to you
Softly a song of love.*

Evev Shel Shoshanim

*Erev shel shoshanim
Nitze'ah na el habustan
Mor besamim ulevona
Leraglech miftan.*

*Layla yored le'at
Veru'ach shoshan noshvah
Havah elchash lach shir balat
Zemer shel ahava*

*At dawn a dove is cooling,
Your hair is filled with dew.
Your lips to the morning are like a rose
The rose I picked for me.*

*Shachar homa yonah
Roshech maleh t'latim
Pich el haboker shoshana
Ektefenu li.*

Christina reads:

The Kabbalistic mystics in the city of Safed in the sixteenth century, spoke about the Universe being organized into four dimensions, four worlds, at the same time - the Physical World, the Emotional World, the Intellectual World and the Spiritual World. They believed that by unifying these worlds inside ourselves, we can make a special connection with God and the world that we live in.

The Kabbalists joined these teachings of the four worlds with the celebration of the New Year of the Trees. Tables were set with white cloths and bedecked with fruits. Besides the fruit were flasks of red wine and white wine. Long into the night, they sang, and talked and ate. Over the years, the holiday expanded from just a way to count the tithing of trees, to the celebration of nature; of our connection to God; and a reminder of our responsibility to the natural world.

Tonight, we gather as the Kabbalists did in Safed to study, sing, and celebrate the great miracle of trees.

Shahanna sings:

*"Hine mah tov u'mah na'im shevet achim gam yachad."
How good it is that we have come together!"*

1st Break Out Group Discussion:

Jackie : Welcome and introduce yourself to your group. Share something wonderful about this winter or something you have noticed about early signs of spring this year.

Jackie - Sharing from the group

Werth reads:

We pause now, just for a minute, to prepare ourselves for the journey through the four worlds that we are beginning. We stop, and breathe, and notice what we are doing, how we are feeling, what this moment is like.

To the Kabbalists of Safed, the Tu B'Shvat seder was deeply important. What mattered was not merely holding a seder, but truly experiencing the seder with kavanah, with focus and intent. Not only is this tonight the celebration of the trees, but also to reflect on how much we depend on the earth and its resources and how much in turn, the earth and its resources depend on us.

Jackie: Guided mindfulness meditation with a raisin, or small pieces of fruit, or piece of chocolate.

Sharon reads:

The Kabbalists also saw Tu B'Shvat as an opportunity to note the changes in the seasons.

The white wine (*hold up the bottle of white wine*) symbolized the slumber that had descended upon nature from the 15th of Av, when the sun's rays began to weaken. The red wine (*hold up the bottle of red wine*) predicted the awakening of the trees, its blossoming and growth on the 15th of Shvat.

First the Kabbalists drank some white wine, then white wine mixed with some red, then red wine mixed with some white wine, and finally red wine by itself. The change in color of the wine during each drinking symbolized the changing seasons.

"It is a good custom for those who walk upright to eat an abundance of fruit on this day and to give expression to words of song and praise for them."

From P'ri Etz Hadar, "The Fruit of the Goodly Trees": The first published Tu B'Shvat Haggadah, published in the 17th C.

Becky reads:

***WORLD OF ASSIYAH - THE PRACTICAL,
THE ETERNAL PHYSICAL CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE
WINTER
THE FIRST CUP OF WINE***

As we drink the first cup of wine, a white wine, we remember that nature has been asleep, awaiting warmer weather and the annual cycle of rebirth. In the winter, when nature is asleep, the earth is barren, sometimes covered with snow.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p're hagafen

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

The Midrash explains, 'Even though you may find the land full of goodness, don't say, "We will sit and not plant.' Rather be careful to plant trees. Just as when you came, you found trees which others had planted - so you should plant for your children, so that no one may say 'I am old. How many more years will I live? Why should I be troubled for the sake of others, for tomorrow I may die'. Therefore, one may not abstain from planting. For just as we found trees, we should add more by planting - even if we are aged.'

Shahanna:

*"Atsay zay-tim omdim
La, la, la, la, la, la,"
(The olive trees are standing)*

Becky continues reading:

This first world is that of Assiyah, the lowest level, our level of physical creation. In this lowest world, there is the great need for protection. It is great risk to open up, to peel off the protective shells.

Let us eat fruits that require protection, whose peel or shell cannot be eaten - almonds and walnuts, and oranges, and coconuts, and Brazil nuts, and pomegranates, and pineapples.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam borei pr'i he'etz

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of trees.

Shahanna :

Nigun or song to bring everyone back together

Suzanne reads:

**WORLD OF YETZIRAH - FEELINGS, THE EMOTIONAL
THE ETERNAL FORMATIVE POWER OF THE UNIVERSE
SPRING
THE SECOND CUP OF WINE**

We now lift our cups a second time with wine tinted pink representing the beginning of the warming of the earth as winter loses its hold. As spring approaches,

the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth. The ground becomes soft. We turn the earth and plant the seeds. Water, Sunshine, and Time combine in the creation of new life in the ground.

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.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p're hagafen

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

“Consider the life of trees.

Aside from the axe, what trees acquire from man is inconsiderable.

What man may acquire from trees is immeasurable.

From their mute forms there flows a poise, in silence, a lovely sound and motion in response to wind.

What peace comes to those aware of the voice and bearing of trees!

Trees do not scream for attention.

A tree, a rock, has no pretense, only a real growth out of itself, in close communion with the universal spirit.

A tree retains a deep serenity.

It establishes in the earth not only its root system but also those roots of its beauty and its unknown consciousness.

Sometimes one may sense a glimmer of that consciousness, and with such perspective, feel that man is not necessarily the highest form of life.”

(from “Words of the Earth”, Cedric Wright)

Carla reads:

“When God created the first man and woman, God took them and showed them all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to them, ‘See My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are. And everything that I created, I created it for you. Be careful not to spoil or destroy My world—for if you do, there will be nobody after you to repair it.’”

- Midrash Kohelei Rabbah

This next sphere is Yetzirah; formation, the world of feelings. In this sphere

there is still some need for some reinforcement and protection - not totally, but just around the heart. We can share from our heart, but we still need to be careful.

Let us eat fruits whose pit or seeds cannot be eaten - peaches, and plums, and dates, and avocados, and cherries, and apricots, and olives.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam borei pr'i he'etz
Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of trees.*

Shahanna : Nigun or song to bring everyone back together

Stormy reads:

**WORLD OF BIRIAH - KNOWLEDGE, THE INTELLECTUAL,
THE ETERNAL CREATIVITY AND CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE
SUMMER
THE THIRD CUP OF WINE**

The third cup is still darker. In Summer, when vegetables and fruits are abundant, we are reminded of the richness of life. We fill our Kiddush cups with red wine and add a dash of white wine.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

*Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p're hagafen
Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.*

Rabbi Yochannan ben Zakkai used to say, "if you happen to be standing with a sapling in your hand and someone says to you, 'Behold, The Messiah has come!' First plant the tree, and then go out to greet him!"

And the Bible teaches us that when you make war against a city, you must not destroy its trees, because the trees of the field are our life.

Shahanna sings:

*Come down the rain,
Come down the sun,
Come down the fruit to the heart that is open,
I am standing like a tree*

*With my roots dug down,
My branches wide and open!"*

Stormy continues reading:

Biriah is creation, God creating matter from nothing. In this world, where God's protection is close at hand, we can let go of all barriers and try on freedom. In Beriah the fruits of the earth require neither inner nor outer protective coverings.

Let us eat fruits that need no protective coverings or protected center such as figs, and grapes, and pears, and apples

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

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam borei pr'i he'etz
Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of trees.*

Shahanna : Nigun or song to bring everyone back together

Laurie reads:

**WORLD OF ATZILUT - PURE SPIRIT,
THE ETERNAL ESSENCE OF THE UNIVERSE
THE FOURTH CUP OF WINE**

The fourth cup is the full strength red wine. As the white wine is enriched, the taste becomes more full and rich, so the earth is full of new life. In the months to come, the fields will yield their crops, and the trees their harvest of fruits.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p're hagafen
Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of
the vine.

The world of Atzilut we eat no fruit, for this world cannot be represented by any fruit. In this spiritual world we become aware of God' love, mercy, and wisdom perceived with our hearts, not our senses. Our hearts are full and we praise the source that renews all creation:

Shahanna : Nigun or song

Judith H. reads:

A Poem for Tu B'Shevat 2021 before our second breakout discussion groups:

(modified and adapted from poems by R. Dara Lithwick & R. Rachel Barenblat)

Last year we gathered,
Together at shul, shoulder to shoulder,
Snow banks high outside, warm within, to celebrate the birthday of trees with a Tu
Bi'Shevat seder.

And ate the fruits of the branch - Peeling oranges, making apple smiley faces,
spitting out the pits of soft sweet dates and olives, devouring figs, and peaches,
and pomegranate seeds.
And blessed the beauty bounty and sang of almond blossoms.

We sang out loud, not thinking twice.
Our voices rising, commingling, harmonizing.
This year, we guard our breath
Behind a mask.

No singing together - Couldn't imagine.
Every breath, a risk.
We stay outside as much as possible, where the breathing is easier.

As the birthday of trees approaches,
All I want is to be with the trees.
Breathing together,
Where my exhalation is life, a gift,
And I inhale fresh, clean air
From the maples, and firs, and pines, and spruces, and birch, and apple trees.
Offerings of life.
Symbiosis.
Hope.

I want to thank the trees for oxygen.
Sing Happy Birthday quietly, under my breath,
Before walking back home.

Blessed are You, Holy One of Blessing, for trees of life.
May the trees enjoy protection and love. And may we all heal and breathe life into
each other.

2nd Breakout Groups Discussion:

Jackie: Here's some possibilities of questions. Pick one for your group to discuss:

- What has given you hope in this difficult year to keep going?
- We have been forced to make many changes in our everyday reality since last March. What are some positive practices that you would like to continue after the pandemic is over?
- Are there some dreams or plans for building community or supporting the ecology that you would like to put into practice now, or after the pandemic is over?

Jackie - Sharing from the groups

Sharon reads:

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav said,

"Master of the Universe. Grant me the ability to be alone. May it be my custom to go outside each day among the trees and the grasses, among all growing things. And there may I be alone and enter into prayer to talk with the One that I belong to. May 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 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 all my children.

May it be your will, O God of our ancestors, that through our eating of the fruits you have created, the trees be filled with the glory of their ability to renew themselves for new blossoming, from the start of the year to its end, so that our lives too will be renewed and filled with goodness, blessings, and peace."

Shahanna reads and then sings - *"Imagine leaning against the trunk of a sturdy tree on a hot summer day. This is "The Tree of Life", offering protection, inspiration and unending generosity. At the end of the chant, tune into your breath as you receive the sweet fruit of Being. Let each breath nourish, delight and renew."*

In His Shade Chant - by Shefa Gold

B'tzilo chime's v'yashvti (4 x)

Upiryo matok l'chiki (4x)

In His shade I delight to sit, eating His sweet fruit. (Songs of Songs 2:3)

ENDING THE SEDER

Jackie:

We end our journey together with a blessing of thanks for gifts from the trees and the wines that we have shared.

But it is one thing to acknowledge and praise the fruit which comes from trees, and it is a whole other level to consider the trees' current state, in a world of deforestation and climate disaster, that have contributed to our present pandemic.

May we encourage each other to not only celebrate the trees and the fruit they bear, but also think about the role trees play in protecting and healing our planet, and the actions we must take to make it so.

Let us return to our best and truest selves. Let us cultivate a deeper understanding that we are a part of the natural world. Let us step back into our role as part of a symbiotic relationship with the world. Let us plant a seed.

May it be your will that the trees whose fruit we have eaten and blessed will be filled with the strength to flourish and grow during the coming year - for goodness and for blessing, for life and for peace. Blessed be you who created so many different living things, so much diversity, all needing each other, to make one life interwoven through them all, as one soul. Blessed be the life of all worlds.

Brauch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam al hagafen v'al pri hagafen, al ha'etz v'al p'ri ha'etz.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, for the vine and its fruit, and the tree and its fruit.

There is a fire alive within every living cell of every being. The carbons we eat burn in the presence of the oxygen we breathe, giving us the energy to be. This spark of light is our connection to the divine.

Everyone unmute and together:

*L'Shanhah Tovah U'Vevacha Pri Utenuvah!
May The Year Be Fruitful and Blessed*