

# ט"ו בשבט Tu BiSh'vat Seder

from The Natural Bible iBook by Baruch Sienna

May it be Your will, Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that through the power of eating the fruits which we will bless and eat now, we will enjoy the secret roots on high upon which they depend, to bring abundance upon us, abundant blessings and goodness. We reaffirm our bond with the land of Israel and with the holy power of the Earth and all nature. May our deeds reflect that holy relationship between us, the world, and the Creator of the world. Amen.

## עשייה Assiyah

### The first cup: Winter — The World of Action

We begin in the real world, in the here and now. The real world is the physical world, this world of action. We recall that nature has been dormant these many months, awaiting the warmth of spring and the annual cycle of rebirth. Starting on Tu BiSh'vat, a few weeks after the winter solstice, even though it is still cold outside, we can already begin to feel the sun's strength growing.

In winter we layer ourselves in clothing, blanketing ourselves from the cold just as the earth is covered in snow. Here, in North America our trees are covered in white. In Israel, on Tu BiSh'vat, the almond tree is also covered in white. It is the first tree to blossom. The first wildflowers are white crocuses, narcissus and sand lilies.

Our Seder begins with white wine, symbol of winter. The days are getting longer. In Israel, winter begins with the rainy season. The earth begins to come to life after the long dry summer. We begin our Seder by remembering our connection to the land of Israel.

For Adonai your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to Adonai your God for the good land which God has given you. (Deuteronomy 8:7-9)

*Our first cup of wine is dedicated to the land of Israel.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei pri hagafen.

*Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, You have created the fruit of the vine.*

*Drink glass of white wine.*

הַשְּׂקֵדִיָּה פּוֹרַחַת	Hashkeidiyah porachat
וְשֶׁמֶשׁ פָּז זוֹרַחַת	V'shemesh paz zorachat;
צְפוּרִים מְרֵאשׁ כָּל גַּג	Tziporim meirosh kol gag,
מִבְּשׂוֹת אֶת בּוֹא הַחַג	M'vasrot et bo hechag.
ט"ו בְּשֶׁבֶט הַגִּיעַ חַג הָאֵילָנוֹת	Tu BiSh'vat higiya chag ha'ilanot (2x)
	The almond tree's in blossom,
	The sunshine's gold and awesome
	Birds in song for all to hear
	Send the news the day is near
	Tu Bish'vat is coming,
	New Year of the Trees.

Though it is winter outside, the roots of trees are in the world of action as they begin to seek nourishment far underneath the frozen ground. The turn of the year has come. The seed is quickening, life is reasserting itself. And we celebrate the reawakening of the Tree of Life. The physical world is the world in which we assemble and shape artifacts from God's raw material. But this world is protected with an outer shell. The first fruits we eat tonight are those which are shelled on the outside, whose insides are edible. We must crack the shells to release the divine sparks for *Tikkun Olam*, healing the world.

When God created Adam, all the lovely trees in the Garden were shown to him. God said, "Look how lovely and praiseworthy are my works! But everything I created I created for you. Pay heed that you do not ruin it, there is no one after you who can repair it." (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13)

When God created the world everything was made a little bit incomplete. Instead of making bread grow out of the earth, wheat was made so that people might bake it into bread. Instead of making the earth out of bricks, it was made of clay, so that people might bake the clay into bricks. Why? So that man and woman would be partners in the task of completing the work of creation. (Midrashic idea adapted by Rabbi Harold Kushner)

*As we eat the fruit of Assiyah, the physical world of action, may we be blessed with the courage to work for the repair of the world:*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei pri ha-eitz.

*Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, You have created the fruit of the trees.*

*Eat almonds & pistachios.*

**What actions can we take to help repair the world?**

## יצירה Yetzirah

### The second cup: Spring — The World of Emotion

As spring arrives, the ground becomes soft. The farmer turns the earth and plants seeds. The world begins to blossom and grow green. Spring is a time for love and lovers.

I went down into the walnut garden  
Looking for the signs of spring:  
The pomegranates — Have they flowered?  
The grapevines — are they blossoming?  
Turning to him, who meets me with desire—

...

Arise, my love, my fair one, come away!  
For now the winter is past, the rains are over and gone.  
The blossoms have appeared in the land,  
The time of singing has come,  
And the song of the turtledove is heard.  
The fig tree brings forth her green figs,  
The vines in blossom give off sweet fragrance.  
Arise, my love, my fair one, come away!

...

There among blossom and vine I will give you my love,  
Musk of the violet mandrakes spilled upon us.  
And returning, finding our doorways piled with fruits,  
The best of the new-picked and long-stored,  
My love, I will have you all I have saved for you.  
(adapted from Marcia Falk's The Song of Songs 6:8; 7:11–14)

*As we drink our second cup of wine, we pray that our hearts may be opened to the beauty and goodness of God's creation.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei pri hagafen.

*Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, You have created the fruit of the vine.  
Drink glass of white wine with a drop of red.*

Once when Rav Kook was walking in the fields, lost deep in thought, the young student with him inadvertently plucked a leaf off a branch. Rav Kook was visibly shaken by this act and, turning to his companion he said gently: believe me when I tell you that I never simply pluck a leaf or a blade of grass or any living thing unless I have to. Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song and breathing forth a secret of the divine mystery of the creation. The words of Rav Kook penetrated deeply into the mind of the young student: For the first time he understood what it means to show compassion to all creatures.

The world of emotion needs protection only at its heart, so it is represented by fruit with a hard inner pit which cannot be eaten. We naturally protect those things that we love. Today, the world of nature needs our protection.

צְדִיק כְּתָמָר יִפְרָח כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבְנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה:  
שְׁתוּלִים בְּבַיִת יי בְּחֻצוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִפְרִיחוּ:  
עוֹד יִנּוּבוּן בְּשִׁיבָה דְשָׁנִים וְרַעֲנָנִים יִהְיוּ:  
לְהַגִּיד כִּי-יָשָׁר יי צוּרִי וְלֹא-עוֹלָתָהּ בּוֹ:

Tzaddik katamar yifrach, k'erez balvanon yisgeh  
Shtulim b'veit adonai, bechatzrot eloheinu yafrichu.  
Od yenuvun beseivah, desheinim verananim yihyu  
L'hagid ki yashar adonai, tzuri velo avlata bo.

The righteous flourish like the palm tree;  
he grows like a cedar in Lebanon.  
Those that are planted in the house of Adonai  
shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
They shall still bring forth fruit in old age;  
they shall be fat and flourishing;  
To declare that Adonai is upright;  
God is my rock, in whom there is no wrong.  
(Psalm 92:14–16)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei pri ha-eitz.

*Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, You have created the fruit of the trees.*

*Eat dates.*

**Share something in nature that you love.**

# בריאה Bri'yah

## The third cup: Summer — The World of Intellect

The tree symbolizes the life giving source of creation; it also symbolizes the life giving energy of Torah, the source of our life and growth as the people of Israel. The Torah is called the Tree of Life. Summer is a time of rejuvenation. As summer refreshes our body, so does the Torah refresh our mind. We move from the world of our bodies and our emotions to our intellect. Our impulses and passions are tempered with our mind.

עֵץ-חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחְזִיקִים בָּהּ וְתַמְכִּיהָ מֵאֲשֶׁר.  
דְּרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֵי-נְעִים וְכָל-נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם:

It is a tree of life to those who hold it fast, and all who cling to it find happiness. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.

*Our third cup of wine is dedicated to the Torah.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei pri hagafen.

*Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, You have created the fruit of the vine.*

*Mix half a glass of white wine with half red.*

Most fruits have inedible parts: dates have pits, grapes have seeds, pomegranates have skins. The world of intellect is represented by a fruit with neither pit nor outer shell; a fruit wholly edible. Unlike other fruit that have a pit, or a shell, every part of the fig can be eaten.

Why is the Torah compared to figs? Like the fig, no part of the Torah is without value; all parts of it provide sustenance. Every part is sweet and “food for thought.” Figs have a very long growing season. Most trees, such as olive, grape or date, produce fruit that can be gathered all at one time, but that of the fig is gathered bit by bit. You cannot pick all the figs at once, but only gradually, over a long season. Similarly, you cannot learn the whole Torah at once, but only gradually, little by little, over an entire lifetime. And so, whenever you go to the fig tree, you are likely to find ripe fruit to eat. Similarly, whenever you go to the Torah, you will find nourishment for the spirit. (Midrash Rabbah)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei pri ha-eitz.

*Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, You have created the fruit of the trees.*

*Eat figs.*

**How is the Torah like a tree?**

## אֲצִילוֹת Atzilut

### The fourth cup: Autumn — The World of Being

The fourth world of emanation is purely spiritual. This level of being defies representation. The world of Being is our hope for the future, the Messianic vision. This world is the most hidden, like Redemption.

לֹא-יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל-גּוֹי חֶרֶב לֹא-יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה  
וְכָתְתוּ חֶרְבוֹתָם לְאַתִּים וַחֲנִיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמֵרוֹת

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor learn war any more. Every person shall sit securely under their vine and under their fig tree; and none shall make them afraid. (Isaiah)

The tree and the holiday of Tu BiSh'vat have connected us to the land of Israel, to God's creation and the Torah. We have planted trees to rebuild the land of Israel. Today we are reminded that planting trees is a symbol of taking care of the earth and bringing redemption. There is a tradition that the sage Honi slept for seventy years:

One day Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, "How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit?" The man replied: "Seventy years." He then further asked him: "Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?" The man replied: "I found [ready grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children."

This story teaches us that we must leave the earth for our children. We work for redemption by planting seeds of peace.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai taught: "If there is a sapling in your hand, and you hear that the Messiah has come, first finish planting, and then go and greet the Messiah."

No fruit can represent the spiritual world. Instead, we smell the sweet fragrance of spices.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיְיָ בְּשָׁמִים.

Baruch ata Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei minei v'samim.

*Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, You have created sweet smelling spices.*

*Smell fragrance.*

Master of the Universe,  
May it be our custom to go outdoors each day  
among the trees and grass,  
among all living things,  
and there may we be alone,  
and enter into prayer.

There may we express all that is in our hearts,  
talking with the One to whom we belong.

And may all grasses, trees and plants  
awake at our coming.

Send the power of their life into our words of prayer  
making whole our hearts and our speech.

(attributed to Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav)

The Hebrew letter *yud* is the smallest letter in God's name; it is like the seed that knows how to grow into the adult plant. We all have within us the seed. All we need to do is let it grow. We all have the seeds of Redemption.

We raise our fourth cup to the fullness of life and the harvest of nature; to the cycle of the year and our own spiritual growth. May it be Your will, Adonai, that through the eating of the fruits that we have blessed, the trees will be renewed for new blossoming and growth. So too, may our lives be renewed and filled with goodness, blessings and peace. May we become strong like healthy trees, with solid roots in the ground and with our arms open to the love that is all around us.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei pri hagafen.

*Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation, You have created the fruit of the vine.*

*Drink glass of red wine with a drop of white.*

We pray that this Seder celebration will inspire in us a deeper sensitivity to nature's gifts. May the day soon come when all will live their lives in freedom so that next year we may plant trees in a Jerusalem of peace.