

A TU B'SHEVAT SEDER

The Tu B'Shevat seder is a celebration of our relationship with nature and with fruit trees in particular, and a time for reflection. Today, as we celebrate together, let us envision ourselves as partners in shaping, cultivating, and healing the natural world. The Tu B'Shevat Seder is split into four sections, each reflecting the seasons and symbolizing different aspects of the trees and our own lives. Each section is connected to one of the four worlds of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, and represents the transition from the most physical to the most spiritual.

First Cup

The World of Asiyah (Actualization)

Fruits and nuts with a hard outside and an edible inside

[Pour a glass of white wine, say the blessing, and drink half or more.]

Although seemingly inedible from the outside, each of the foods eaten at the level of Asiyah, when peeled or shelled, hold gifts that transcend their outward appearance. Like winter, where everything lays dormant and hidden, these fruits and nuts contain inside them the potential to reveal what is hidden within. Because of their hard exterior, these foods can represent the human tendency to judge others by their outer appearance. They can also represent the ways we separate ourselves from other people. Eating these fruits reminds us that whoever we are, we all carry a divine spark within.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam borei peri ha-gafen.
Blessed are you, Source of all life, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Eat: Walnuts | Almonds | Pomegranates | Coconuts | Pistachios

Second Cup

The World of Yetzirah (Formation)

Fruits with pits at their center

[Add a few drops of red wine and fill the rest with white. Drink half or more.]

We now drink our second cup of wine. Just as each new stream begins with a trickle, each flower with a single bud, just a few drops of color transform the hue of our wine. Although we discard the pits of these fruits, they are the seeds, the means to rebirth. These fruits can remind us that every flowering tree was once bare and that the means to growth can sometimes come from the innermost overlooked places. They can symbolize the potential within us that we have not tapped.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei peri ha-etz.
Blessed are You, Source of all life, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

Eat: Cherries | Olives | Plums | Apricots | Avocado

Third Cup

The World of Beriah (Creation)

Fruits that are entirely edible

[Refill the glass so that there is now half red and half white wine. Drink half or more.]

We drink our third cup of wine. We now have half a cup of red wine and half a cup of white - even though the trees will be full and green and their flowers will blossom, their growth is not complete. So much more will be created; so much more is to come.

These fruits can remind us of the wholeness of the world, where nothing is wasted and everything nourishes everything else. We can take this time to look at the fruit of our own creations and actions and consider how to deepen our relationships in the world and with the earth.

Eat: Grapes | Raisins | Apples | Pears | Blueberries | Raspberries

Fourth Cup

The World of Atzilut (Presence, Emanation, Birth)

[Pour a nearly full glass of red wine again and add just a few drops of white. Drink all.]

We now come to our final cup; the drops of white in the red remind us of the first cup of this seder and of the cyclical nature of the seasons. This final section represents what is invisible to the eye. Instead of eating fruit, we may enjoy sweet smells like cinnamon and rosemary.

Beyond the cycle of eating is the cycle of breathing, when something lives both within and without us at the same time, when it is so much a part of us that we cannot even see it. At this level all things are already part of each other. We all have this kind of connection with the earth and with God. Like smells, the ways we remember this connection are subtle: the feel of the soil or the smell of dew, the color of the changing leaves, the sounds of birds migrating, or the clasp of a hand.

Smell: Cinnamon | Rosemary | Bay Leaf | Cedar

May the New Year of The Trees begin a year of growth; may it be a year of renewal for the trees and for us; and may our blessings give strength to the trees and may our eyes be opened to the wonders of creation, and may we nurture the world that nurtures us.