

Tu B'shevat Seder

Open with He-nay Matov

The Four Questions:

- 1) Why do we have a new year of the trees?
- 2) Why today do we eat different kinds of fruits that are grown in Israel?
- 3) On other days we take trees for granted. Why today do we think about conserving and sharing?
- 4) Why on a cold and wintry day do we talk about spring planting?

Answers to the Questions:

- 1) Certain mitzvot in the Torah make it very important to know the age of trees. The Torah requires farmers to give one tenth (or a tithe) of all crops grown during a given year to the priests of the holy Temple. Tu B'shevat marked the beginning of the year for tithing trees. The Torah also says that we may not eat the fruit of a tree until the fourth year after it has been planted. Tu B'shevat figures into this calculation as well. In addition to these practical reason for celebrating the birthday of trees, Tu B'shevat celebrates the Jewish people's love of trees. In the Talmud, we learn that when a baby was born, the parents planted a cedar tree for a boy and a cypress tree for a girl. The children cared for their trees and when they grew up and were ready to be married, branches from the 2 trees were used to make the pillars of the chuppah. By planting trees, people showed they believed in a future for their children, who would grow up enjoying the fruit, shade, breeze, and beauty provided by the trees.
- 2) After the Temple was destroyed and the Jews were forced to leave the land of Israel, the original purpose of Tu B'shevat was lost. The laws of planting and tithing crops did not apply outside of Israel. But the holiday was preserved as a symbol of the love of the Jewish people for their land. It became a custom to eat fruits that grow in the Holy Land—almonds, dates, olives, figs, carob and pomegranates. The Jewish mystics or Kabbalists created a formal Tu B'shevat celebration modeled after the Passover seder. In modern times, Tu B'shevat has taken on new meaning. With the rebirth of the State of Israel, trees have become the symbol of rebuilding the land.
- 3) Trees were so important that Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai taught: If you should be standing with a sapling in your hand when the Messiah arrives, first finish planting the tree, then go and greet the Messiah. And the Bible tells us that when you make war against a city, you must not destroy the trees because the trees of the field are your life. The rabbis interpreted this as meaning that we should not be wasteful or destructive. Preventing forest fires, conserving energy that is needed to produce food, and recycling paper products are things we all can do to help our environment and save the trees.
- 4) In Israel, Tu B'shevat has become a day for planting trees. Children go out into the fields, valleys and deserts and plant hundreds of saplings. Jewish children all over the world contribute money for tree planting.

First Cup of Wine: all white wine

Q: Why do we use white wine in this first cup?

A: Because white wine reminds us of winter, when nature is sleeping, the earth is barren, sometimes snow covered.

Recite the blessing over the wine and the Shehecheyanu

Wine: Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen

Shehecheyanu: Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu, v'kiyemanu, v'higianu laz'man hazeh

Drink the wine

The First Seder Plate: grains and fruits and nuts with shells

Q: Why are the fruits and nuts with shells separated from other fruits in the Seder?

A: The peel or shell is protecting the soft 'meat' of the fruit or nut. Some say that God's spirit is hidden by the shell of the fruits or nuts. Fruits, like nuts, with their hard outer shells remind us that God's presence is often hidden.

Recite blessing for foods with grains and fruits and nuts

Grains: Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'erezt

Fruits and nuts: Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz

Eat some samples from the first seder plate

The Second Cup of Wine: mix a little red wine into the white wine

Give each student a glass of white wine and then pour a little red wine into it and allow them to watch the colors change.

Q: What does this second glass of wine represent, with the changing colors?

A: The coming of spring when the land changes its colors from white to red.

Recite blessing over the wine:

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

Drink the wine

The Second Seder Plate: fruits with pits or seeds that cannot be eaten

Q: Do you know someone who is like these kinds of fruits—soft on the outside and hard on the inside? Why do you think they are like this?

A: No correct answer—just use as a mini-discussion about how we can learn a little bit more about people and ourselves.

Recite blessing over fruit

Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz

Eat some samples from the second seder plate

The Third Cup of Wine: mix a little white wine into the red wine

Give each student a glass of red wine and then pour a little white wine into it and allow them to watch the colors change.

Q: What does this third glass of wine represent, with the changing colors?

A: Summer because as summer arrives the land of Israel becomes bright red, flowers bloom, the earth softens, farmers farm their land, etc.

Recite blessing over the wine:

Barcuh atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen

Drink the wine

The Third Seder Plate: fruits that are edible inside and out

Q: What do these fully edible fruits represent?

A: In the summer, the earth has become alive once more. This type of fruit needs only protection around its heart. The fruit is very easy to bite into and enjoy.

Recite blessing over fruit

Barcuh atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz

Eat some samples from the third seder plate

The Fourth Cup of Wine: all red wine

Q: What does the fourth glass of wine represent?

A: Fall, the season of harvest

Recite blessing over the wine:

Barcuh atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen

Drink the wine

The Fourth Seder Plate: seeds

There isn't anything to eat on this plate; instead we plant parsley seeds into dirt, to represent the mitzvah of planting seeds. The Parsley can then be used at the Passover seder.

Plant seeds into the dirt.

Recite a blessing of thanks for the food and wine just shared:

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