

# Tu B'Shevat – The Holiday of Redemption

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## Introduction

My favorite holiday – Tu b'Shevat – has arrived. On that holiday, we recognize how these holy fruits are vehicles through which our mutual relationship with Hashem is expressed: Hashem bestows His blessings of fruit upon Israel, and we praise Hashem for the fruits of the Holy Land. Tu b'Shevat is the time to work on our *emunah* and patience. Even when things look bleak on the outside, the greatest blessings of surprise peak beyond the surface.

I'm giving you a drop of the book from the Tu b'Shevat section of *The Seven Fruits of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties*.

## Tu b'Shevat – Celebrating the Fruits of the Land of Israel

The Torah is a "Tree of Life,"<sup>1</sup> the fruits of the Land reflect the unique Torah of Eretz Yisrael. Just as the tree of the field blossoms on Tu b'Shevat due to the rain water it receives that year, likewise the Tree of Life within us – the Torah – flourishes then. The *chidushei Torah* (original Torah insights) granted to us on Rosh Hashana in potential, materialize on Tu b'Shevat through the blossoms of the new fruits.

## The Tu b'Shvat Seder

In the past few decades, as we get closer to our final redemption and return to Paradise, the Tu b'Shevat Fruit Seder has become widespread among Jews across the world. It facilitates partaking of the fruits of the Land in a mindful way, enjoying their colors, textures and tastes, while praising Hashem for the fruits with intentional blessings. Originally in the Garden of Eden, humanity was sustained by the sparks of the holy Hebrew letters of the Torah inherent in the fruits.<sup>2</sup> By blessing the fruits during the Tu b'Shevat Seder, and sharing Torah insights about them, we can elevate our relationship to food, and infuse our eating with Torah, transforming our eating once again into the words of Torah. Moreover, eating fruits on Tu b'Shevat in a mindful way gives us the opportunity to rectify all of our past eating during the entire year.<sup>3</sup>

## The Origin of the Tu b'Shevat Seder

The Tu b'Shevat Seder somewhat similar to the Pesach Seder was compiled by the students of the Holy Arizal.<sup>4</sup> It is based primarily on the Kabbalistic work, *Chemdat haYamim*, later published separately under the title "*Pri Etz Hadar*."<sup>5</sup> The Tu b'Shevat Seder involves appreciating the fruits of the tree, particularly those native to the Land of Israel.

## Between Tu b'Shevat and Pesach Seders

<sup>1</sup> *Mishlei* 3:18.

<sup>2</sup> Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, *Likutei Amerim* 11.

<sup>3</sup> Rav Tzadok HaKohen, *P'ri Tzadik, for Tu b'Shevat* 2.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Tzefat.

<sup>5</sup> The book *P'ri Etz Hadar* was first published as part of *Chemdat HaYamim*, in Tzefat, 1641.



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Although the Pesach Seder is halacha (Jewish law), the Tu b'Shevat Seder is not obligatory. Halachic sources do mention the *minhag* (custom) to enjoy an abundance of different fruits on Tu b'Shevat.<sup>6</sup> Since the order and the content of the Seder do not follow specific Jewish law, there is much room for flexibility and creativity for each of us to conduct the Seder in our own way. Pesach celebrates the past redemption of the Jewish People from Egypt and anticipates our return to the Land of Israel. However, Tu b'Shevat celebrates the return to the Land – the entryway to the Garden of Eden, and anticipates the redemption of all humanity we will eat – this time – fruit from the Tree of Life.

### The Sequences of the Seder Corresponding to the Four Worlds

The fruits of the Tu b'Shevat Seder are divided into four categories corresponding to the Four Worlds that link the upper and lower reality. Each sequence of fruit culminates with a cup of wine. As on Pesach, the wine is poured before the text is read and drunk afterwards. The first cup is white wine symbolizing the refined ethereal upper world of *אצילות* /*Atzilut* – Emanation. This cup is followed by a cup of white wine with a drop of red added, corresponding to the world of *בריאה* /*Beriyah* – Creation. The third cup with equal red and white wine reflects the world of *יצירה* /*Yetzirah* – Formation, whereas the fourth cup filled with red wine, represents our coarse material lower world of *אשיה* /*Asiyah* – Action. During the Tu b'Shevat Seder we spiral downward from the highest world of Emanation beyond any physical manifestation, through the worlds of Formation and Creation, ultimately landing in our physical world of Action.

### The Different Categories of Fruit and their Corresponding Kabbalistic Worlds

1. There are no fruits that correspond to the world of Emanation, which is totally spiritual beyond physical manifestation. However, for this category, we have chosen the Seven Species by which the Land of Israel is praised, since these fruits take precedence according to the laws of blessings as will be explained.
2. Wholly edible fruits correspond to the world of Creation.
3. Fruits that are wholly edible except for their inner pits correspond to the world of Formation.
4. Fruits that have outer inedible shells correspond to the world of Action.

It is interesting to note that the Seven Species include fruits from each of these worlds.<sup>7</sup>

### The Tu b'Shevat Haggadah

Just as Pesach is accompanied by the *Haggadah*, the Tu b'Shevat Seder includes texts with verses from the Bible and passages from the Oral Torah describing the fruits. Before each fruit is eaten, a portion of the Written or Oral Torah is recited and discussed. In contrast to the Pesach Haggadah which is a fixed text, you can create your own Tu b'Shevat Seder text, personally selecting the Torah portions of your choice for each fruit.

### Practical Guidelines for Conducting a Tu b'Shevat Seder

<sup>6</sup> *Mishnah Berurah* 131:31; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 139:26.

<sup>7</sup> The fig, which is totally edible, from the world of Creation; grapes, olives and dates, with their inedible pits from the world of Formation; wheat, barley and pomegranates with their inedible shells, from the world of Action.

It is recommended to set aside at least two hours to run a meaningful Tu b'Shevat Seder with enough time to share and discuss Torah about each of the fruits. Set your Tu b'Shevat table with four fruit platters arranged according to the Four Worlds. It is preferable to prepare thirty kinds of fruit corresponding to the Ten Sefirot in each of the three lower worlds. If this is not possible, a minimum of twelve fruits will do. If you are missing one fruit you can substitute another, preferably from the same category. You can invite each of the participants to bring one kind of fruit and prepare Torah insights to share about it. Be creative! You may decorate your table with fragrant flowers, for instance. Include songs and meditations of your choice between each of the sequences. At the end of your Tu b'Shevat Seder, make sure to recite the threefold *'M'ein Shalosh'* after-blessings for cake, wine and fruit together with all the participants.

### Laws and Order of Blessings

Whenever we eat, the blessing on sustaining foods made from the five grains precedes the rest of the blessings.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we begin the Seder by blessing *'borei minei mezonot'* on the wheat cracker or cake. When blessing on wheat have in mind to include all other grains as well. The Torah mentions seven kinds of fruits in praise of the Land of Israel. These seven species are wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. The first blessing recited over the fruits of the tree includes all other fruits on the table. When you eat several different kinds of fruits, choose a fruit from the Seven Species to eat first.<sup>9</sup> The order of blessing within these Seven Fruits is according to their proximity to the word 'land' in the Bible verse.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, we bless *'borei p'ri ha'etz'* on the olive and have in mind that this blessing includes the remaining fruits of the tree. Whenever making a blessing, hold the fruit in your right hand. Whenever possible each person should recite her own blessing.<sup>11</sup>

### New Fruits from the Land

Contemplating the marvel of the gift of the divine fruits can teach us many lessons about G-d, life and ourselves. Try to include in your Tu b'Shevat Seder as many fruits as possible grown in the Land of Israel, in order to connect yourself to the Holy Land on this day. Make sure the fruits have been grown and tithed according to the Laws of the Land. It is also recommended that you include a fruit you have not eaten yet during that year, in order to recite the special *shehecheyanu* blessing for eating a fruit for the first time in the season.<sup>12</sup>

### Tikun via Eating

During the Tu b'Shevat Seder we have the opportunity to rectify eating from the Tree of Knowledge – the root of all eating disorders and sin – which corrupted the world and combined the pure with the impure by causing sparks of holiness to fall into the husks. Words of Torah, blessings and proper intentions enable us to raise the fallen sparks within the food and return them to their source in the Garden of Eden. Since the exile from the Garden, every fruit includes a part of both the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, its antidote. Every time we put food in our mouths, especially on Tu

<sup>8</sup> Although only wheat and barley are mentioned among the Seven Species in Deuteronomy 8:8, spelt, rye and oats are included as their subspecies.

<sup>9</sup> Mishnah Berurah 211:4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Mishnah Berurah 211:21.

<sup>11</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 213:1, Mishnah Berurah 213:12.

<sup>12</sup> בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהִתְחַיְנוּ וְהִצַּיְנוּ לָרֶגֶעַץ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה – Blessed are You Hashem our G-d King of the Universe, Who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion.



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b'Shevat, we have the choice whether to continue the sin of Adam and Eve by eating the Fruit of Knowledge or to eat like the righteous and take each bite from the Tree of Life.<sup>13</sup>

### Elevating Sparks

It is our G-d-given opportunity to rectify and unify the upper worlds through the power of blessings and prayer. The purpose of reciting *berachot* (blessings) is to affirm that there is one G-d in the world and that everything belongs to Him. Blessing with proper intention purifies and elevates the Divine sparks contained in the food. Learning Torah, praying to G-d, and using the food's energy to perform a mitzvah elevate the sparks contained in the food to the upper worlds, from where they had originally fallen. The sparks of holiness are thereby returned to their source. Whereas, the blessings on mitzvot draw down celestial abundance, blessings over food and other pleasures are meant to rectify the worlds themselves, by elevating them and connecting each one with the world above it. This way, even our lowest world can receive the Holy influence of the highest light.<sup>14</sup>

### Tu b'Shevat – An Occasion to Connect with the Land of Israel and Yearn for Redemption

If you seek to heighten the spirituality of your life by deepening your bond with Eretz Yisrael, the holiday of Tu b'Shevat assumes major importance. When blessing and enjoying the fruits during the Tu b'Shevat Seder, keep in mind that the fruits of the Land of Israel herald the redemption as we learn from the prophets: "But you, mountains of Israel shall give forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people, Israel; for soon they will come."<sup>15</sup> Based on this verse, the Talmud reveals that there is no more revealed sign of the End of Days, than when the Land of Israel will produce fruits in abundance.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Based on Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, *P'ri Tzadik*, for *Tub'Shevat*.

<sup>14</sup> Based on Rav Chaim Volozhin, *Nefesh HaChaim* 2:3-4 and 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Yechezkiel* 36:8.

<sup>16</sup> *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 98a.



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