



Tu B'shvat Seder 5771 / 2011

INTRODUCTION

Tu B'Shvat is the New Year for the trees. As in all other points in the Jewish calendar, Tu B'Shvat offers a unique opportunity for insight into living and personal growth.

Today's seder will have three major components. First, we will look at the holiday of Tu B'shevat itself, what its significance is historically and religiously, and gain understanding into how and why it is celebrated. Second, we will connect to the Land of Israel through the "Seven Species", and third, we will use the model of the kabbalists' first Tu B'Shevat seder to explore our inner selves.

Pt. I: Tu B'Shevat as a Holiday

Tu B'Shevat is first recorded as a date of significance in the Mishnah. Jewish law recognizes four different new years. The existence of four new years shows an awareness and sensitivity to the fact that humans operate in many different time cycles and rhythms. Tu B'Shevat, the new year for trees, delineates years for the agricultural tithing cycle. Depending on the year of a seven-year cycle, a different type of tithe had to be given.

- **Tithing the fruit**

This refers to the different tithes which were obligatory during the time of the Temple. This means that a portion of the fruit from the tree was given to the Kohanim and Levites. Which year that fruit belonged to was calculated by how much it had grown by this date.

- **Orlah**

Parashat Vayikra (19: 23-25) discusses the mitzvah of orlah. For three years after planting a tree, one cannot eat its fruit. In the fourth year, one must eat them specifically in Yerushalayim.

In Eretz Yisrael, one plants a fruit tree, not just in order to eat its fruit as soon as possible.

Rather, one plants a tree so that the Land can become more productive. The phenomenon of orlah also ties one to the Land. When one plants something that he knows will not benefit him for at least three years, it means that he must believe in his chances to remain there. Either that, or he sees the value of preparing the Land for his offspring.

These laws apply only in the Land of Israel.

- **The timing**

The demarcation of the new year is when the sap rises in the tree, which is approximately at this season. The sages explain that by the fifteenth of Shvat the soil is saturated with the rains of the passing winter so that growth is assured for the New Year. Therefore any tree planted before Tu B'shvat is considered as belonging to the previous year.

After the destruction of the Temple and expulsion of Jews from Israel, Tu B'Shevat was a relatively dormant holiday until it was developed by the kabbalists living in 16th Century Safed. Kabbala is the study of the “esoteric” or hidden aspects of the Torah. The movement was largely founded by Rav Luria in the 16th century. Kabbala is not studied by most – nor should it be - according to the Talmud, unless one is a thorough Torah scholar and fitting certain conditions. At the same time, we can learn from the Kabbalists, and about their relationship to Hashem.

Throughout the centuries, Kabbalists have used the tree as a metaphor to understand God's relationship to the spiritual and physical worlds. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, in his 18th century classic *The Way of God*, teaches that the higher spiritual realms are roots that ultimately manifest their influence through branches and leaves in the lower realms.

Trees and nature play an important part in the kabbalistic understanding of the world. In the kabbalist mindset, there are many worlds, of which ours is the lowest and most distanced from God. Although each world is characterized by an increasing degree of opacity that veils its divine root, all worlds share a common underlying structure. Thus contemplation of any world can lead to knowledge of the structure of the ultimate theosophical realm. Nature is perhaps the richest symbol available to the kabbalists to provide insight into the Divine realm. Unlike philosophers, for whom nature allows for an appreciation of God, the kabbalists believe that nature is a symbolic representation of the hidden divine realm.

According to kabbalistic doctrine, our world exists as a result of constantly flowing divine energy, which is channeled through ten emanations. Additionally, there are four “worlds”, or realms, through which our universe exists. They are: nobility, creation, formation and doing. These worlds provide linkage between our own universe and God. Each world contains different elements, all of which are present in our universe. Thus the highest world, nobility, is as close to God as possible. It is pure spirituality. The next world, creation, begins to have physical aspects and materials. In the third world,

formation, the materials are formed. The fourth world, the world of doing, combines all of the elements of the upper worlds to make the universe as we know and experience it.

Part II: Connection to the Land of Israel

Jews throughout their exile, whether enduring freezing Siberian winters or basking in the warmth of sunny Florida, always keep the Land of Israel close to their heart and consciousness. Jews face Jerusalem for prayer three times a day. Each time we recite Grace After Meals we ask for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Also, Jews have always celebrated the beginning of spring in the Holy land. Even if outside it is still winter and cold, deep within the tree the sap is rising and the process of creating a new fruit has begun. So too, we trust that God is preparing our redemption -- even though on the outer surface we still are in a bitter exile.

We celebrate this connection by starting with the Seven Species of Israel.

The "Seven Species of Israel" are what are described in *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 8:8 describes the Land of Israel as a "land of wheat and barley, of [grape] vines, figs and pomegranates, and land of olives for oil and [date] honey."

The offerings of the first fruits (*bikkurim*) brought to the Temple in Jerusalem on Shavuot were brought only from these seven species. In modern Israel the seven species dominate large areas of the countryside, accentuating a sense of continuity between the biblical Land of Israel and the modern state.

1. Barley and Wheat (Grains)

- Before we say a blessing for grains, let us reflect on our good fortune. God has given us innumerable blessings, enabling us to enjoy this food. God could easily have arranged for humans to be nourished by photosynthesis like plants, or by eating bland oatmeal, or by taking pills. Instead, He created a seemingly endless variety of appetizing and nourishing foods for us to enjoy. He gave us taste buds, and many miraculous organs with which to eat and digest the food. A blessing is a thank-you note to our Creator.
- The Talmud says that someone who eats and doesn't say a blessing is considered a thief. Why? Because every aspect of God's creation is inherently holy. So when one eats a piece of fruit, he is depriving the world of a piece of holiness. A blessing re-infuses the world with holiness. Eating without a blessing, however, lowers the level of holiness in the world without replacing the loss -- and is regarded as theft. (Maharal of Prague)

Before eating **cake or pastry**, we recite the following blessing:

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam, boray minay mezonot.

Blessed are you God, King of the Universe, Who creates species of nourishment.

Specialness of grains b/c we make bread, truly Hashem's partner. The grains (wheat and barley) provide necessary basics in our diet. As basic staples, they are compared to Jewish law, *halachah*, which literally means "the way we walk." Humans have a sense of destiny, and the directives of Jewish law tell us which roads won't take us to where we want to go and which roads will.

2. FRUIT - dates, olives, figs, pomegranate & grapes

- In contrast to the grains, the message of the fruits -- which are *not* staples but add flavor, variety, fragrance and color to our lives -- is that the journey itself is meant to be joyous. Moving forward, getting beyond routine and habitual observance, gives us enormous pleasure.

Before we move from grains - which we process - to fruit - that is ready to eat, let's look at this beautiful dvar Torah by **Rabbi Avigdor Miller** Z"L about the difference:

Why isn't all food made ready to eat?



Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted us to work in this world. It's very important we should be busy. If we would live idly like *Adam* in *Gan Eden*, we would fall into sin, and that's why when *Adam* showed that total leisure was dangerous for him, he fell into sin. So *Hashem* said, from now on "with the sweat of your brow you'll eat bread". You have to work for your bread, it's a blessing to work, because you're busy working it keeps you out of trouble.

If everything was ready made, you never have to do any cooking, people would go wild. It's a blessing that we stand in the kitchen, and there's a big opportunity. A person standing at the gas range is like a *Kohain* at the *Altar* and she's *bringing a korban*, a

sacrifice. She's *sacrificing* herself (her leisure time) on the gas range for the benefit of her family. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* planned this world for work, work is a very important blessing in this world. Make no mistake about it, *Adam* was given this blessing, *B'zeiat Apecha*, with the sweat of your brow. *Tova Torah Im Melacha*, you need work in this world. Laboring in *Torah* and laboring in work causes people to forget sin.

And therefore when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* made an exception and gave us fruits, He's reminding us of our original state. Our original state was planned to be total leisure, where we'd enjoy the fruits of *Gan Eden*. So on *Tu Beshvat* we go back to *Gan Eden* for a short visit and we look at the fruits, and we utilize them for the purpose for which the world was created. Then we go back to our work, *Shaishes Yomim Ta'avod*, six days you should work. When *Shabbos* comes, thank *Hashem* for *Shabbos* or on *Shabbos* thank *Hashem* that He gave you six days to work.

Think about that: Thank *Hashem* that he gave you six days to carry out all your plans, to labor, to perfect yourself, to create the benefits of character that accrue from work. *Shabbos* is like giving *Maaser*. When you give a tenth of your earnings to *Hashem*, you thank Him for the other nine tenths, and when you keep *Shabbos* to *Hashem* you thank Him for the other six days. *Shaishes Yomim*, six days you should do your work, a blessing of six days, it's a happiness the six days, opportunity of six days, because the work is in itself one of the great benefits that *Hashem* is giving to mankind.

Say the following blessing and then eat one of the fruits:

Baruch Ata Adod-nai Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam boray pri ha-aitz.

Blessed are you God, King of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree.

If there is a seasonal fruit at the table which you have not yet tasted this season, say the following additional blessing before eating the fruit:

***Baruch Ata Ado-nai, Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam, sheh-he-che-yanu
vi-kee-yimanu vi-hee-gee-yanu laz-man ha-zeh.***

*Blessed are You God, King of the Universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us,
and brought us to this season.*

Take each fruit one by one, as the appropriate paragraph below is recited. Enjoy the many unique flavors and textures. Reflect on the reality that the Creator of time and space wants us to take pleasure in everything that He put into the world.

● **Olives:**

Rabbi Yehoshuah Ben Levi said: Why is Israel compared to an olive tree? Because just as the leaves of an olive tree do not fall off either in summer or winter, so too the Jewish

people shall not be cast off -- neither in this world nor in the World to Come. (Talmud - Menachot 53b)

The Sages taught: Just as olive oil brings light into the world, so do the people of Israel bring light into the world. (Midrash -- Shir HaShirim Raba 1:2)

- **Dates:**

Your stature is like a palm tree (Song of Songs 7:8). Just as the palm tree doesn't bend or sway, so too the Jewish people.

No part of the palm tree is wasted. The dates are for eating; the Lulav branches are for waving in praise on Sukkot; the dried thatch is for roofing; the fibers are for ropes; the leaves are for sieves; and the trunk is for house beams. **So too, every one of the Jewish people is needed.** It says in the Midrash: "Some are knowledgeable in Bible, others in Mishnah, others in Aggada. Still others perform many mitzvot, and others give much charity." (Bamidbar Raba 3:1)

- **Grapes:**

Just as a vine has large and small clusters and the large ones hang lower, so too the Jewish people: Whoever labors in Torah and is greater in Torah, seems lower than his fellow [due to his humility]. (Midrash - Vayikra Raba 36:2)

- **Figs:**

Why is the Torah compared to a fruit tree? Figs on a tree do not ripen all at once, but a little each day. Therefore, the longer one searches in the tree, the more figs he finds. So too with Torah: The more one studies, the more knowledge and wisdom one finds. (Talmud - Eruvin 54a)

- **Pomegranates:**

Shir HaShirim, The Song of Songs includes: "Let us get up early to the vineyards. Let us see if the vine has flowered, if the grape blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates have budded. There I will give you my love."

If the pomegranates have budded. These are the little children who study Torah and sit in rows in their class like the seeds of a pomegranate. (Midrash - Shir HaShirim Rabba 6:11)

Pt. III: The Four realms of creation mentioned in Kabbalah

We will symbolize this and explore it with Four cups of grape juice & Four types of

fruit

While we have brought ourselves closer in consciousness to the Land of Israel, now we will travel *within*, using our seder to get closer to Hashem.

WINE:

At the Tu B'Shvat seder, it is traditional to drink four cups of wine, similar to the Passover seder.

First Cup - pure white

Second Cup - pale pink (white with a drop of red wine)

Third Cup - darker pink (with more red added)

Fourth Cup - almost totally red (with only a drop of white)

We will now drink these four cups of grape juice in conjunction with four different categories of fruit. Each of these pairs correspond to each of the four spiritual realms as described in *Kabbalah* (from lowest to highest):

action -- *asiah*

formation -- *yetzirah*

creation -- *briah*

emanation of pure Godliness -- *atzilut*

Each level becomes more spiritual and connected to the Creator. As we eat, we elevate the fruits -- and ourselves -- through the various levels, rising higher and higher.

● *Pour the first cup of grape juice (all white):*

White wine represents nature in potential. Red wine represents nature in full bloom. On this day, we begin to leave the winter behind and move into a period of renewal and life.

It is stated in the Zohar:

- As we progress from white to red, we move from **potential to actuality**. We are able to appreciate God's judgment as well as His kindness. We see God's design and goodness in the world with increasing clarity.
- The Talmudic section dealing with agriculture is called trust in God. When a farmer plants a seed, trust in God gives him the strength to survive the winter. On Tu B'Shvat he begins to see that trust rewarded.
- Similarly, when we plant a seed for personal growth, it requires trust and patience to

survive the 'cold,' before we see the fruits of our labor.

All say the following blessing, and then drink from the wine:

Baruch Ata Adon-ai Elohai-nu Melech HaOlam boray pri ha-gafen.

Blessed are you God, King of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.

1. Asiyah - The realm of action

Our First Fruit: with inedible shells or peels

Explanation of Assiya

The realm of assiya is the furthest from perfection in the Kabbalistic scheme. Symbolically,

this realm requires the most protection, and therefore we eat fruits that have a shell on the

outside – to protect them from the external elements. With this fruit and cup, then, we have

a rooted awareness of the tangible world around us, in both its natural and human dimensions. We concentrate on our proper place in that world.

Meditation

מדרש רבה שיר השירים פרשה ו פסקה כו

אל גנת אגוז ירדתי מה אגוז זה את נוטל אחד מהכרי וכולן מדרדרין ומתגלגלים זה אחר זה כך הן ישראל

'לקה אחד מהן כולן מרגישים הה"ד (שם ט"ז) האיש אחד יחטא וגו

“I went down to the nut grove...” (Song of Songs 6:11) Just as with nuts, if you remove one from the pile, all of them move and roll after each other. So to with Israel, if you hit one of them, they all feel it. (Song of Songs Rabbah 6:26)

● Our “fruit” with inedible shells or peels can be pomegranates, almonds, walnuts, etc. The edible part of the fruit corresponds to perfection and purity, while the inedible is connected to deficiency and impurity. This is parallel to the realm of action (*asiah*), the lowest of the spiritual worlds -- a world which is enveloped by materialism, just as the fruit is enveloped in its peel/shell.

● As you toss away the peels and shells, see one of your bad character traits (anger,

impatience, etc.) being tossed away. In your mind's eye, picture the bad trait as the shell. Then, as you toss it away, feel the trait leaving you. That's not the real you. The real you is the fruit... delicious and nourishing. See the trait going into the garbage.

As we celebrate the realm of *assiya* and all that it represents, let's peel off our metaphorical shells and share some of ourselves with the community that has gathered to celebrate Tu B'Shevat together. The Jewish tradition is full of sources that compare humans and human qualities to trees and to fruits. Let's study some source, and then discuss what kind of fruit you most identify with.

1. "Eitz Chayim Hi L'machazim ba v'tomchei ha meushar" It is a tree of life and those who hold fast to it are happy. "

This is from *Mishlei* (Proverbs). Proverbs, we are told by our Rabbis, was the second of three books written by King Solomon (Shlomo). King Solomon was the son of King David. In his youth, he wrote the eternally optimistic (and deeply symbolic) "Song of Songs". In mid life, he penned this book, filled with invaluable practical advice. In his declining years, perhaps a bit cynical about life, Solomon wrote "Ecclesiastes".

What do you think he is trying to teach us? Why is the Torah a tree?

2. Grapes

מדרש רבה שמות פרשה מד פסקה א

מה הגפן היא חיה ונשענת על עצים מתים כך ישראל הם חיים וקיימים ונשענים על המתים אלו... האבות וכן אתה מוצא כמה תפלות התפלל אליהו בהר הכרמל שתרד האש כמד"א (מלכים א יח) ענני ה' ענני ולא נענה אלא כיון שהזכיר את המתים ואמר ה' אלהי אברהם יצחק וישראל מיד נענה וכן משה בשעה שעשו ישראל אותו מעשה עמד ולמד עליהם זכות מ' יום ומ' לילה ולא נענה אלא כיון שהזכיר את המתים מיד נענה שנאמר זכור לאברהם ליצחק ולישראל מה כתיב וינחם ה' על הרעה הזאת כשם שהגפן הזאת חיה ונשענת על עצים מתים כך ישראל חיים ונשענים על האבות כשהם מתים הוי זכור לאברהם ליצחק ולישראל

Just as a grape vine is alive while being supported by dead trees, so too Israel lives is sustained by and leans on the dead for support, i.e., the patriarchs. Thus you find with Elijah, that he prayed several prayers on Mt. Carmel and wasn't answered until he mentioned the patriarchs. As soon as he mentioned the dead, and said: "Lord, the God of Abraham Isaac and Israel..." he was immediately answered. Similarly with Moses, when the Children of Israel committed the sin of the Golden Calf, he stood and learned in their merit forty days and forty nights, and was not answered. As soon as he mentioned the dead, he was answered immediately, as it says, "Remember for Abraham, for Isaac and for Israel." Just as the grape vine lives and is supported by dead trees, so too Israel lives and is supported by the patriarchs. (Exodus Rabbah 44:1)

1. How do the dead patriarchs help and support the Jews?

3. Grapes

מדרש רבה ויקרא פרשה לו פסקה ב
מה גפן זו יש בה יין ויש בה חומץ זה טעון ברכה וזה טעון ברכה כך ישראל חייבין לברך על הטובה
ועל הרעה על הטובה ברוך הטוב והמטיב על הרעה ברוך דיין האמת

Just as the grape has in it wine and vinegar, and each one of them requires a different blessing, so too Israel must make a blessing for the good and for the bad. On the good they say, "Blessed is the One Who is good and Who does good." On the bad they say, "Blessed is the true judge." (Leviticus Rabbah 36:2)

1. Why must we make a blessing for the bad?
2. Is it possible to make a blessing for the bad in our lives?

4. Nuts

מדרש רבה שיר השירים פרשה ו פסקה כו
אל גנת אגוז ירדתי מה אגוז זה את נוטל אחד מהכרי וכולן מדרדרין ומתגלגלים זה אחר זה כך הן
'ישראל לקה אחד מהן כולן מרגישין הה"ד (שם ט"ז) האיש אחד יחטא וגו'

"I went down to the nut grove..." (Song of Songs 6:11) Just as with nuts, if you remove one from the pile, all of them move and roll after each other. So too with Israel, if you hit one of them, they all feel it. (Song of Songs Rabbah 6:26)

5. Carob

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כג/א
אמר רבי יוחנן כל ימיו של אותו צדיק היה מצטער על מקרא זה שיר המעלות בשוב ה' את שיבת ציון
היינו כחולמים אמר מי איכא דניים שבעין שנין בחלמא יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא חזייה לההוא
גברא דהוה נטע חרובא אמר ליה האי עד כמה שנין טעין אמר ליה עד שבעין שנין אמר ליה פשיטא לך
דחיית שבעין שנין אמר ליה האי [גברא] עלמא בחרובא אשכחתיא כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי שתלי נמי
לבראי

Rabbi Yochanan said, his entire life Choni the Circle drawer was troubled by the following verse: "A song of Ascents, when God restores the fortunes of Zion we will be like dreamers" (Psalms 126:1). He said, "Is there anyone who sleeps for 70 years in a dream?" One day he was traveling on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree. Choni said to the man, "How long does the tree require to grow [and produce

fruit]?” The man answered, “70 years.” Choni said, “do you think you will live for 70 years?!” The man replied, “I found the world with carob trees; just as my fathers planted for me, I too am planting for my children.” (Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 23a)

1. How does the man’s planting a carob tree answer Choni’s question about the verse from Psalms?
2. How does this story relate to your notions of social responsibility?
3. What kind of legacy do we want to leave for the next generation?

Our second cup -- pale pink (white with a drop of red).

Our second fruit: with inedible pits.

We now eat **fruits with inedible pits**. For example: dates, olives, peaches, plums, cherries. This stage is comparable to the realm of formation (*yetzirah*).

As the color of the wine begins to get darker, we can start to see potential turn into reality.

The edible parts of the fruit represent holiness. Pits represent impurities which have penetrated the holiness.

The pit or seed is a means of regrowth. It symbolizes the earth’s reawakening and with it we can cause a transformation of raw materials. **The inedible part is no longer waste; it is a seed with potential to grow.**

- Imagine one of your bad traits as this seed. **Really** see it. Then, see that trait growing and developing into something great. This trait no longer holds you back, but propels you forward. Many great people have turned their faults into assets. The impurity is an opportunity - it depends on your avodat Hashem.

Planting seeds, planting trees:

Is Israel today, Tu B'Shevat is celebrated by planting trees. Tree planting was an integral part to the Zionist cause in settling the land of Israel from the late 19th Century. Planting trees was seen as a necessary ritual in order to connect to the land. Trees were an essential symbol for the Zionist mission of “striking roots” in the Jewish homeland.

Let's look at a Torah source on this:

מדרש תנחומא קדושים פרק ח
כי תבואו אל הארץ ונטעתם אמר להם הקב"ה לישראל אע"פ שתמצאו אותה מליאה כל טוב לא תאמרו נשב
ולא נטע אלא הווי זהירין בנטיעות שנאמר ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל כשם שנכנסתם ומצאתם נטיעות שנטעו
אחרים אף אתם היו נוטעים לבניכם שלא יאמר אדם אני זקן כמה שנים אני חי מה אני עומד מתיגע לאחרים
למחר אני מת

When you enter the land and plant any tree for food...(Lev. 19:23) God said to Israel,
“Even though you will find [the land] full of good, you shouldn’t say ‘we will sit and not
plant.’

Rather, be careful to plant.” As it says, you shall plant any tree for food. Just as you
entered the land and found trees that others had planted, so too you should plant for your
children.

A person shouldn’t say, ‘I am old; how much longer will I live? Why should I toil for
others when I may die tomorrow?’ (Midrash Tanchumah, Kedoshim 8)

***Israel is the only country in the world that has more trees at the end of the 20th
Century than it did at the beginning.***

● ***Our third cup (dark pink).***

Our third fruit: completely edible (blueberries).

- The third realm is (*briah*), or creation - the highest level in the created world.(The three lower worlds -- *asiyah*, *yetzirah*, and *briah* -- are referred to as *ma'aseh bereishit*, the act of creation. The fourth level, remember, is pure Godliness.) Now we eat **fruits that are completely edible:**

In this third realm, Creation, the tree has grown into a full being and is blooming. No protective shells are needed within or without. The fruit of the realm of Creation has no shell or pit, and may be eaten as is. This realm is the realm of intellect. Fruits from this realm include: grapes, figs, quinces, and carob.

Some berries, such as strawberries also come from this realm. The blessing for most berries

is the following:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי יָדָא דְּמָה

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam Borei peri ha-adama.

Blessed are You Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who creates fruit of the ground

Things are coming close to their full potential. Even the seeds are now edible. They not only have future potential, but are also delicious and ready to eat right now.

- Think about an area of life you would like to improve. Picture your ideal self. Realize that's the real you. Act as if you're already there.

The seeds in the fruits of this realm are small, and easily spread. How is this like our role as "A light unto the nations"? Focus on how every tiny little act you do can be a spark of divine light and change the world - plant a seed, so to speak.

Our fourth cup (red with a drop of white).

Our fourth fruit: that with the best fragrance

- The fourth cup of wine is all red with a drop of white. It symbolizes complete development and ripeness. We are now reaching the realm of atzilut - pure Godliness. We now taste the fruit on the table **with the best fragrance**.

Blessing for Fragrant Fruits and Spices There is a blessing recited over smelling spices and fruits that are particularly fragrant.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam Boreh minei besamim

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe Who creates different types of spices.

In Leviticus 23:40, the Etrog is described as *pri aitz hadar* -- fruit of the majestic tree. The Etrog is the most spiritual of all trees, as its fruit and bark both have fine taste and smell.

On Tu B'Shvat, when all trees are judged, it is fitting to pray for a beautiful Esrog during the coming Sukkot.

The sense of smell is the purest and most elevated. It is through the nose that God invested Adam with a soul, as it says, God breathed into man's nostrils a breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Since there is no perceptible physical matter to smell, it is the most spiritual and Godly of the five senses. Burning the fragrant incense was designated as the holiest act of the Jewish year -- performed by the Kohen Gadol in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

The smelling of a fragrance invigorates one's soul -- We learn in the Talmud, Berachot

43b *“What is it that gives enjoyment to the neshama and not to the body? That is fragrant smell”*. A pleasant fragrance is emitted by a living thing while still alive and fresh, in stark contrast to the foul odor of a dead creature. In general, the greater the ‘life-force’ of something, the more putrid is the stench given off upon its death and demise.

Of the three parts of the soul, the highest, unsullied component is the neshama (as in the Eloykei Neshama prayer: “My G-d, the neshama that You implanted in me is pure”. This soul can never be contaminated. Why not? This is because it has no association to sin – and by extension, to spiritual distance from the Creator – as apparent in the primeval sin.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Chava defiled four out of their five senses. They heard the serpent’s alluring words, the fruit was “a delight to the eyes”, they touched it by taking from its fruit and they tasted it. But the sense of “smell” remained untarnished. Accordingly, this sense denotes inner purity and deep attachment to G-d and the fulfilment of His Will (Bnei Yissacher, Adar 1:10).

Smell retraces the holy, unadulterated level of a Jew’s innermost soul – his neshama – that is indeed free of defilement.

- Use this opportunity to smell the fragrance of our last fruit, and savor the purity of this sense, and our closeness to Hashem. Enjoy and appreciate that our foods engage all of our senses and that even eating can be elevated to the service of G-d.

On Tu B'Shvat, we enjoy the fruits as God's gift and experience their pleasure as a connection to God. We celebrate how eating and enjoying the fruits of trees can be a bridge to God, and how it can bring back the blessing to the earth.

Everything in the physical world is a metaphor for a deeper spiritual concept.

Eating is to the body, what knowledge is to the soul. When we eat, we internalize the good part of the food -- and through that we grow and develop. Similarly, when we learn a new piece of information, we must chew it over, digest it, and integrate it into our very being. Only then can we truly grow in wisdom and spirituality.

CONCLUSION

The practical lesson we derive from Tu B'Shvat is that a person is similar to a tree. Trees continually grow from the seed, until they die. This comparison teaches us that a person must also keep growing lest he stagnate. This is especially true in Torah study and mitzvah performance.

When one plants a seed in fertile soil and adds water, he must give it a chance to grow. If you remove the seed every day to check its progress, it will never grow. So too, we must connect ourselves to our roots, the Jewish people, take nourishment from our life-source, the Torah, and grow through accomplishment as individuals and as a nation. This is the

lesson of Tu B'Shvat.

We have now completed the Tu B'Shevat seder. Tu B'Shevat allows us to think about our relationship to trees and the physical world around us. Tu B'Shevat introduces us to the Kabbalistic understanding of the world and of God. Tu B'Shevat also allows us to concentrate on the land of Israel and its fruits.

When everyone is finished eating, there are traditional blessings that are said after eating. There are concluding blessings that are said after eating snacks or a meal that does not contain bread. After eating grain products that are not bread, wine, and/or one of the fruits for which Israel is praised in the Bible (grapes, figs, dates, olives, pomegranates) the following concluding blessing, known as Al Ha-Mechiya is said:

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam al hagefen ve-al peri ha-gefen, al ha-etz ve-al peri ha-etz, al ha-mechiya, ve-al hakalkalah. Ve-al tenuvat ha-sadeh ve-al eretz chemda tovah u'rechavah sheratzita ve-hinchalta la-avoteinu le-echol mipiryah ve-lisboah mituvah. Rachem na Adonai Eloheinu al Yisrael amecha ve-al Yerushalayim irecha ve'al tzion mishkan kevodecha ve'al mizbachecha ve'al heichalecha, u'veneh Yerushalayim ir ha-kodesh bi-meheira beyameinu ve-ha'aleinu le-tochah vesamcheinu be-vinyanah ve-nochal mi-piryah, ve-nisba mituvah u-nevarechecha alehah bi-kedusha uvetoharah Ki Ata Adonai tov u-meitiv la-kol, ve-nodeh lecha al haaretz ve-al peri gafnah. Baruch Ata Adonai al ha-aretz ve-al peri gafnah, ve-al perotehah ve-al ha-mechiya ve-al peri ha-gefen.

Blessed are You, Hashem our God, Sovereign of the universe, for the nourishment and the sustenance for the vine and the fruit of the vine for the tree and the fruit of the tree And for the produce of the field; for the desirable land that You were pleased to give our forefathers as a heritage, to eat of its fruit and to be satisfied with its goodness. Have mercy, Hashem, Our God, on Israel Your people; on Jerusalem Your city; on Zion, the resting place of Your glory; on Your Altar, and on Your Temple. Rebuild Jerusalem, the holy city, speedily in our days. Bring us up into it and gladden us in its rebuilding and let us eat from its fruit and be satisfied with its goodness and bless You upon it in holiness and purity For You, Hashem, are good and do good to all, and we thank You for the land and for the nourishment and for the fruit of the vine and for the fruit and for the sustenance.

L'Shanah Habah B'Yerushalayim, Next year in Jerusalem!

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"Shvat:Filling the Bucket" by Rebbetzin Tzipporah Heller, www.aish.com

and, "Lively Overview of Tu B'Shvat" by Rabbi Avi Geller

"Trees, Creation & Creativity The Hillel Tu B'Shevat Seder", www.hillel.org

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