

GatherBay Tu Bishvat seder

Updated 15 Shevat 5784 / 24 January 2024

Excerpt from a Ladino liturgical poem about Tu Bishvat
by Yehudah Kalzah (first published in 1892)

Complas Para Noche De Frutas	Verses for the Night of Fruits
Razon es de alabar al Dyo noche i dias, Non son kosas de akavar las sus grandes maravias! Krio tiera i todo el resto, menester para el ombre, Todo echo i bien kompuesto, trigo i todo lugumbre. Enkomedo a la tiera kitar todo en su punto, Trigo i sereales i arvoles de fruto! Kada koza en su tiempo su fruto deve kitar, En la guerta o en el kampo el arvol deve espuntar. I komo sinyal el Dyo pozo, de 15 Shevat ke empesen.	Our reason for being is to praise God nights and days, For God's great miracles never cease! God created the earth and everything else, for human beings. All had sprouted and was well put together, wheat and all vegetables. Trusting the land to bring forth all at their time, Wheat and grains and fruit trees! Each thing in its time, each fruit at the appointed time, In the garden or in the field trees must flower. And as a sign from God, the source, it begins on 15 Shevat.

Blessing for fruits that grow on trees:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ	Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam borei pri ha-eitz	Blessed are you, G!d, Guardian of the universe, who creates the fruits of the tree
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Blessings for fruits (and vegetables) that grow in the ground:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי האדמה	Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam borei pri ha-adamah.	Blessed are You, G!d, Ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the earth
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First world: inedible outside, edible inside

The first fruit of Tu Bishvat is cradled inside its inedible shell.

What's a time in your life you needed to persist through a tough beginning to get to something meaningful within?

Oranges by Mary Oliver

Cut one, the lace of acid
rushes out, spills over your hands. You lick them, manners don't come into it.
Orange—the first word you have heard that day—
enters your mind. Everybody then
does what he or she wants—breakfast is casual.
Slices, quarters, halves, or the whole hand
holding an orange ball like the morning sun
on a day of soft wind and no clouds
which it so often is. “Oh, I always
want to live like this,
flying up out of the furrows of sleep,
fresh from water and its sheer excitement,
felled as though by a miracle
at this first sharp taste of the day!”
You're shouting, but no one is surprised.
Here, there, everywhere on the earth
thousands are rising and shouting with you—
even those who are utterly silent, absorbed—
their mouths filled with such sweetness.

Second world: edible outside, inedible inside

The second world brings immediate sweetness and pleasure, with the hard-shelled seed within.

- ❖ *Can you think of a place in your life where something was in fact easy right away? What kind of seed of learning did that offer you?*

Excerpt from “Letters from two gardens” — this section by Ross Gay

Maybe you're right: let us stop explaining.

I know those ants too — soon they'll slurp caves into the handful of apples
that come on the pipsqueak tree out back,
or scurry dizzy on the sugar
glazing the sweetest bean I've ever tasted,
the beans themselves tonguing
through the spent cherry bush.
Terrified as I am — and I am —
the bumblebees furrow the pursed
and purple lips of false indigo
for the dusty blush
and I want to go make a hallelujah
of my own simple body. Not to mention
the cup plants just coming up out back
can hold mouthfuls of wet
despite the months-long drought.
All is never lost.
Some of what remains
of my father swims amidst the breathing
roots of the plum tree. You could almost
see him look out from the leaves' stomata
in spring, or his fingerprints pressed into
the delicate whorls of the young bark.
And when the tree makes its first
fruit next year, or the next,
it won't only be in dreams
he's back. I think I too will be
so lucky some day. Some day,
I think, so too will you be.

Third world: entirely edible

The third world invites us to consider wholeness, both within and beyond ourselves.

- ❖ *How are we all part of the ecosystem where we live? What webs of connection orient us in the world, stretching out across space and time? Who are the teachers or ancestors you've learned from? Who do you get to teach?*

My Father and the Fig Tree, by Naomi Shihab Nye

For other fruits my father was indifferent.
He'd point at the cherry tree and say,
"See those? I wish they were figs."
In the evenings he sat by my bed
weaving folktales like vivid little scarves.
They always involved a fig tree.
Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in.
Once Joha¹ was walking down the road and he saw a fig tree.
Or, he tied his camel to a fig tree and went to sleep.
Or, later when they caught and arrested him,
his pockets were full of figs.

At age six I ate a dried fig and shrugged.
"That's not what I'm talking about!" he said,
"I'm talking about a fig tree straight from the earth—
gift of Allah!—on a branch so heavy it touches the ground.
I'm talking about picking the largest fattest sweetest fig
in the world and putting it in my mouth."
(Here he'd stop and close his eyes.)

Years passed, we lived in many houses, none had fig trees.
We had lima beans, zucchini, parsley, beets.
"Plant one!" my mother said, but my father never did.
He tended the garden half-heartedly, forgot to water,
let the okra get too big.
"What a dreamer he is. Look how many things he starts
and doesn't finish."

The last time he moved, I got a phone call.
My father, in Arabic, chanting a song I'd never heard.
"What's that?" I said.
"Wait till you see!"

¹ A trickster figure in Palestinian folktales

He took me out back to the new yard.
There, in the middle of Dallas, Texas,
a tree with the largest, fattest, sweetest figs in the world.
“It’s a fig tree song!” he said,
plucking his fruits like ripe tokens,
emblems, assurance
of a world that was always his own.

Fourth world: no fruit at all

The fourth world is beyond what we can taste, touch, or imagine. What full flowering of connection, liberation, and justice might be possible, even beyond our wildest dreams?

- ❖ *Curiosity can be a good way into this fourth world—so what questions do you have this Tu Bishvat? What in your life is waiting to bloom?*

Verge, by Mark Doty

A month at least before the bloom
and already five bare-limbed cherries
by the highway ringed in a haze
of incipient fire
—middle of the afternoon,
a faint pink-bronze glow. Some things
wear their becoming:
the night we walked,
nearly strangers, from a fevered party
to the corner where you’d left your motorcycle,
afraid some rough wind might knock it to the curb,
you stood on the other side
of the upright machine, other side
of what would be us, and tilted your head
toward me over the wet leather seat
while you strapped your helmet on,
engineer boots firm on the black pavement.

Did we guess we'd taken the party's fire with us,
somewhere behind us that dim apartment
cooling around its core like a stone?
Can you know, when you're not even a bud
but a possibility poised at some brink?

Of course we couldn't see ourselves,
though love's the template and rehearsal
of all being, something coming to happen
where nothing was...

But just now

I thought of a troubled corona of new color,
visible echo, and wondered if anyone
driving in the departing gust and spatter
on Seventh Avenue might have seen
the cloud breathed out around us
as if we were a pair
of—could it be?—soon-to-flower trees.

Blessing after eating (Aramaic from Babylonian Talmud Brachot 40b; English and tune by Batya Levine):

בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָא מַלְכָּא דְּעֵלְמָא	Brich rachamana malka	Blessed is the merciful One, ruler of the
מְרִיבָה דְּהַאי פִּיתָא	d'alma marey	world, creator of this bread
	d'hai pita	

Thank you, thank you, thank you for this beautiful food
May it nourish us to build a world that's whole