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A Tu BiShevat Seder

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Ecological awareness has been at the forefront of the Reform Jewish Movement in North America since the 1965 General Assembly in San Francisco. The UAHC (now URJ) pledged at that time to urge the American government to conserve and develop America's natural resources.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the URJ passed a resolution to actively urge the national and local governments to go above and beyond when addressing the impacts of climate change.<sup>2</sup> Jews of all ages are feeling the urgency of addressing the ecological concerns of our world today. On the holiday of Tu BiShevat, Reform Jewish congregations, schools, and institutions become aware of their environment, and they adopt sustainable methods of living that will continue to preserve our precious Earth. Although the holiday is known as the New Year for the Trees, it has developed into an observance of our ecological awareness, and Jews learn how they can impact their local governments and communities to fight climate change.

Hazon, a Jewish environmental organization based in New York City, has made excellent progress in helping Jews take active steps in creating sustainable lives that can affect positive change in the climate change crisis. The organization has developed a Tu BiShevat Seder booklet available online or printed that allows participants to engage in the holiday while creating an "ecological awareness". Ecological awareness is understood as being informed and knowledgeable about the impact of our actions and activities on the environment and the ecosystems around us: individually or collectively, locally and globally.<sup>3</sup> Other Tu BiShevat Seder booklets that are available engage participants in the

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<sup>1</sup> "Conservation and Development of Natural Resources," Union for Reform Judaism, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/conservation-and-development-natural-resources>.

<sup>2</sup> "Resolution on Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change," Union for Reform Judaism, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/resolution-addressing-impacts-climate-change>.

<sup>3</sup> "What Is Ecological Awareness," IGI Global, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/environmental-protection-and-quality-of-life/104838>.

historical, religious, and cultural narrative of the Jewish people and their role as stewards of the Earth. The Tu BiShevat Seder I have created will combine the elements of our ecological awareness, the narratives of the holiday throughout Jewish tradition, and a deep dive into a reflection of ourselves and how we are connected to the Earth and its creation.

The Tu BiShevat seder I have developed is divided into three parts: a background of the Tu BiShevat holiday, a Seder booklet, and an appendix of commentaries on the selections chosen within the Seder booklet. I aim to serve Jews of all ages and denominations who are eager to engage in the holiday through an ecologically aware perspective while wanting to reflect on the self.

There are four Jewish new years according to Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1. One of them is the new year of the trees, Tu BiShevat, which is observed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat. Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai argued about the date upon which this specific new year fell: Bet Shammai stated that it was on the first of Shevat; Bet Hillel held that it fell on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. The rabbis chose the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat because it was understood to be a time when the heaviest part of the rainy season had passed in the land of Israel. Also, the sap had risen in the trees, which allowed for the development of their fruit. Another opinion states that trees that blossom before the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat contain rainwater from the previous year, and it cannot be counted in the tithing of the following year. Any new blossoming after Tu BiShevat will be attributed to the new year. For this reason, Tu BiShevat is also known as the judgment day of the trees.

The name “Tu BiShevat” means the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat. The numerical value of the Hebrew letters *tet* and *vav* is fifteen. (The letters *yod* and *hei* also equal fifteen. However,



since *yod* and *hei* when put next to each other form the name of God, which must not be written in vain, the letters *tet* and *vav* are used.)

The historical narrative of the holiday sheds light on the significance of trees in the Jewish tradition. Four months after Tu BiShevat, during the time of Shavuot, the first yield of fruit-bearing trees (*bikkurim*) was brought to the Temple as offerings. According to Jewish belief, God would pass judgment upon the people, and God decided how the fruit would grow in the coming year. After the destruction of the Temple, the rabbis marked out the fifteenth day of Shevat as the day that marked the turning of the year of the tithing of fruit-bearing trees: fruit that sprouted after this date would be tithed according to the requirements of the new year. In the Middle Ages and in the diaspora (where tithing was not relevant), the day was observed as a minor holiday. Fasting and the recitation of penitential prayers were prohibited. Hallel psalms were not recited, because this was not a biblical festival. The holiday transformed into one about renewal from the dormancy of winter. Rabbinic tradition favored the symbolism of trees. Trees of life and knowledge from Gan Eden – these were the themes important to rabbinic Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

Today the holiday is observed and celebrated by engaging in its seder, which is a creation of seventeenth-century kabbalists who had been influenced by the school of Isaac Luria. The Kabbalistic seder originated among Sefardic Jews in a text called *Pri Etz Hadar*. It also appears in *Hemdut Yamim*, a Sabbatean-influenced anthology of kabbalistic customs in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> *Pri Etz Hadar* has been reprinted many times since its first edition in Venice in 1728. The text is divided into four basic sections: introduction to the seder, a

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<sup>4</sup> Ari Elon, Naomi M Hyman, Arthur Ocean Waskow, eds., *Trees, Earth, and Torah: A Tu B'shvat Anthology*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

prayer before the seder, a description of the order of fruit to be eaten, and a description of how the wine should be blended in each of the four cups. Most of the seder text consists of selections from the Torah, early rabbinic texts, and Zoharic literature.<sup>6</sup> The preponderance of the textual material is taken from the Zohar.

*Hemdat Yamim* explains that the table for the seder is to be covered in white cloth and decorated with nature symbols like greenery, branches, and flowers.<sup>7</sup> The seder was to be a moment in time for the Jewish people to be engulfed in God's creation and ultimately explore our exile from, and yearning to return to, Gan Eden – the ultimate paradisaical garden.

The Tu BiShevat Seder is a time for deep learning and meditation on God's creation and nature around us. It is upon the Jewish people to explore their connections to the land of Israel, their consumption of food, their relationship with nature, and their devotion to God. Throughout the seder, food is meditated upon, but study is also expected. The term *seder* means order. The festive meal is constructed in a way that allows a person to explore all these facets listed above with the community around them. There is no *hagaddah* for a Tu BiShevat seder because there is no formal story to tell, like the one found during the Passover holiday. Instead, a seder booklet is used during the holiday, which includes a plethora of songs, stories, quotes, and blessings to help connect the participant to the holiday.

Each facet of the seder has a deep spiritual element that connects God, nature, and humanity to its activities. "The structure of different kinds of fruit, the growing patterns of trees, the habits of birds, indeed all natural phenomena are, in essence, aspects of a divine

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>7</sup> Yitzhak Buxbaum, *A Person Is Like a Tree : A Sourcebook for Tu Beshvat*. (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 2000), 5-6.

epiphany that proclaims the truth of God's existence."<sup>8</sup> Each fruit eaten during the seder represents an aspect of God's creation and a mode of existence in the world.

Fruit and nuts are the foods eaten at the Tu BiShevat seder. These foods are the closest diet to that in Gan Eden. No animal, creature, being, or plant was harmed or killed for the sake of food, thus the seder includes a diet of Gan Eden. Three categories of fruit are eaten during the seder: hard outer-shell (inedible) with a soft inside, soft outer-shell (edible) with a hard inside, and entirely soft (edible).

The types of fruit eaten during the seder allow a participant to meditate and focus on what they are consuming. A *kavannah* (directed intention), while eating the fruit directs one to focus on how they could make a *tikkun* (repair) for the sins that have followed them from the first sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. During the seder, meditative eating allows one to elevate their body and soul to become one with God.<sup>9</sup>

It is customary to eat the seven species of produce associated with the Land of Israel during the seder. These include grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates, wheat, and barley.<sup>10</sup> However, these foods must be eaten in the following order: olives, dates, grapes, figs, and pomegranates. These foods were brought to isolated towns in the diaspora of Eastern Europe during the severe winter. It would warm people's hearts and bring the light of Israel into the darkness of the exile of the diaspora. This encouraged the people with new hope for a complete redemption.<sup>11</sup>

The kabbalists organized the seder into four worlds, which corresponds to four different types of fruit. The following chart summarizes this:

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<sup>8</sup> Miles Krassen, in *Trees, Earth, and Torah*, 138.

<sup>9</sup> Buxbaum, *A Person Is Like a Tree*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Deut. 8:7-8

<sup>11</sup> Buxbaum, *A Person Is Like a Tree*, 32-33.

World	Quality	Season	Fruit	Element
Assiyah	Action	Winter	Hard outer, soft inner	earth
Yetzirah	Emotion	Spring	Soft outer, hard inner	water
Briyah	Thought	Summer	Soft throughout	Air
Atzilut	Spirit	Fall	Essence	Fire

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Each “world” fits a specific season, element, and type of fruit. “The soul of the seder concerns ‘The Four Worlds’. The Kabbalists who originated the tradition of a Tu BiShvat seder defined four levels of meaning in all experience, which they called ‘worlds.’ In this seder, each world is also connected to a particular element and the environmental aspect of that element is explored.”<sup>13</sup> Although we eat only three types of actual fruit during the seder, observing the essence (smell, texture, appearance) of a fruit counts as a type of consumption.

Nuts are also eaten during the seder (they constitute the fourth kind of ‘fruit’). The Hebrew word for nut is *egoz*, which has the numerical value of “sin” – *het*. It is also the numerical value of “good” – *tov*. On this holiday, God’s love dominates over creation, so we can repent out of love and promise to do good.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ellen Bernstein, *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights, 1998), 145.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen Bernstein, in *Trees, Earth, and Torah*. 347.

<sup>14</sup> Buxbaum, *A Person Is Like a Tree*, 103

Although fruit is a major part of the Tu BiShevat seder, the four cups of wine take their own place during the meal. Red and white wine are served during the seder. White wine represents the dormancy of the world during winter, while red wine represents the rebirth of the world as trees and plants begin to bloom in the upcoming months thereafter.

The first cup of the seder begins with white wine, then mixed with a touch of red, half red-half white, and finally a full cup of red wine with a touch of white wine. Although it can represent the changing of seasons, it also represents the anticipation of redemption for all humanity in their return to Gan Eden.<sup>15</sup> Humanity is experiencing a “dormancy” of the world – cold, bitter, stagnant – in which it yearns for the Garden of Eden – rebirth, renewal, and redemption. Through time and through mitzvot, humanity can finally enter Gan Eden.

From an ecological perspective, the white wine can represent a pure world without the impurities of pollution, chaos, and violence that exist today. Since the exile of humans from Gan Eden, the world has become more “polluted” by the different actions of humanity, in which the world becomes impure, symbolized by the red wine. These impure actions of humanity include violence, deceit, destruction, negligence, irresponsibility, over-consumption, abuse, etc. Because of humanity’s failings, the Earth and its creatures experience turmoil and destruction. The violence and death of different parts of God’s creation are symbolized in the red wine.

The colors of the wine can also represent God’s attributes. According to the Zohar, the white wine represents God’s mercy while the red wine represents God’s judgment/severity: we begin with white wine, symbolizing situations in which God’s mercy

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 49.

is easy to recognize, then progressively encounter more red, as we come to recognize God's mercy and compassion even in situations of suffering and affliction.<sup>16</sup>

In the state of Israel, the holiday is celebrated by appreciating the earth and God's creation. It is customary for children to observe the holiday by planting trees.<sup>17</sup> In the Talmudic legend of Honi the Circle Maker, Honi fell asleep by a newly-planted carob tree for seventy years and woke up to behold the seedling that had been planted fully grown and feeding the planter's grandchildren.<sup>18</sup> This story teaches the importance of planting trees for future generations and how one can create a legacy.

On the holiday in 1949, Tu BiShevat was celebrated for the first time in the state of Israel. Thousands gathered throughout the land to memorialize the dead of the Israeli army and the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Sha'ar Hagai was where the largest gathering took place. This was where many fought, and eventually, a memorial forest was planted in that area. The first saplings were planted in the Martyr's Forest, which corresponded to the number of those who died in the Holocaust. The Jewish people who died during the Shoah are now symbolized in those trees.<sup>19</sup>

As noted previously, different Tu BiShevat seders are in circulation in the Jewish world to allow the Jewish people to observe the holiday. The Jewish National Fund, an organization that focuses on financial and educational support for the state of Israel, designed their own Tu BiShevat seder. It includes practical suggestions to be eco-friendly, blessings,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>17</sup> Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America. National Program Department. *Tu B'shevat: A Holiday Manual*, (New York, 196-), 4.

<sup>18</sup> b. Ta'anit 23a.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 6.

and teachings about the holiday. Throughout the guide, texts are presented to allow a participant to connect with the land of Israel through a religious and historical lens.<sup>20</sup>

Hazon, an American Jewish environmental organization, created a family seder guide. It begins with a story and a brief explanation of the holiday. Before each blessing over the wine, a short teaching or text that relates to Jewish ecology is presented. Discussion questions are then provided for families to use. At the end of the seder, an “ecological checklist” is provided to guide families on how they can make an impact on the environment in practical ways.<sup>21</sup>

Adam Fisher’s Tu B’Shevat seder, published by the CCAR in 1989, lays the groundwork for the structure of a Reform Jewish seder. He begins with an introduction to the holiday and an overview of the different *sedarim* found in the book. A list of how to prepare for the seder is provided along with instructions for how one should conduct the meal. He created two *sedarim* in this book. The first seder begins with a poem/song (*Hinei Mah Tov*), songs about the holiday, and a blessing for creation (which includes several options). The blessing for the first cup of wine is preceded by more poems and a story, and an optional Shabbat blessing is shared afterward. An acknowledgment of the land the people are living on is shared through poems and stories. After the blessing over the second cup of wine, Torah lessons through songs, stories, and poems about the Tree of Life are presented. Interpretations, poems, blessings, and songs follow the second cup of wine about all the different types of fruits/nuts one will eat during the seder. The third cup of wine with its blessings and songs follows the instruction for eating the fruits. The section about the festive

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<sup>20</sup> “Celebrate Tu Bishvat Materials - Jewish National Fund.” jnf.org. Accessed February 14, 2023. <https://www.jnf.org/ways-to-help/celebrate-tu-bishvat-materials>.

<sup>21</sup> Hazon, “Tu B’Shvat - Hazon,” Hazon, accessed February 14, 2023, <https://hazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/2011FamilySeder.pdf>.

meal follows the third blessing over the wine, which includes a blessing for handwashing and *hamotzi*. An alternative *Birkat Hamazon* as well as the traditional text concludes the festive meal section. The blessing over the fourth cup of wine and further explanations follow. Ecological teachings, additional poems, and cheerful songs end the first Tu BiShevat seder that Adam Fisher has designed.

Trees are the central focus of the Tu BiShevat holiday. Judaism has various laws and customs regarding the handling and use of trees. Leviticus 19:23-25 states: “When you come into the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden; three years it shall be forbidden to you, it must not be eaten. And in the fourth year all their fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord. But in the fifth year you may eat of their fruit, that they may yield more richly for you: I am the Lord your God.”

The life cycle of fruit trees was important in their tithing during the Temple period. The first three years of the trees’ growth were in a state of *orlah* – uncircumcision. This derives from the root word of *arelah*, which is the uncircumcised foreskin of a penis. The trees have the potential to produce fruit, but out of respect for their divine creator, God, they are left to rest for three years. Also, the agricultural practice of leaving the trees to rest for three years is beneficial for the trees and can provide good, future harvests. “Careful cultivation and pruning was necessary during the first three years in order to insure eventual good harvests and proper maturing of the trees.”<sup>22</sup> In the fourth year, special offerings using the trees’ fruits are permitted. The first-fruits of the tree (in its first year of harvesting) belong to God, just as do the first yield of every season, the firstborn of every flock and herd, and the human firstborn (male). By giving God the first/best portion, one hopes to insure the

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<sup>22</sup> John H Walton and Victor H Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis-Deuteronomy*, (2000), 163.



fertility/productivity of the rest of the crop. In the fifth year, the trees are subject to regular tithing, and all their fruit can be eaten.

Restraint from using trees at the beginning of their life is not only beneficial to their growth and crops, but it also benefits humanity. “The precept of not using fruits during the first three years is a clear example of this general rule. As R. Carmell (1991) states: ‘By this restraint we practice the self-control which is so necessary for keeping all enjoyments within the limits of morality. ... The universal lesson is this: The planet is not ours to plunder and rape without concern for others in the present or the future.’”<sup>23</sup> Humanity can enjoy nature, but restraint teaches us to not overindulge. Overindulgence in our consumption of nature’s resources leads to abuse. Therefore, when we wait to harvest these fruits until the tree’s production is viable, possible abuse of nature is prevented.

Jewish law also states that the abuse of trees is not permitted. Deuteronomy 20:19-20 states: “When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the axe against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you under siege? Only trees which you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.” This concept is known as *bal tashchit* – “You shall not destroy.”

Rashi understood this to mean that trees have an existence independent of human wants and needs. He takes the word *ki* (in *ki ha’adam etz hasadeh* – “Are trees of the field human?”) and makes the question rhetorical: Is the tree of the field to be part of the same (moral) world as the human being? No. “The tree of the field is not the target of the siege; the

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<sup>23</sup> Aloys Hüttermann, *The Ecological Message of the Torah* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1999), 93.

people of the town are. One has no moral right to destroy the trees because of a dispute among human beings. The trees must not be destroyed because of human disputes.”<sup>24</sup>

Ibn Ezra’s interpretation is slightly different from Rashi’s: “Human responsibility for the tree is based on human dependence upon the tree. Trees are a source of food, and thus cutting them down reduces the food supply after the siege.”<sup>25</sup>

In relation to Ibn Ezra’s commentary, the law of *bal tashchit* identifies those who are minimalist and maximalist in their approach to the consumption of nature. A minimalist will use this law to support the conservation of nature and trees by consuming nature through sustainable methods. A maximalist will see the law of *bal tashchit* as an opportunity to use trees for any type of consumption. As stated in Genesis 1:29, everything on Earth belongs to God, and humanity can partake in its consumption since it is a divine gift to us. However, Jews are required to recite a blessing before consuming food, because we must acknowledge God as its creator. If we do not, we are considered thieves i.e., we are robbing God --- this would be an act of sacrilege (making improper use of God’s possessions).<sup>26</sup>

Rabbi Moses Maimonides stated in his *Mishneh Torah*, Book of Judges, that it is permissible to cut down a fruit tree when it is damaging other fruit trees, damaging another person’s property, or its economic value is higher than its purpose for fruit. Senseless destruction is prohibited.<sup>27</sup> Our society has become over-consumers, which has led to the destruction and abuse of nature. Although this “destruction” can be argued as permissible because the economic value of its use is more than that of the trees and nature itself, the over-

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<sup>24</sup>Eilon Schwartz, in Martin D Yaffe, ed., *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader*, (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2001), 232.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>26</sup> b. Berachot 35a

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Waskow, *Torah of the Earth: Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights, 2000), 101.

consumption has become needless and wasteful. One-time-use products and unsustainable products are harming the earth and its creatures, which is senseless destruction.

The Tu BiShevat seder I have created is concerned with humanity's connection to, and impact on, God's creation. Every piece of food eaten, each cup of wine drank, and every song or poem read connects the Jew to the history and religious meaning of the holiday. It is a time of deep reflection as consumers and displays a concern for the Earth. The laws of *bal tashchit* and *orlah* are taught to those who participate in the seder. They can enjoy the fruits of the trees, while learning about how they can be stewards of the Earth. During the holiday, the Jewish people have an opportunity to discover what their role is in relation to God's creation. A question we can ask ourselves is, "What is the human place in the universe? To control and to master? Or to be a part of the world while also caring for it? Or both?"<sup>28</sup> We can find an answer to these questions in Genesis 1:28, where God commands humankind not only to be fertile and multiply, but to also fill the Earth and master it. How we master the Earth might differ from person to person, culture to culture, and religion to religion. From a conservationist perspective, mastering the Earth requires humanity to be responsible for creation. The responsibility for creation entails upkeep, protecting, and properly using it for the benefit of humanity, animals, and all of nature.

Humanity has subdued nature in order to live comfortably, which has at times harmed the ecological balance of the Earth. We do not experience the Earth's true habitat, because its real habitat is the wilderness, which is a danger to humans. Humans have worked on the environment in order to secure their own safety, protection, and food. Although we need to find ways to maintain the survival of our species, we alter the environment in a way that only

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<sup>28</sup> Bernstein, *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit*, 20.

benefits humanity and harms other living beings. For example, we create housing by tearing down forests that are home to other creatures. We dump our waste into the ocean or bay, which kills numerous fish and other water animals. We consume products that come from trees that are home to different animals. We take from the world and take from other living beings. Humankind seeks a Gan Eden – an ideal place that is safe and full of plenty.

However, the garden in its true state would not be a safe place for humans. If the Earth was left alone, without humanity to master and subdue it, we would encounter dangerous animals and uncomfortable habitats. In order for us to live on Earth, we subdue its true nature. This is the destruction of Gan Eden, and thereby we expel ourselves from it.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, Leviticus 25:23-24 diminishes humanity's control and ownership of the Earth. It states: "But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land." The Jewish people are ordered not to use the land beyond a point of no return, in which it cannot be used in the future. God is its sole owner, but the Jewish people can use it to find benefit, sustain, and improve it for all creatures. This law is specific to the land of Israel, although, through a contemporary perspective, we can interpret this law to include the entire world. Laws specific to the land of Israel are serious and must be upheld. Consequences are dire if these laws are violated. Agricultural laws such as *peah*, *orlah*, *kilayim*, *sheviit*, *terumot*, and *bikkurim* are evidence that God is the owner of the land of Israel. God gives clear instructions on how humanity can use God's land. "In the words of the Talmud, 'God acquired possession of the world and apportioned it to humanity, but God always remains the master of the world.'"<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Waskow, *Torah of the Earth*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Bradley Artson, in Yaffe. *Judaism and Environmental Ethics*, 163.

Humanity's role is not only to use nature for humanity's benefit but also to be stewards and guardians of the Earth. According to Tikva Frymer-Kensky in her article "Ecology in a Biblical Perspective," humankind in the cosmos (universe) is not the farmer, but rather the executive. Humans are *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God. The term *tzelem* is similar to *salum*, known in Mesopotamian inscriptions, where the king is in the 'image' of the god. Because of this role, humanity is expected to keep everything on Earth orderly.<sup>31</sup> If we were to truly embody this role as executives of the world, how would we treat the world?

In contrast, Adam (mankind) is punished to be a farmer of the world, and Eve (womankind) is punished to produce children. "Farming meant more children; children meant more farming. Adam's and Eve's punishments fed each other."<sup>32</sup> Instead of overseeing the Earth, humanity is a worker of the Earth and only God is its ruler.

"Jews commonly believe that every live thing on earth must have some human reference and use, even if it is only to remind us of our place in the scheme of things."<sup>33</sup> Humanity is a steward and responsible for creation, regardless of whether we are its master or caretaker. Every part of nature and its animals is for our use, even if that means it can teach us about our place in God's creation as well. We can use nature to create a habitat of our own. We can use animals to graze the grass for agriculture. However, although we can use all of nature, humanity must be careful to not abuse this power.

Wendell Berry, an agricultural writer, shares the following: "For a long time now we have understood ourselves as traveling toward some sort of industrial paradise, some new Eden conceived and constructed entirely by human ingenuity. And we have thought

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<sup>31</sup>Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Ecology in a Biblical Perspective," in Waskow, *Torah of the Earth*, vol. 1, 62.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>33</sup> David Eherenfeld and Philip J. Bentley, in Yaffe. *Judaism and Environmental Ethics*, 126.

ourselves free to use and abuse nature in any way that might further this enterprise. Now we face overwhelming evidence that we are not smart enough to recover Eden by assault, and that nature does not tolerate or excuse our abuses.”<sup>34</sup>

Gan Eden was taken away from humanity after the fall of Adam and Eve. We crave to create a world for our use that is easy and convenient, but this has caused harm and abuse to nature and its creatures. As Wendell Berry points out, because of humanity’s abuse of nature, we are experiencing the repercussions through the impacts of an accelerated climate change, food and oil shortages, and toxic pollutants sickening all of us. The ease of consumerism in the American West has allowed many people (those with the economic means) to have access to both necessities and luxuries, but this has come at a cost – a cost that shows this easy consumption is not sustainable.

In an age of over-consumerism, an important question raised and answered by Dr. Jean Sindab (program director of Economic and Environmental Justice and Hunger Concerns in the Prophetic Justice Unit of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA) might help us navigate the concern about humanity’s abuse and mastery over nature. “*How do we meet the legitimate needs of the growing human community without destroying Earth’s ability to support its community of life?*” It was important from the perspective of the Black Church to consider not only how we would define legitimate needs, but also to understand who would define them. According to Dr. Sindab, this was an issue of economic justice; the needs of the poor were so overwhelming that humanity would need to extract even more of the Earth’s natural resources to provide them with the most basic necessities for survival. The question then develops into, ‘Do we need to produce more, extract more, or share more?’ Dr.

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<sup>34</sup> Wendell Berry, *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry* (Counterpoint, 2019), 64.

Sindab suggested that sharing was a theological concern involving relationships between people, God, and the community. “Meeting the needs of the poor would require a theology of sharing – an understanding of a need for building a deeper kinship with the human community in distress. ‘To share is to build the harmony called Shalom, the fruit of justice,’ said Dr. Sindab.”<sup>35</sup>

The legitimate concerns of caring for the Earth and satiating the necessities of humanity is a Jewish topic, which is reflected upon in the Tu BiShevat seder. Each decision to produce and consume is a decision to interact with creation, each other, and the divine. However, on Tu BiShevat, we are conscious of these decisions and their impact on the Earth.

This seder explores our connection with the Earth as its master, partner, consumer, and creature. The first theme of the seder is humanity’s connection with nature. When we explore how we relate to all of God’s creation, we might become more appreciative and responsible for it. The second theme of the seder is our relationship with food and the challenges we face as consumers of the Earth. The fruit and wine consumed during the seder is an opportunity for us to meditate, be intentional, and reflect upon what we are eating. The third theme of the seder is the realization of the impact we have on the environment. As consumers, we alter the environment to meet our needs. Although this is necessary for our survival, we sometimes take and use nature in abusive ways. The final theme of the seder is our commitment to being stewards of the Earth. This holiday reminds us of our partnership with the Earth and the divine as caretakers and nurturers of creation. We can use our talents,

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<sup>35</sup> Leslie Lang, *Religion's Role in Preserving the Environment: A Nationwide Leadership Conference for Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant Seminaries*, (Mundelein, Illinois: Center for Development in Ministry, University of Saint Mary of the Lake, 1994), 14-15.

skills, abilities, and minds to use and safeguard the environment for our benefit and the benefit of all of God's creation.

By partaking in the seder, we might find answers to, or have initial conversations about, the pressing environmental challenges. Tu BiShevat provides us an opportunity to connect with all of God's creation, while acknowledging our responsibility to take special care of the Earth. Let us read words from the voices within our tradition, listen to those who sit with us during the seder, and start conversations with each other as we begin to find solutions to the issues and difficulties of our world.



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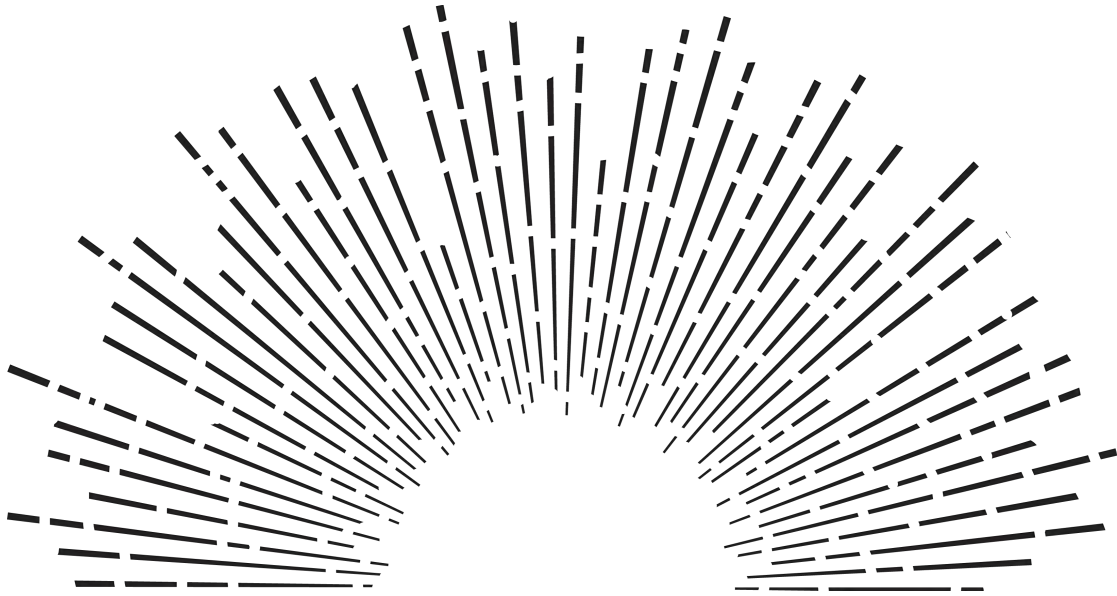
# A Tu Bishevat Seder

By Ashley Englander





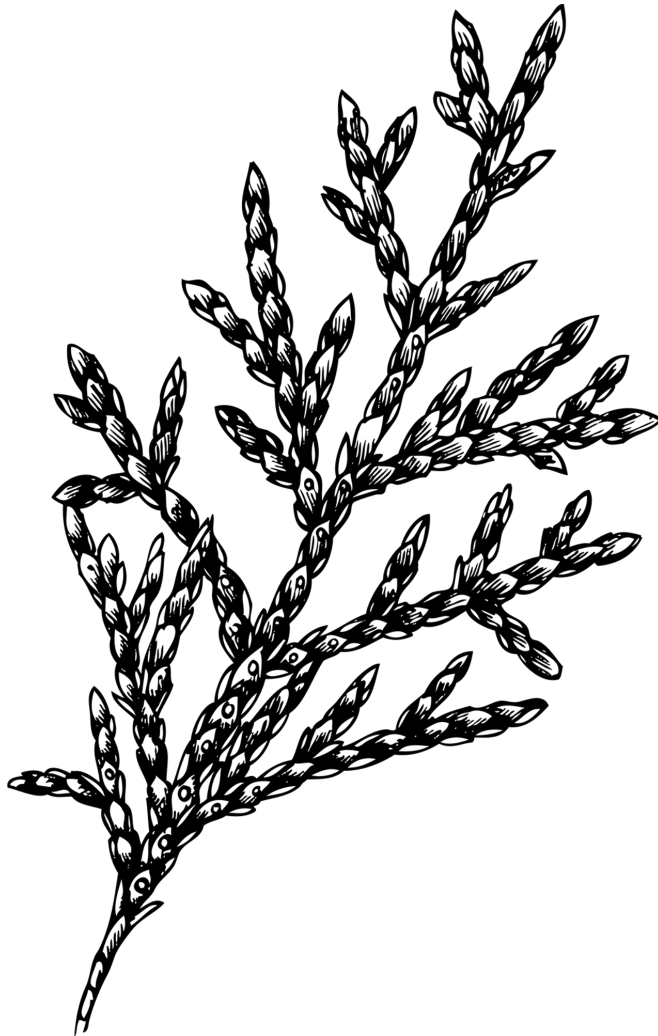
This Tu BiShevat seder is dedicated to my son, Adam. May he find an appreciation for God's creation, and always know that he is a steward of the land.



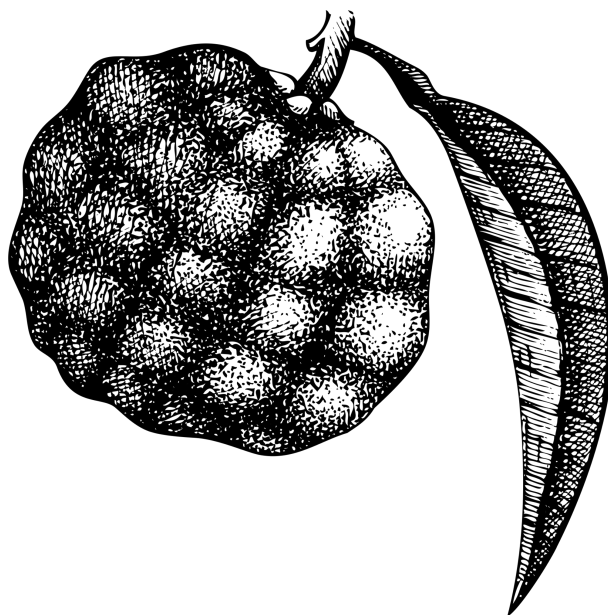
**Thank you to my capstone advisor, Rabbi Richard S. Sarason, Ph.D., Director of the Pines School of Graduate Studies; Professor of Rabbinic Literature and Thought and The Deutsch Family Professor of Rabbinics and Liturgy, who has been a remarkable teacher and mentor throughout my rabbinic studies and this capstone project.**

Thank you for choosing to use this booklet for your Tu BiShevat seder. This seder is split into four sections that correspond with the four cups of wine. Liturgy, poems, songs, and stories are a priority in this seder. Feel free to add your own creative texts as you lead.

Participation from everyone is highly encouraged. This seder is an opportunity for every person to connect with the holiday, Judaism, nature, and themselves. Use this seder as a tool to grow your connection with the land and to reflect on humanity's role as stewards of God's creation.



Please look through the entire booklet before you lead this Tu BiShevat seder. You will need to purchase or have access to the music of the suggested songs. A link will be provided for each song. You will also need different food and drink materials for your seder. Check with those who are coming to your seder if they have any food allergies (especially nut allergies). Look to your local food markets for foods that are in season or native to your area. If that is a challenge, consider buying organic and compostable products in your grocery stores.



You will need:

- A cup for each person
- White wine/grape juice
- Red wine/grape juice
- Fruits and nuts with an inedible outer layer and edible inner piece
- Fruits and nuts an edible outler layer, but an inedible inner piece
- Fruits and nuts that are completely edible
- A copy of this booklet for each person
- Access to the music of the songs

# WHAT IS TU BISHEVAT?

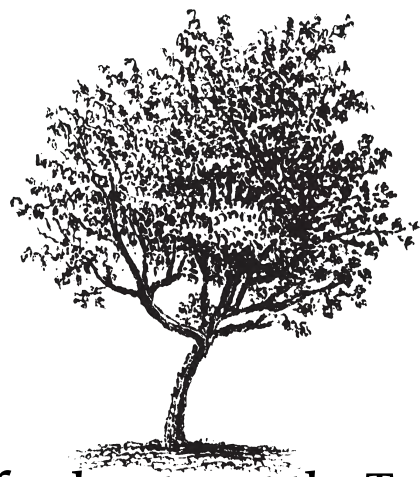
There are four Jewish new years according to Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1. One of them is the new year of the trees, Tu BiShevat, which is observed on the 15th of Shevat. The name “Tu BiShevat” means the 15th of Shevat.

Today the holiday is observed and celebrated by engaging in its seder, which is a creation of seventeenth-century kabbalists who had been influenced by the school of Isaac Luria. The Kabbalistic seder originated among Sefardic Jews in a text called Pri Etz Hadar. The preponderance of the textual material is taken from the Zohar.

The Tu BiShevat Seder is a time for deep learning and meditation on God’s creation and the nature around us. It is upon the Jewish people to explore their connections to the land of Israel, their consumption of food, their relationship with nature, and their devotion to God. Throughout the seder, food is meditated upon, but study is also expected.







Fruit and nuts are the foods eaten at the Tu BiShevat seder. These foods are the closest diet to that in Gan Eden. No animal, creature, being, or plant was harmed or killed for the sake of food, thus the seder includes a diet of Gan Eden. Three categories of fruit are eaten during the seder: hard outer-shell (inedible) with a soft inner, soft outer-shell (edible) with a hard inner, and entirely soft (edible). Although fruit is a major part of the Tu BiShevat seder, the four cups of wine take their own place during the meal. Red and white wine are served during the seder. White wine represents the dormancy of the world during winter, while red wine represents the rebirth of the world as trees and plants begin to bloom in the upcoming months thereafter.

The first cup of the seder begins with white wine, then mixed with a touch of red, half red-half white, and finally a full cup of red wine with a touch of white wine. Although it can represent the changing of seasons, it also represents the anticipation of redemption for all humanity in their return to Gan Eden.

Humanity is experiencing a “dormancy” of the world – cold, bitter, stagnant – in which it yearns for the Garden of Eden – rebirth, renewal, and redemption. Through time and through mitzvot, humanity can finally enter Gan Eden.

This seder will explore our connection with the Earth as its master, partner, consumer, and creature. The Tu BiShevat holiday reminds us of our partnership with the Earth and the divine as caretakers and nurturers of creation. We can employ our talents, skills, abilities, and minds to use and safeguard the environment for our benefit and the benefit of all of God's creation.



# CUP 1

THIS FIRST CUP IS ONLY WHITE WINE/GRAPE JUICE. ALL FRUITS OR NUTS SHOULD HAVE A HARD, INEDIBLE OUTER SHELL AND AN INNER EDIBLE PIECE. THESE CAN INCLUDE ORANGES, BANANAS, WALNUTS, OR STARFRUIT.

## BLESSING

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheiyinu Melech haolam borei p'ri haetz.  
Praised are You, Eternal, Our God, who creates the fruit of the tree.

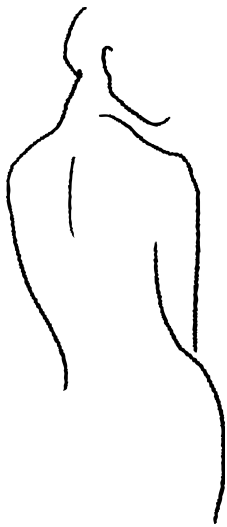
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheiyinu Melech haolam borei p'ri  
hagafen.

Blessed are You, God our God, ruler of the universe, who  
creates the fruit of the vine.

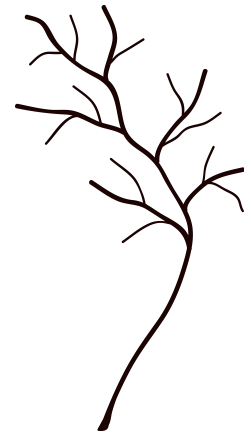
Like trees, the spiritual life of human beings is comprised of three parts: The root is faith. A person's spiritual life is derived from it. Continuously imbibing and drawing in from the fountain of faith sustains and develops the soul. The body of the tree is the study of Torah and fulfilling the mitzvot and good deeds. These comprise the main structure and quantitative aspect of a person's spirituality. This is also the area where he can expand and grow from day to day and from minute to minute.  
- Yitzhak Buxbaum

Yitzhak Buxbaum wrote that humans are segmented into three parts – faith, the study of Torah (fulfillment of mitzvot), and spirituality. Jews are rooted in their faith –faith in God and God’s instruction to them. Every action a person takes is based on their faith, and that faith gives them a reason to be an active participant in the world.



A Jewish person uses their body to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot. Their body and mind engage in the history, tradition, and religion of their people. Hopefully, each Jew will use the teachings from their tradition to act righteously within their community.

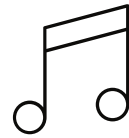
Finally, a Jew’s spirituality connects their faith and body to the divine. Everything they have done and believed culminates in a spiritual connection with the divine, who will continue to sustain them throughout time.



A Jew is like a tree – rooted in faith, sturdy and structured in Torah and mitzvot, and branched out to the sky, where the divine dwells.



## ETZ HASADEH



For the human is like the tree in a field,  
like the human, the tree grows too;  
like the tree, the human is chopped down,  
and I don't know  
where I've been and where I'll be,  
like the tree in a field!

Ki ha'adam - etz hasadeh,  
k'mo ha'adam gam ha'etz tzome'ach;  
k'mo ha'etz, ha'adam nigd'a,  
Va'ani lo yode'a  
efo hayiti ve'efo ehyeh,  
k'mo etz hasadeh!

For the human is like the tree in a field,  
like the tree he strives upwards;  
like the human, it burns in fire,  
and I don't know  
where I've been and where I'll be,  
like the tree in a field!

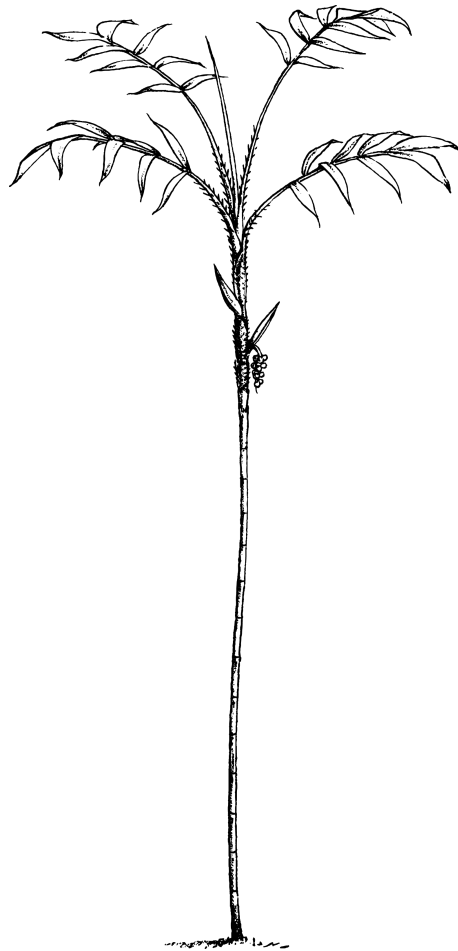
Ki ha'adam - etz hasadeh,  
k'mo ha'etz hu sho'ef lemalah;  
k'mo ha'adam, hu nisraf ba'esh,  
va'ani lo yode'a  
efo hayiti ve'efo ehyeh,  
k'mo etz hasadeh!

I loved, and I hated too,  
I tasted this and that;  
I was buried in a plot of dust,  
and I feel sour - sour in my mouth,  
like the tree in a field! (x2)

Ahavti, vegam saneti,  
ta'amti mizeh umizeh;  
kavru oti bechelkash shel afar,  
umar li - mar li bapeh,  
k'mo etz hasadeh, k'mo etz  
hasadeh!

For the human is like the tree in a field,  
like the tree he's thirsty for water;  
like the human, it stays thirsty,  
and I don't know  
where I've been and where I'll be,  
like the tree in a field!

Ki ha'adam - etz hasadeh,  
k'mo ha'etz hu tzame lemayim;  
k'mo ha'adam, hu nish'ar tzame,  
va'ani lo yode'a  
efo hayiti ve'efo ehyeh  
k'mo etz hasadeh!



You can check this out for yourself simply by looking up into the forest canopy. The average tree grows its branches out until it encounters the branch tips of a neighboring tree of the same height. It doesn't grow any wider because the air and better light in this space are already taken. However, it heavily reinforces the branches it has extended, so you get the impression that there's quite a shoving match going on up there. But a pair of true friends is careful right from the outset not to grow overly thick branches in each other's direction. The trees don't want to take anything away from each other, and so they develop sturdy branches only at the outer edges of their crowns, that is to say, only in the direction of 'non-friends'. Such partners are often so tightly connected at the roots that sometimes they even die together.

- Peter Wohlleben

Rabbi Yose the Galilean says,  
Whatever the Blessed Holy One created on earth,  
God also created in human beings...

In the world, God created forests; in human beings, a head of hair.  
In the world, God created wild beasts; in human beings, lice.  
In the world, God created channels; in human beings, ears.  
In the world, God created wind; in human beings, breath.  
In the world, God created sun; in human beings, a forehead.



In the world, God created sun; in human beings, a forehead.  
In the world, God created stagnant water; in human beings, sinuses.  
In the world, God created salt water; in human beings, urine.  
In the world, God created streams; in human beings, tears...

In the world, God created firmaments; in human beings, a tongue.  
In the world, God created fresh water; in human beings, spit.  
In the world, God created stars; in human beings, cheeks...  
In the world, God created grape clusters; in human beings, breasts...

In the world, God created mountains and valleys;  
When standing, a human being is like a mountain,  
And when lying down, a human being is like a valley...

- Avot de-Rabbi Natan [c.200-700 CE]



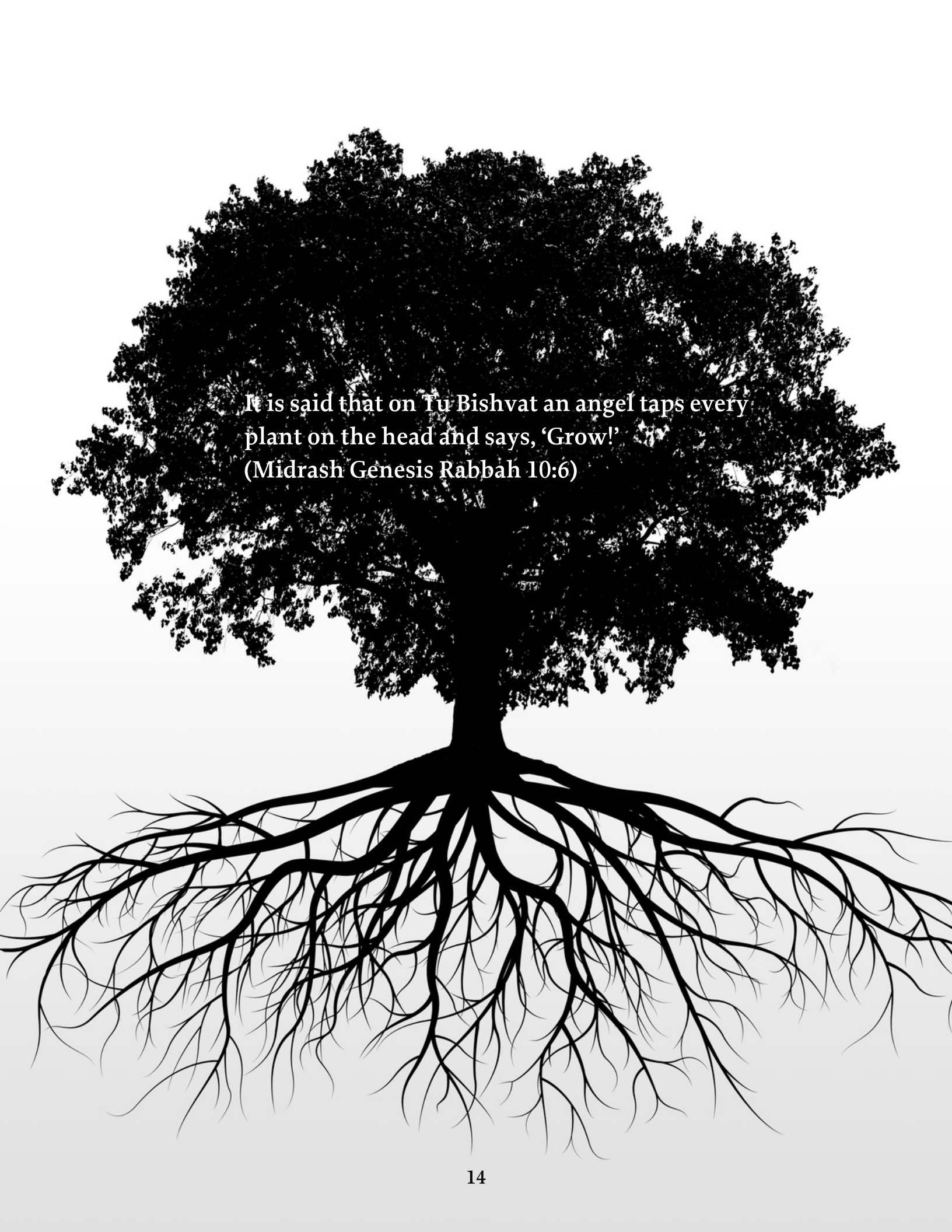




Find a word in the Tree that reminds you of your connection to nature, Earth and/or the divine.

What is a word that is not included in the image that you would like to add?





It is said that on Tu Bishvat an angel taps every  
plant on the head and says, 'Grow!'  
(Midrash Genesis Rabbah 10:6)

# CUP 2

EACH PERSON DRINKS A CUP OF WHITE WINE THAT HAS A SPLASH OF RED WINE IN IT. ALSO, THE FRUIT/NUTS EATEN ARE ONES WITH A SOFT, EDIBLE OUTER SHELL AND A HARD, INEDIBLE INNER PIECE. THESE INCLUDE CHERRIES, PEACHES, OR GRAPES.

Let us concentrate on our breathing before we eat the fruit or nut with an edible outer shell, but a hard, inedible inner core.

Follow your breath as it travels down into your body as you inhale and up as you exhale. Like the way nutrients flow down through the deep roots in the trunk of a tree...

and out to the branches...

down to the roots...

out to the branches...

down to the roots.

Imagine a lush garden, vibrant with colorful flowers, trees, and fruits,  
those pleasant to the eye and sweet to the taste.

While imagining this garden, take the appropriate fruit or nut in your hand.

Feel its texture. Look at its colors. Smell its scent.

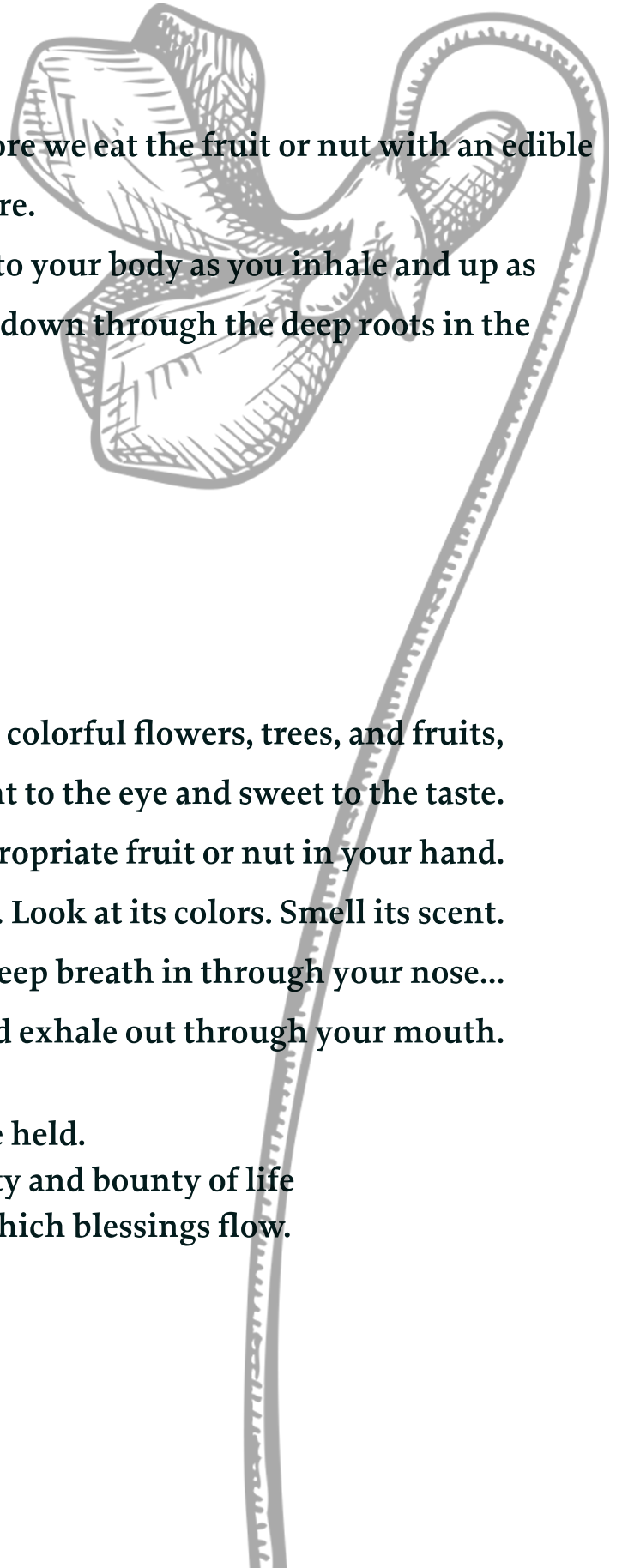
Take a deep breath in through your nose...

and exhale out through your mouth.

Taste this delicious fruit or nut you have held.

We recite: Thank you, God, for the beauty and bounty of life  
and for the tree of life, the Torah from which blessings flow.

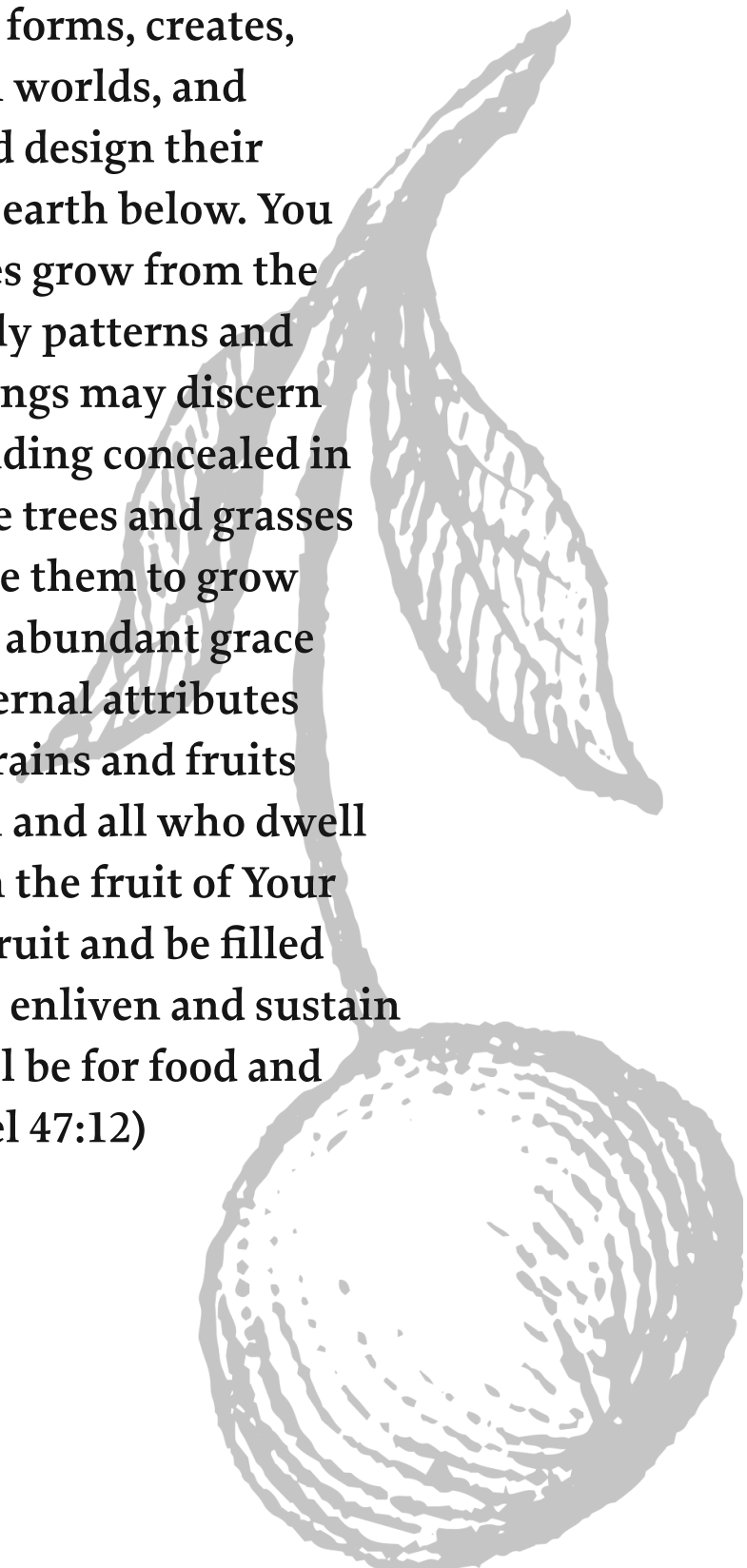
Amen.



# BLESSING

**Please, O God, who makes, forms, creates, and emanates the supernal worlds, and according to their form and design their pattern was created on the earth below. You have made trees and grasses grow from the earth, according to heavenly patterns and designs, so that human beings may discern the wisdom and understanding concealed in them. You have set over the trees and grasses governing angels that cause them to grow and thrive. You make Your abundant grace and the power of Your supernal attributes flow to them, to produce grains and fruits after their kinds. The earth and all who dwell thereon shall be sated with the fruit of Your work; they shall eat of its fruit and be filled with its goodness. You will enliven and sustain the body too. “Its fruit shall be for food and leaves for healing.” (Ezekiel 47:12)**

**- Yitzhak Buxbaum**





HASADEH  
BY MOLLY BAJGOT



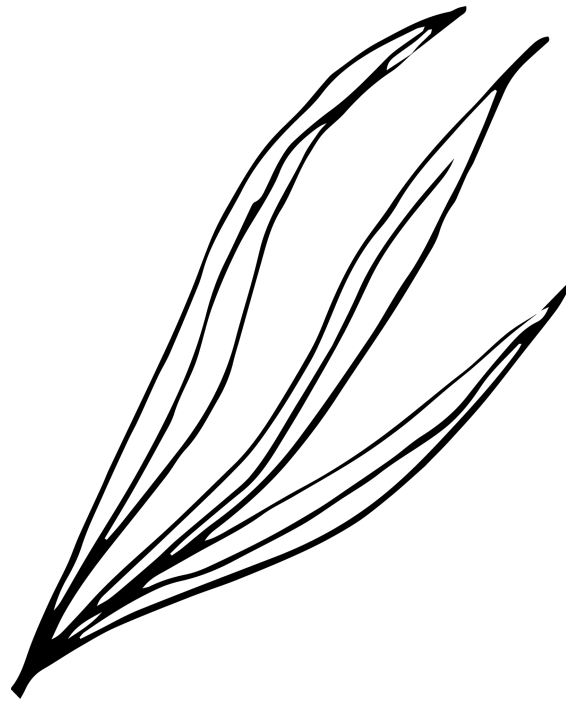
Everything lays fallow  
We have all that we need  
Trust in that fills the gaps  
That once were filled with greed

Water flows in bounty  
There's nothing now to mine  
Remnants of systems from  
Before covered in vines

Garden gates are open  
The city streets are ours  
Grass is sweet, enough to eat  
And no one's be behind bars

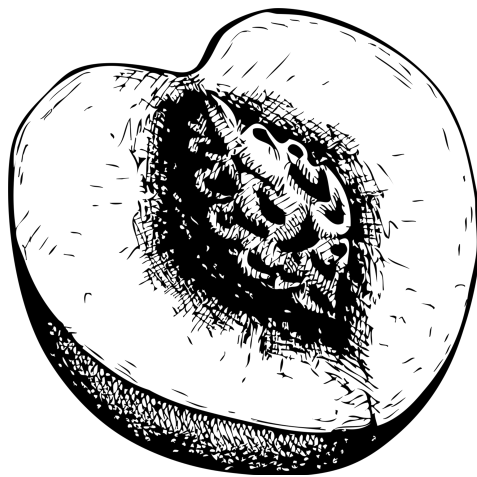
וְנִטְשָׁתָּהּ וְאָכְלוּ אֲבִינֵי עַמָּךְ  
וַיִּתְּרֵם תֹּאכַל חֵיטְ הַשָּׂדֶה

Unetashtah v'achloo  
evyonei amecha  
V'yitram tochal chayot  
Ha—sadeh



Rabbi Yosei in the name of Rabbi Bun said: It is even forbidden to live in a city that doesn't have a source of fresh produce. Rabbi Hezekiah the priest in the name of Rav said: In the future, a person will have to give an accounting for everything that his eyes saw, but he did not eat.

- Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 48b



I begin with the proposition that eating is an agricultural act. Eating ends the annual drama of the food economy that begins with planting and birth. The industrial eater is, in fact, one who does not know that eating is an agricultural act, who no longer knows or imagines the connection between eating and the land, and who is therefore necessarily passive and uncritical – in short, a victim. When food, in the minds of eaters, is no longer associated with farming and with the land, then the eaters are suffering a kind of cultural amnesia that is misleading and dangerous.

-Wendell Berry



To eat responsibly is to understand and enact, so far as one can, this complex relationship. What can one do? Here is a list, probably not exhaustive:

1. Participate in food production to the extent that you can.
2. Prepare your own food.
3. Learn the origins of the food you buy, and buy the food that is produced closest to your home.
4. Whenever possible, deal directly with a local farmer, gardener, or orchardist.
5. Learn, in self-defense, as much as you can about the economy and technology of industrial food production.
6. Learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening.
7. Learn as much as you can, by direct observation and experience if possible, of the life histories of the food species.

In what way is the Torah like a fig? It is because most fruits contain something inedible: dates have a pit, grapes have hard seeds, pomegranates have a peel. But every part of a fig is good to eat. So too with the Torah: every part of it contains wisdom.

- Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshuah 1:2



# CUP 3

EACH PARTICIPANT WILL DRINK A CUP OF HALF-WHITE AND HALF-RED WINE. THE FRUIT/NUT THEY WILL EAT WILL BE COMPLETELY EDIBLE/SOFT THROUGHOUT. FOR EXAMPLE, PLUMS, ALMONDS, APPLES, STRAWBERRIES, BERRIES, KIWI... ETC.



## BLESSING

**Blessed are You, God, who roots a tree in soil, root us in your Torah.**

**Blessed are You, God, who keeps a tree sturdy, keep us sturdy in all the challenges we face.**

**Blessed are You, God, who helps a tree be a home, help us create community wherever we are.**

**Blessed are You, God, who allows a tree to share fruit, allow us to share wisdom with one another.**

**Blessed are You, God, who sustains the tree of life, sustain our lives through your creation.**

**Amen.**



Rabbi Yisrael Gustman (1903-1991) was a prominent rabbi in Vilna; he made Aliyah, to live in Israel, in 1961. Several of his students were walking past his house one day and they noticed Rabbi Gustman watering his front garden. 'May we water the plants for the headmaster?' they offered. Rabbi Gustman hesitatingly explained that he preferred to water the plants himself.

A few days later, the same students passed Rabbi Gustman's house, and again they found him watering the plants. 'What can be so important about watering these plants that the rabbi is spending so much of his valuable time doing it?' one of them wondered aloud.

'Perhaps he does it for relaxation,' another boy suggested.

'Impossible!' another boy countered. 'There must be a better reason for the headmaster to devote so much time to such a trivial task.'

The boys decided to find out and one of them approached Rabbi Gustman with their question.

'I was once walking with Rabbi Hayyim Ozer Grodzinsky in a forest,' Rabbi Gustman explained. 'We were discussing various Torah topics and I wasn't paying too much attention to the surrounding trees and bushes. We were completely absorbed in our discussion.'

'Suddenly, Rabbi Hayyim Ozer interrupted the conversation. He pointed to a plant we were passing by. 'This one is nutritious,' he told me. He pointed to another plant. 'This one is poisonous.'

'He then continued on with the topic under discussion. Several times during the ensuing conversation, however, he continued to interrupt himself to point out other edible plants.'

'I was a bit puzzled by Rabbi Hayyim Ozer's interruptions, but I didn't question him. I made sure however, to observe and remember what he had told me, for I was certain that he had some reason for telling me this.'

'Shortly after that, World War II began. I had to hide in the forest, and I had almost no food with me. The hunger was almost unbearable. One day, I happened to glance down at the forest floor, and I recognized one of the plants that Rabbi Hayyim Ozer had pointed out to me many months earlier. I lived almost entirely on those plants during the war years and they saved my life. 'I feel obligated to show my appreciation to the plants, for they saved my life and, therefore, I water them personally.'



# HASHKEDIYAH PORACHAT THE ALMOND TREE IS BLOOMING



The almond tree is blooming  
And the golden sun is shining,  
Birds atop each roof  
Announcing the arrival of the festival.

Hashkediyaḥ porachat  
Veshemesh paz zorachat,  
Tziporim merosh kol gag  
Mevasrot et bo hachag.

Tu bishvat has arrived  
(it's) the festival of trees.  
Tu bishvat has arrived  
(it's) the festival of trees.

Tu bishvat higiya  
Chag la'ilanot.  
Tu bish'vat higiya  
Chag la'ilanot.

The land is crying out  
The time of planting has arrived  
Each person shall take a tree  
We'll stride out with spades.

Ha'aretz meshava'at  
Higiyaḥ et lata'at  
Kol echad yikach lo etz  
Be'atim nitzeḥ chotzetz.

The sun is shining  
And it's very hot today  
I hope the weather  
Stays bright.

Hashemesh zorachat  
Vecham me'od hayom.  
Ani mekavah mezeg ha'avir  
Sheyisha'er bahir.

“But now,” says the Once-ler,  
“Now that you’re here,  
the word of the Lorax seems perfectly  
clear.  
UNLESS someone like you  
cares a whole awful lot,  
nothing is going to get better.  
It’s not.

“SO...

Catch!” calls the Once-ler.

He lets something fall.

“It’s a Truffula Seed.

It’s the last one of all!

You’re in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds.

And Truffula Trees are what everyone needs.

Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care.

Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air.

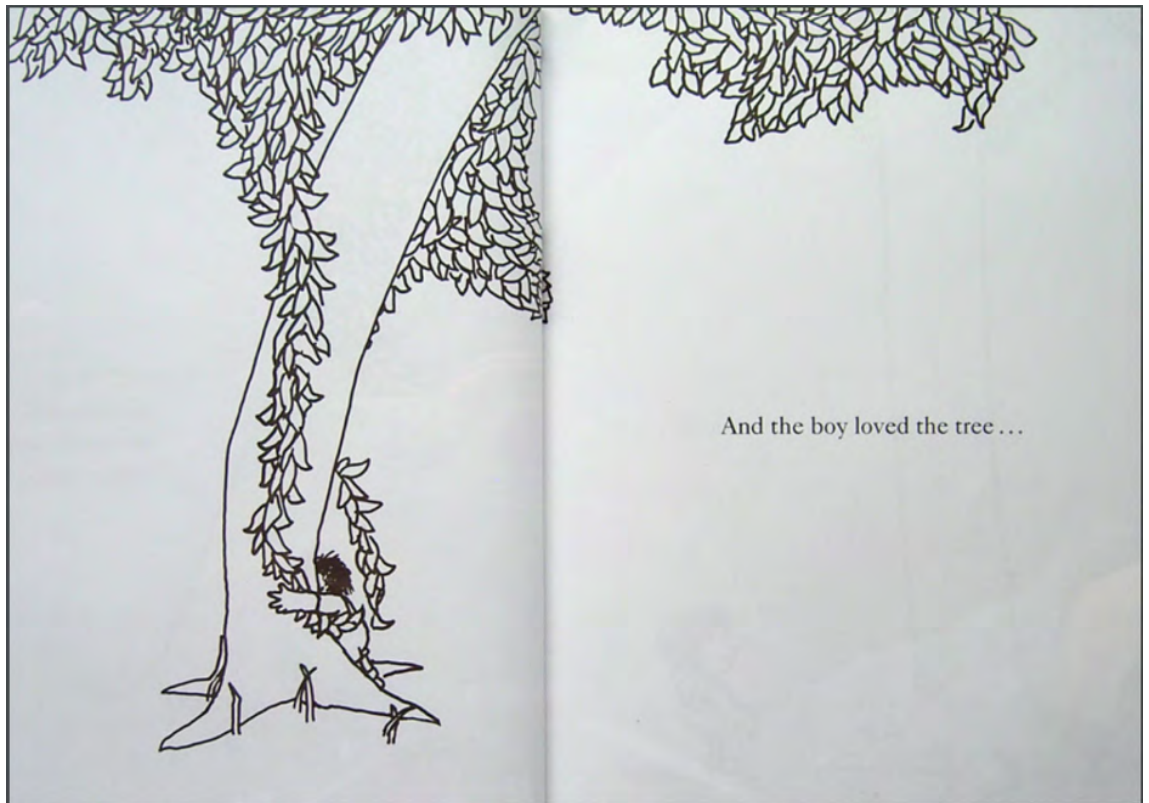
Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack.

Then the Lorax

and all of his friends

may come back.”

In *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, a boy and a tree have a special bond throughout their entire lives. As the boy gets older, his needs from the tree change. He uses the tree's fruits, branches, and trunk to help create and sustain his life. The tree is happy to provide all these things for the boy. At the end of the book, all that is left of the tree is a stump. The boy is now an old man, and he is unsure of what use the tree can have for him. He becomes tired and sits on the tree's stump. Both the tree and the boy are happy.



Every living thing remains, even in death, very much a part of the web of life. After a living thing dies, it provide nutrients for the soil. From this soil a tree may grow, which provides fruit for a human or a home to an owl, etc.

- Ellen Bernstein and Dan Fink

# CUP 4

EACH PARTICIPANT WILL HAVE A CUP OF RED WINE WITH ONLY A TOUCH OF WHITE WINE. NO FRUIT OR NUTS WILL BE EATEN DURING THIS LAST SECTION, BUT THE ESSENCE OF A FRUIT/NUT WILL BE OBSERVED. THEIR ESSENCE CAN BE OBSERVED THROUGH THE FIVE SENSES: SMELL, TOUCH, TASTE, SIGHT, AND SOUND.

## BLESSING

**Humanity has a special relationship with God's creation.**

**We were settled in Gan Eden to till and tend the Earth (Gen 2:15)**

**We are instructed to fill the Earth and master the world around us. (Gen 1:28)**

**We are ordered to release our dominion over the land every seven years. (Lev 25:4)**

**Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the Universe, who gave us the ability to care, nurture, and sustain Your creation.**

Blessed be the person who trusts in  
God, whose trust is God alone.  
And He shall be like a tree, planted  
by the water,  
Sending forth its roots by a stream:  
It does not sense the coming of heat,  
Its leaves are ever fresh;  
It has no care in a year of drought,  
It does not cease to yield fruit.  
(Jeremiah 17:7-8)

Happy is the man who has not followed  
the counsel of the wicked,  
Or taken the path of sinners,  
Or joined the company of the insolent;  
Rather, the teaching of the Lord is their  
delight,  
And they study that teaching day and  
night.  
He is like a tree planted beside streams of  
water,  
Which yields its fruit in season,  
Whose foliage never fades,  
And whatever it produces thrives.  
(Psalm 1:1-3)

In both these biblical texts, a person who trusts and follows God, while following God's teachings will always be nourished like a tree planted beside a stream of water. By being faithful and devoted to God, one will always be sustained throughout his or her life. They will be vibrant, productive, and timely. They will never be without their needs and left alone. A tree by a stream of water will always bear fruit, always be colorful and sturdy, and always be nourished by the body of water next to it.

**\*This Tu BiShevat, what resource do you depend upon to sustain and nourish you, like a tree beside a stream of water?\***



# WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED-V' HAYA K' ETZ SHATUL

## BY JOANIE CALEM



We shall not, we shall not be moved  
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,  
We shall not be moved.

V'heye C'Etz Shatul, Etz Shatul al mayim  
Hooooo, Hoooo, Etz Shatul al mayim

We're standing here for freedom,  
we shall not be moved  
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,  
We shall not be moved.

V'heye C'Etz Shatul, Etz Shatul al mayim  
Hooooo, Hoooo, Etz Shatul al mayim

We're standing here for peace,  
we shall not be moved  
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,  
We shall not be moved.

V'heye C'Etz Shatul, Etz Shatul al mayim  
Hooooo, Hoooo, Etz Shatul al mayim

We shall not, we shall not be moved  
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,  
We shall not be moved.



- I don't know.
- What's not to know?
- I don't know how I've gotten this far – learned this much, convinced myself this thoroughly of the need to change – and yet still doubt that I'll change. Are you hopeful?
- That you'll change?
- That humankind will figure this out.
- We've already figured it out.
- That we will act on what we've figured out.
- Have you noticed how often conversations about climate change end with the question of hopefulness?
- Have you noticed how often conversations about climate change end?
- That's because we feel hopeful and are comfortable putting off the discussion.
- No. It's because we feel hopeless and are uncomfortable discussing it.
- Either way, it's hope that allows the subject of climate change to be eclipsed – in news and politics, in our lives – by more 'urgent' issues.

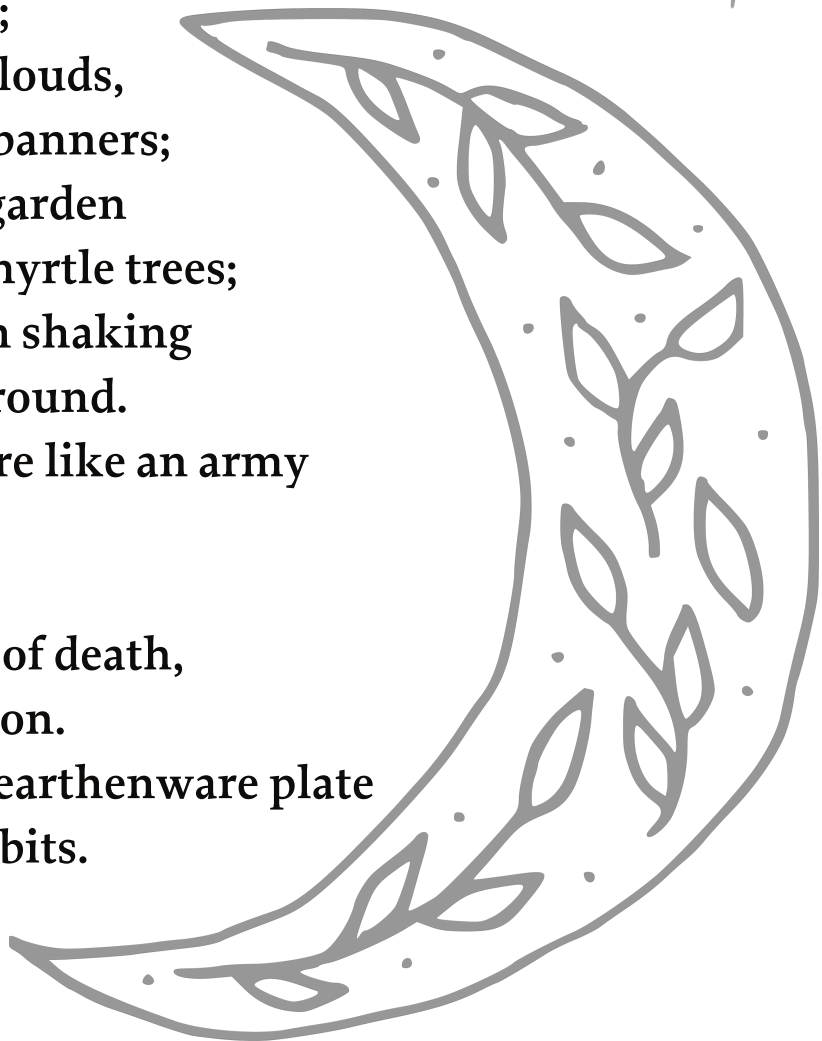
(Jonathan Safran Foer)

**\*What does “hope” look like when we discuss solutions to climate change, climate justice, etc.?**



I look up to the sky and its stars,  
And down to the earth with its creeping things.  
And I understand in my heart how their creation  
Was planned with wisdom in every detail.  
See the heavens above like a tent,  
Constructed with loops and with hooks,  
And the moon with its stars, like a shepherdess  
Driving her sheep to pasture;  
The moon itself among the clouds,  
Like a ship sailing under its banners;  
The clouds like a girl in her garden  
Walking, and watering the myrtle trees;  
A cloud of dew, like a woman shaking  
Drops from her hair to the ground.  
But the earth's inhabitants are like an army  
Pitching its tent for a night,  
Looting the local granaries.  
And all flee before the terror of death,  
Like a dove pursued by a falcon.  
All are doomed to be like an earthenware plate  
Which has been smashed to bits.

- Samuel ha-Nagid



“Look at My works! How beautiful and  
praiseworthy they are! And everything I made, I  
created for you. Be careful, [though] that you don’t  
spoil or destroy My world – because if you spoil it,  
there’s nobody after you to fix it.”



## Cup 1 Appendix

Teaching: *A Person is Like a Tree* by Yitzhak Buxbaum

From *Tehillah LeDavid* p.133, quoting *She'arim* (Israeli newspaper), Tu BeShvat, 1979.

In this teaching, the spiritual life of a person is compared to the structure of a tree. The structure of a tree is its roots, body (trunk), and branches. The roots are like the faith of a person; their faith grounds them. Like roots that fill with and carry water throughout the tree, faith sustains a person's soul; it ebbs and flows within a person and keeps their spirit alive. The body of the tree is like the Torah, which structures a Jewish person. They show who they are by the mitzvot they perform (actions and deeds). Torah allows a Jewish person to remain strong in their beliefs and accountable for their actions. Finally, the branches of a tree are like the growth and expansion of a person throughout their lifetime. Branches grow toward the heavens to find air and sun for their leaves. Like tree branches, humans grow spiritually when searching for a meaningful and sustainable life.

Song: *Ki ha'adam etz hasadeh*,

The text, originates from Deuteronomy 20:19. People are instructed not to destroy trees when they besiege and capture a city in a time of war. This text is the basis for the Jewish law of *bal tashchit* – one must not destroy. In the song *Etz hasadeh* by Natan Zach (words) and Shalom Chanoch (music), this biblical text shares with its listener that humans and trees are alike – they both grow, get 'chopped down', strive upwards, burn, are thirsty, and are loved.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LdGNPgbis>

Contemporary Piece: *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben

According to Peter Wohlleben, when trees grow, they face challenges from the other trees around them. However, a pair of “true friends,” two trees that work together in a forest to survive, carefully grow in a way that allows them both to survive. Trees’ growth teaches us that when we want to excel and move forward in our own lives, we need to uplift and support one another when achieving our goals.

When we understand the trees’ special relationship with one another, we notice that they flourish in a community, like humans. They work together in order to survive. We too work in a community to achieve our life goals and survive this world.

Poem/Reflection: Avot de-Rabbi Natan, Ch. 31 (200-700 CE), translated by Jacob Neusner  
(=Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:4.4 on Ecclesiastes 1:4)

Comparing our bodies to trees allows us to find a relationship between ourselves and creation. In this homily, Rabbi Yose the Galilean compares each part of God’s creation of nature to God’s creation of the human body. Our bodies are interconnected with the creation and the beauty of the world. We are a mirror image of God’s design of the world. The veins on a placenta after the birth of a human child look like the tree of life. The neurons of the human brain look like the vessels of the universe. The human eye looks like the death of a star in the universe. We are interconnected with God’s creation.

Once we understand that we are a part of God’s creation, we can see ourselves in all of the world’s natural wonders. We can notice the similarity between a strong breeze and a heavy, fast breath. We can notice the water in a stream runs like the blood inside our bodies. Each part of us is created by God; God who created the entire universe.

Break Teaching/Quote: Midrash Genesis Rabbah 10:6

Children are eager to grow up. They crave to be independent and meet their own needs without relying only on the help of the grown-ups around them. Throughout the first two decades of their lives, they learn and grow into self-sufficient adults who will one day nurture the next generation of children who are eager to grow up.

Like children, trees grow and grow. We acknowledge their growth on Tu BiShevat. Throughout the year, we may not be aware of a tree's growth. It seems to grow slowly. However, the tree suddenly is much taller than it was the previous year! It appears as if the tree grew overnight. Even children seem to grow overnight (and sometimes they do!). Like trees, we too grow over time – physically, mentally, and emotionally.

As a community, we must support each child to grow into the person they want to be. We hope they grow up to be kind adults who care about the world around them. Like the angel who taps the plants and tells them to grow, we tell our youth to grow. We hope our children grow into mensch-like adults and experience the world with joy and peace.

## Cup 2 Appendix

Teaching: This meditation is an adaptation from *Trees, Earth, and Torah* on page 402

Before eating the delicious food that comes from God's creation, we can meditate on its existence and how it nourishes our bodies. All the five senses are used in this meditation to allow the participants to experience the fruit or nut that they will consume. After using the five senses to meditate on their fruit or nut, they will recite the blessing found below. After tasting the fruit/nut, they will then recite a mantra of thankfulness for God's creation.

This meditation's purpose is to connect the person to the food they will eat by not only their sense of taste but by all their body's senses. In our busy lives, we might eat quickly without much thought about what we are consuming. During Tu BiShevat, we have the opportunity to eat food with *kavannah*, intention.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan's explanation of a blessing before eating reminds us that the act of eating is holy. It is an exercise that requires one to be disciplined. When eating, we use our entire body to consume the food. We use our mouth, nose, and stomach; and eventually we will expel the waste. Our bodies become connected to the food that comes from the Earth, which makes us even more connected to the Earth and all of God's creation. Blessing God for the food we eat is crucial, so we can acknowledge its source.

Blessing:

*Pri Etz Hadar* is a Tu BiShevat seder written in the Kabbalistic tradition. The first edition was published in Venice 1728. The material in it was taken from the *Zohar*, which explains why the language used relates to the divine and the world through a mystical lens. In this blessing, the heavenly worlds' patterns are reflected on the earth below, which God has created. Everything created on Earth, from the trees to the grass, embodies, a heavenly design

from which humanity can discern the wisdom concealed within it. The blessing references Genesis Rabbah 10:6, which explains the idea that angels cause grass to grow and thrive.

God's creation is good, and we are given it to sustain our bodies. Ezekiel 47:12 is cited to prove that fruit is for food, and fruit is intended to heal our bodies.

This alternative blessing acknowledges the beauty of God's creation. Many Jews recite *hamotzi* or another short blessing before they eat to acknowledge and thank God for the food they were given. However, we rarely take the time to explore the awesomeness of the creation of our food and how it perfectly sustains our bodies. We need to be reminded that food not only provides us pleasure and sustenance, but also that its consumption is a holy act.

Song: HaSadeh by Molly Bajgot

The text, וְנִטְשָׁתָּהּ וְאָכְלוּ אֲבִינֵי עַמְּךָ וְיִתְּנָם תֹּאכַל חֵיטְ הַשָּׂדֶה, comes from Exodus 23:11, which states “On the seventh [year], you shall let [the land rest] and be fallow. **Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they eat, let the wild beasts eat.** You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.” This is the commandment of *shmitah*, a release of the land, which also states that all the food from the land must be given to the needy among the community and the wild animals.

Molly Bajgot's song/poem begins with the concept of *shmitah* and an acknowledgment that we have all that we need. She describes a world in which all people are free and fed. Her take on *shmitah* reminds us that there are commandments that exhort us as Jews to engage in food justice. We have everything we need when we go to the grocery store. We can buy the food we want, and even have enough to go to waste after sitting in our fridge

for a week. Food justice advocates for the hungry in our communities and those without all their basic needs met.

As we nourish our bodies on this holiday, let us remember to help nourish the bodies of others in need through social action programs like food justice.

<https://shireishmita.bandcamp.com/releases>

Commentary: Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 48b

This text reminds us that we must eat locally in order to preserve the green spaces in our towns and cities for the health of their residents. Eating locally also allows residents to find enjoyment in eating food because of its freshness. Expecting to enjoy the things that we see reinforces that we are to enjoy the pleasures of this world, particularly food. (*The Sacred Table*, 175) Where we get our food is just as important as what we eat. Eating locally supports our neighbors fiscally, and it is more sustainable for our planet. Also, knowing where our food is sourced creates a relationship between what we are eating, our bodies, and the world around us. Knowing that our food is finite and sacred can lower our amount of food waste. We can also be particular with what we put in our bodies since locally-sourced food can be healthier than something processed and transported from far away.

Contemporary Piece: *The World-Ending Fire*, “The Pleasure of Eating” by Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry states that eating is an agricultural act. Eating is not something separate from the process and creation of our food. It is produced in order for it to be consumed. How it is produced is important – it should be free from chemicals, planted by workers who are treated fairly, and sourced from land tended sustainably. Also, how the food is consumed is equally as important – it should not be wasted, should be cooked and processed in the healthiest way for consumption, and should be purchased from a place that

treats its workers fairly. The two acts are not distinct; they work together in the life and cycle of the food.

Wendell Berry writes a lot about the impact of the Industrial Revolution on agrarian society. He uses the term ‘industrial eater’ to explain that a consumer is not in tune with, or aware of, the agricultural process of food production. An industrial society creates a division between the producer and the consumer. An eater in this system is not aware of whence their food derives, and they are passive about how their food gets to them. For example, someone who buys a package of Tyson Chicken Nuggets is usually unaware of exactly where that chicken is sourced. They are unaware of how the chickens were raised or treated. They are unaware of the work environment of the animal farm. They are unaware of how the chicken was processed and packaged for consumption. When entering a grocery store, they go to purchase their chicken nuggets passively without an active step in the process of obtaining their food. Berry states that when an individual is no longer associated with the process of the production of their food, they are then divorced from the land and cannot recognize the processes and implications farming has on their food source. Without an awareness of their food source, they can be endangered, and: 1. May support dangerous agricultural practices that harm the land, animals, and people; 2. Cannot provide their own food when needed in case of a shortage or problem of locality; 3. Are not aware of the connection between themselves and the land in which they were both created, which creates a separation between them and their Creator.

Discussion Questions/Thoughts: *The World-Ending Fire*, “The Pleasure of Eating” by

Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry provides a list of ways one can create a relationship with the food one consumes.

1. *Participate in food production to the extent that you can.* Join a local CSA or create your own vegetable garden to tend and partner with God in the production of the food that you consume.
2. *Prepare your own food.* If you have the time and resources, make your own food from scratch – using whole ingredients without preservatives and other added chemicals. For example, bake your own bread, make your own cheese, or blend your own smoothies using locally sourced fruits.
3. *Learn the origins of the food you buy and buy the food that is produced closest to your home.* Discover which foods are native to your area, and the ones that are not. Find out how they are made and sourced. Being aware of where your food comes from might shed light on the conditions in which your food is prepared.
4. *Whenever possible, deal directly with a local farmer, gardener, or orchardist.* Join a local CSA or find a farmer's market to purchase your food and gardening needs.
5. *Learn, in self-defense, as much as you can about the economy and technology of industrial food production.* Education is power. Every consumer should be aware of the impact their consumption has on the economy. What we purchase and from where makes a statement about what we support. Technological advancements have led to the sustainability and growth of the human population. However, is the technology used to make food safeguarding our land and providing the best health practices for our bodies?



6. *Learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening.* How our food is produced affects the land it is created upon. Understanding agricultural and even small gardening practices that are sustainable and organic to the land we use can produce the best and most appropriate food that is local to our environment.
7. *Learn as much as you can, by direct observation and experience, if possible, of the life histories of the food species.* Understanding where your food comes from and the environment in which it can sustainably grow will allow you to continue to grow your own food successfully.

Break: Yalkut Shimoni, Joshua 1:2

During the second cup of wine, we eat fruit that has an inedible core. The Torah too is like a fig, in which every part of it is good to eat – every part of the Torah has something to offer and teach us. So too, food can teach us that every part of it has a use. Even if a food item seems to have no purpose, it can be used to reduce our waste and produce something that we can nourish our bodies and souls with.

Check out this QR code below or follow this link:

[https://www.tiktok.com/@plantyou/video/7031266644261391622?is\\_from\\_webapp=v1&item\\_id=7031266644261391622](https://www.tiktok.com/@plantyou/video/7031266644261391622?is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=7031266644261391622)

This vegan TikTok content creator has a series in which she teaches her viewers how they can use food scraps for food or other household goods!



### Cup 3 Appendix

Teaching: “A Tale: A Debt of Gratitude” retold by Yitzhak Buxbaum

The tale of Rabbi Yisrael Gustman teaches us that nature sustains our bodies. We are obligated to care for nature as it takes care of us when we need it most. His tale also recalls his experience in WWII, in which his own teacher, Rabbi Hayyim Ozer, taught him the valuable skill of identifying edible plants (needed when he was hiding in the forest). Sometimes, we are too caught up in the rhythm of our lives, and we do not find time to appreciate the world around us. Even the small things in our lives that seem tedious and mundane must be shown attention and appreciation. We can show our appreciation for God’s creation being responsible for the Earth through caring and nurturing acts every day.

Rabbi Gustman was the last *dayan* (Jewish judge) in Vilna during WWII. He lived in Vilna, and unfortunately, when the Nazis invaded, he was tortured to the point where they thought he was one of the dead and put him in a heap of dead bodies. When someone realized he was alive, he was brought to the ghetto. He survived the war. However, he was warned by a Jewish Communist commissar that he would be sent to Siberia, so he fled to France hoping to get to Israel. He could not get a certificate. In 1971 he made Aliyah to Israel. He established a yeshivah in Rehavia, Jerusalem known as Bet Havatzelet. He passed away in 1991, and he was buried on the Mount of Olives.

Song: *Hashkediya Porachat* by Israel Dushman

The well-known song *Hashkediya porachat*, “The Almond Tree is Blooming,” celebrates the arrival of Tu BiShevat, and the soon-to-be spring weather, in which the trees will bloom, people will plant, and the weather will be warm again.

The lyrics were written by Lithuanian-Israeli writer and poet Israel Dushman, and the tune was composed by Ukrainian-Israeli composer Menashe Ravina.

Contemporary piece: *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss

*The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss shares a silly, but important story of how humanity can cause great harm to the world through greedy behaviors. A greedy character named the Once-ler (he uses nature wastefully) finds interest in the beautiful Truffula trees. He decides to create a factory using the Truffula trees. He uses them all up until there are none left. This causes all the other creatures to find new habitats and food and leave the town. The Lorax, who is telling the story to a boy, was the guardian of the Truffula trees. Pollution has filled the air and no beautiful Truffula trees remain. He lets the boy know that UNLESS someone like him cares a whole lot, nothing will change. People will continue to use and use and not care about anything but their need to produce and consume while taking every resource from the Earth. He hands the boy a Truffula seed, the last one, to hopefully plant and give the trees and their creatures one more chance. It needs clean water, fresh air, a forest, and protection from those wanting to cut it down.

This children's story provides two lessons to the reader. Nature and creation need us to guard and nurture them. We cannot overuse nature's resources. If we do, we will drain nature's products, and eventually, nothing will be left for future generations. The second lesson teaches that there is always an opportunity for a second chance. Unfortunately, in the ecological crisis our world faces, we may not have a chance to reverse our negative impacts on the environment. Climate change will not stop, but we can find ways to slow it down. Our Truffula seed, our second chance, might be finding ways to consume and produce more sustainably, and allowing the environment to recover from our abuses.

Discussion: *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein

*The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein teaches its readers the different ways a tree can be used. It also describes a unique bond between nature and a boy. While the boy continues to use and use the tree, the tree continues to be happy. Genesis 1:29-30 states that humanity was given dominion over God's creation. An interpretation of this verse includes the idea that humanity can use nature for our own benefit. However, it can also be interpreted that humanity has a responsibility to care for nature and God's creation in a way that nurtures, cares, and sustains it. Many times, we look at ways we can sustain nature through environmental social action projects. We also find ways nature sustains our lives. At the end of the book, the tree is a stump, and it still wants to help the boy. Nature takes care of our needs. However, we need to find ways we can also care for nature.

Break: Ellen Bernstein and Dan Fink

Death is seen as the complete end of life. Life is the beginning of a creature and death is its end. However, death can be seen as a stage in the existence and life of creation. When a plant dies, its materials break down, and with time, it will become nutrients in the soil that will sustain the lives of other plants. In Jewish tradition, a person will say "May their memory be a blessing" after saying the name(s) of someone they love. Although the person might no longer be alive, their impact on the world remains. Their teachings and good deeds will sustain us long after they have departed. Their memory lives on, and it continues to have an impact on others past their death. Like a tree that benefits from the nutrients of trees that lived thousands of years ago, humans benefit from the actions, good deeds, and efforts of those before us.

## Cup 4 Appendix

Blessing: by Ashley Englander

In this blessing, three verses from the Pentateuch are referenced. They state humanity's relationship with God's creation such as tending, filling, mastering, and releasing the Earth. It is a special relationship because no other creature is instructed by God to do these things. Our responsibility to tend the Earth includes cultivating the land for our own needs, conserving the land to lengthen its vibrancy and existence for future generations and other creatures, and connecting to God's creation through our consumption of creation's resources.

We fill the Earth through reproduction. However, those who choose or cannot have children of their own are not exempt from this responsibility. They must take part in teaching the children in their community to become responsible, caring adults who will continue to take care of the world when we are gone.

We can have dominion over the world by preserving and connecting with other living creatures. Through the sustainable use of animals, land, and water, we can be responsible masters of God's creation. We can nourish and help the land continue to grow.

Finally, we are commanded in Leviticus 25 to release the land from our dominion every seven years. We cannot work the land. This release of the land is called *shmitah*. *Shmitah* allows the land to rest and become revitalized for the upcoming six years. Humanity releases control over the land during *shmitah*. We are commanded to master the land, but this is a period for humanity to let go. Through these commandments, humanity has the chance to nurture and care for God's creation.

Teaching:

The participants are asked to read Jeremiah 17:7-8 and Psalm 1:1-3, which are very similar to each other. Both texts state that a person who trusts in God, and does not follow the wicked, will delight in God's blessings. The blessings they will enjoy will be constant sustenance, like a tree beside a stream of water. On Tu BiShevat, we can reflect on how God's creation provides for our basic needs like food, shelter, and water. Without those things, humanity could not survive. Therefore, we are grateful to God for providing these resources to us.

Song: "We Shall Not be Moved" by Joanie Calem

Joanie Calem's song, "We Shall Not be Moved/V'haya k'etz shatul" was originally composed by Amitai Ne'eman. Its purpose is to spark conversation with children about how they can stand "as strong as a tree by the water" when facing difficult situations in the world. Jeremiah 17:8 is the basis of this song. When sung, it provokes an urgent need to be strong like a tree and stand for the things we care about. On Tu BiShevat, humanity will stand strong for justice for the environment and God's creation. We have the strength within us, like a nourished tree by a stream of water, to nurture and safeguard God's creation. Ways to do this include taking political action, implementing personal choices that are sustainable, and learning about the environment around us.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-31444593/we-shall-not-be-moved-vhey>

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/We-Shall-Not-Be-MovedVHaya-KEtz-Shatul-6580398>

Contemporary Piece: *We are the Weather* "Dispute with the soul" by Jonathan Safran Foer

Jonathan Safran Foer, in *We Are the Weather*, writes a conversation he has with himself about humanity's role in combating climate change. In this specific passage, Foer states that he has learned a lot about humanity's role in climate change, and he knows that he needs to make changes in his life to combat his negative impacts on the environment. However, he doubts that he can make meaningful changes in his life. He is concerned whether humanity can figure out how to change its actions for the sake of the world. Foer remarks about the issue of conversations on climate change that many times end with a sense of hopefulness about the future of the world. Many times, these conversations end without any productive answer to the issue of climate change. He says that humanity wants to stay hopeful about the future, so we put off the discussions of real change we must make in our lives to safeguard the environment. Also, we might be hopeless about the future, in which case the negative implications of climate change will prevail. Therefore, we might be uncomfortable discussing our failures and the destruction of the world. Finally, Foer remarks that the subject of hope when used in conversation about climate change is shadowed by other issues.

Foer's conversation is an example of the conflict we have with ourselves and with each other when talking about our role in the environment and climate change. We find ways to reverse or slow down our negative impacts on the environment, and many times we say that these answers can stop climate change and repair the world. We hold onto these answers as a beacon of hope. However, we might subconsciously be hopeless about our actual impact on slowing down climate change. We find other issues to spend our time fighting for. We might think we cannot make a positive change as guardians of the world, or we may not want to change our current actions and habits. Either way, we find another subject, an easier issue,



that we throw our energy into because we might be able to see quick results. A lot of energy has been spent over several generations to care for the environment, and we may not be able to see its impact in our lifetime. Because of this, we may not change how we interact with the world. We may be complicit in our actions towards the environment because we cannot see a reward.

Poem: “I Look Up to the Sky” by Shmuel ha-Nagid (translated by Daniel B. Fink)

“I Look Up to the Sky” by Shmuel ha-Nagid describes the beauty of God’s creation that was designed specifically with special details. After the description of God’s creation, “earth’s inhabitants” are defined as beings who use and steal from God’s creation. Before they experience the results of their destruction, they try to leave. However, they cannot escape their fate of being engulfed in their destruction. “Earth’s inhabitants” might be humanity. Human beings use God’s creation for our own benefit, and many times we do not care for or nurture the Earth. The sky, stars, moon, clouds, and rain are described with adoration and beauty. However, its inhabitants, the people, are described as the ugly part of creation that seeks to destroy God’s world.

Samuel HaNagid was born in Merida, Spain in 993. He was a Talmudic scholar, statesman, poet, soldier, and philologist in Muslim Spain. He was a well-known Jewish poet of his time, and he is considered a visionary for the Jewish people today. His writing style was noticed by the vizier (a high-ranking political advisor or figure in a Muslim country) of Granada. He was hired as the personal secretary of the vizier, and he gave political counsel throughout his career. When he died, he was mourned by both Jews and Muslims alike.

Break: Kohelet Rabbah 7:13

Kohelet Rabbah 7:13 teaches that God's creation is made for humanity. However, it is important not to destroy creation because nobody will fix it if ruined. God will not fix our destruction of His creation. We are the only ones who can. On Tu BiShevat, we admire nature and all its resources that sustain our lives. God gave us the important role to be stewards of the land. We must nurture and care for the environment. If we abuse our world's natural resources, we will experience the repercussions of our actions that harm not only us, but other creatures and future generations.