

WITH WHAT SHALL I BLESS YOU:  
A TEXT IMMERSION IN MASECHET TA'ANIT

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## **Introduction:**

Over the past eight months, I have engaged in an intensive study in Masechet Ta'anit of the Babylonian Talmud. This masechet focuses on the prayers for rain, fasting in the face of drought and other natural disasters, and other fixed fast days throughout the calendar. Given the associative and free flow thinking that is present throughout the Talmud, the content of Masechet Ta'anit goes far beyond the main focuses.

Out of all the material I studied, I developed four distinct pieces:

“Ancient Lessons on Surviving a Drought” is an analysis of the communal fasting model presented in the first chapter of Ta'anit and how its approach can be applied to emergency drought relief today.

“As the Craftsman Who made Me” uses the tale of the Rabbi Eleazar ben Shimon in Ta'anit 20a-b to address the issue of snap judgments based on physical appearance over a recognition of the humanity within every person.

“A Scholar is like a Seed under a Clod of Dirt” - this piece utilizes lesser known texts out of Masechet Ta'anit for use in religious school staff meetings as a means of continuing education.

“Tu B'shevat Seder Source Sheets” – this piece utilizes sections of Masechet Ta'anit to further discuss the themes and ideas represented by the Kabbalistic four realms theology that is present in the Tu B'shevat seder.

## Ancient Lessons on Surviving a Drought

“Dear Diary,

This Shabbat has been an interesting one. It all started on Friday afternoon. After spending time in the sun, sweating, and watching the CIT-Staff Frisbee game, normally, we would go back to the cabin to get cleaned up before evening services. Instead, all of us were called to the amphitheater for an important announcement. One of the directors of the camp got up on the stage with a serious look on his face.

That important announcement: One of the pipes bringing water into the camp was broken, so until it could be repaired, all staff members and campers were going to have to limit the amount of water that we were using to make sure there was enough for everyone.

Given how hot it gets on our western facing mountain side, this was not fun news to hear. After the camp director was finished, he brought up the Israeli Scouts to teach us some ways that we could contribute to preserving the amount of water that we still had. Here’s how to take a shower with limited water: turn on the water and rinse your whole body, turn off the water and shampoo your hair, turn on the water to rinse out the shampoo, turn off the water to condition your hair and wash your body, turn on the water to rinse everything off, turn off the water and get out.

The Israeli Scouts also taught us how to wash our hands while conserving water, to make sure that we finished the water in our water bottles before filling up again, and to make sure we use the water left on the table at the end of meals to fill up our water bottles rather than let it be poured down the drain.

And this is what we did for the whole weekend. A time that is normally calm and serene had morphed into a stress-filled weekend, making sure no one took showers for too long, or wasted any water because it had gotten warm. Thankfully, the pipe is supposed to be fixed by the end of the day on Monday. At least now I know what to do if I am ever faced with a drought again.”

This first experience with “drought” came in the summer of 1999 at Camp Newman in Santa Rosa, California. After three days, I never wanted to be confronted with these kinds of conditions again. Little did I know that I would be confronted with two other statewide droughts: 2007-2009 and 2011 to the present.

The modern experience of drought is nothing new. Based on soil samples from ancient cities, archaeologists believe that drought may have been a factor in the collapse of the Akkadian empire around 2100 BCE. The first Biblical mention of drought comes in Leviticus. “If, for all that, you do not obey Me, I will go on to discipline you sevenfold for your sins and will break your proud glory. I will make your skies like iron and your earth like copper.”<sup>1</sup> The “skies like iron” evoke the idea of the gates of heaven being locked up, preventing any rain from coming down; while “earth like copper” describes the hardness and color of the land of Israel in the absence of rain. These verses set drought within the realm of divine consequences the Israelites will suffer if they violate the covenant with G-d. Leviticus does not provide a specific remedy to this situation. The only indication of a remedy comes from phrases such as “if you continue to go against Me and refuse to listen to Me,”<sup>2</sup> which infers that in order to bring relief from this divine drought, the Israelites only need to return to following G-d’s laws.

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 26:18-19

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 26:21

The rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud address the need for an explicit remedy to drought and other natural disasters in *Masechet Taanit*. Perhaps drawing inspiration from the observance of Yom Kippur, the rabbis established the appropriate approach as fasting. Starting on the seventeenth of the month of Heshvan, if no rain has fallen, an individual can take a fast upon themselves in order to bring the rain.<sup>3</sup> While a personal fast is valuable as it would bring rain faster, the majority of the discussion of fasting as a response to drought is focused on the public, communal fast, which the local court could decree if the beginning of the month Kislev arrived without rain. The Talmud goes so far as to give a warning of the severity of someone who separates themselves from the community in such a case of danger: “When the Israelites are in trouble, and one of them separates from the community, the two angels who accompany a person place their hands on his head and say to him: ‘Ploni, may this one who has abandoned the community never see the relief that is visited upon the community.’”<sup>4</sup>

What does the communal fast look like? The initial fast is a set of three fasts carried out over the course of a week, on Monday, Thursday, and Monday.<sup>5</sup> During the daylight hours, there is to be no eating or drinking on these days, but unlike on Yom Kippur, people are permitted to wear sandals, work, bathe, anoint themselves, and to have sexual relations. If it does not rain after these three fast days, then the court declares another set of three fast days. During this second set of fast days, there is no eating or drinking during the whole twenty four hours of the day, and people are now forbidden from wearing sandals, working, bathing, anointing themselves, and having sexual relations.<sup>6</sup> If this second set of fast days does not accomplish the job, then a third set of fast days, this time comprising seven days, is declared.

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<sup>3</sup> Taanit 10a

<sup>4</sup> Taanit 11a

<sup>5</sup> Taanit 10a

<sup>6</sup> Taanit 12a

These fasts are observed in a similar fashion as the second set of fasts with the inclusion of the blowing of the shofar. Yet, if this final set of fasts does not bring about rain, no further communal fast days are declared because it would become burdensome to the community.

Two lessons can be drawn out from this method of fasting and used today in our own efforts for conservation of water and other natural resources: reasonable expectations and community participation. Throughout the text, the rabbis make it clear that these fast days are not a continuous string of days with no food and water, but rather are spread out over time. These special fast days are only held on Mondays and Thursdays, allowing people to refuel on the days in between, including the full rest on Shabbat. In our own day, it is important to set reasonable expectations for conservation efforts. It would be unreasonable to expect people to give up their use of water completely, for example. We use water for cooking food, cleaning our homes and bodies, taking care of animals and plants, growing crops, etc. What is reasonable to ask is that people attempt to reduce the amount of water that they consume on a daily basis.

The other piece that makes this a viable method is the community participation. It is great when individuals try to reduce their consumption of water, but if they live in an area where the majority of the population is not taking the same actions, then their individual efforts might accomplish anything. When Governor Jerry Brown called for a 25% reduction in water use in April 2015, there were many wealthy people who resisted, and in one particular area in Southern California, the rate of water consumption actually went up.<sup>7</sup> Yet, when each member of a community does their part in decreasing their water consumption, it can produce real results. One example is in Los Angeles County, an area normally known for its water mismanagement.

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<sup>7</sup> Kuznia, Rob. "Rich Californians balk at limits: 'We're not all equal when it comes to water'". *Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/rich-californians-youll-have-to-pry-the-hoses-from-our-cold-dead-hands/2015/06/13/fac6f998-0e39-11e5-9726-49d6fa26a8c6\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/rich-californians-youll-have-to-pry-the-hoses-from-our-cold-dead-hands/2015/06/13/fac6f998-0e39-11e5-9726-49d6fa26a8c6_story.html) Published 6/13/2015

In October 2015, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power notified its residents that that they would be charged a little more because they had done too good a job of conserving water, to the point that the LADWP did not have all the funds that it needed to maintain the system properly.<sup>8</sup> The people of Los Angeles County had been able to conserve 18 billion gallons of water.

Over the last two months, the state of California has seen several storms that have provided much needed rain and snow. Some are even speculating the drought may be over. For many, this will bring much needed relief. They will no longer have to worry about letting the shower run while the water heats up or determining the best time of day to water their lawns. However, the need for conservation efforts is even more important now. No one knows when the next year or years with little to no rain will be, so conserving water now will ensure that we have the resources to be prepared when it does happen. If we continue to follow the lessons of reasonable expectations of water usage reduction and full community participation, then we will be prepared for another drought in the future.

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<sup>8</sup> Stevens, Matt and Alice Walker. "Water bills will creep up next year in L.A. because we're conserving so much." *Los Angeles Times* <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-dwp-water-rates-20151021-story.html>  
Published October 21, 2016

## Ask the Craftsman Who made Me

In October 2016, Tamika Cross was sitting on a Delta flight from Detroit to Minneapolis when she heard a commotion in front of her.<sup>9</sup> A woman was screaming that her husband needed help. Tamika, a doctor specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, immediately went into doctor mode and tried to get up to help, but was denied access to the man in need because the flight attendant did not believe that she was a doctor. When Tamika finally got the flight attendant's attention, she was asked to prove that she was a doctor, wasting time that could have been used to treat the man two rows in front of her.

Tamika posted her story on Facebook, where it went viral, and stated that she strongly believes she was prohibited from helping because as a black woman, she did not “look like a doctor.” Unfortunately, Tamika's experience is not unique. Many people have shared stories of their experiences of discrimination because of their gender, race, or religion. After learning of Tamika's story, other female doctors shared their own stories where they were ignored in the midst of a medical emergency due to their gender and skin color.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, a colleague from Loyola Marymount University told me of how as a teenager, her guidance counselor had told her that she was too pretty for any kind of work other than prostitution.

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<sup>9</sup> Hawkins, Derek. “Flight Attendant to black female doctor: We're looking for actual physicians” *Washington Post* [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/10/14/blatant-discrimination-black-female-doctor-says-flight-crew-questioned-her-credentials-during-medical-emergency/?utm\\_term=.064d7d8929ef](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/10/14/blatant-discrimination-black-female-doctor-says-flight-crew-questioned-her-credentials-during-medical-emergency/?utm_term=.064d7d8929ef) Published 10/14/2016

<sup>10</sup> Wible, Pamela. “Her story went viral. But she is not the only black doctor ignored in an airplane emergency.” *Washington Post* [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/tamika-cross-is-not-the-only-black-doctor-ignored-in-an-airplane-emergency/2016/10/20/3f59ac08-9544-11e6-bc79-af1cd3d2984b\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f50a72d55f4e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/tamika-cross-is-not-the-only-black-doctor-ignored-in-an-airplane-emergency/2016/10/20/3f59ac08-9544-11e6-bc79-af1cd3d2984b_story.html?utm_term=.f50a72d55f4e) Published 10/20/2016



Discrimination based on physical appearance is something that can even be seen in our own ancient texts. The Talmud tells one such story of Rabbi Eleazar ben Rabbi Shimon:

“Rabbi Eleazar ben Shimon was traveling from the house of his teacher in Midgal Gedor, riding slowly on his donkey along a river, feeling happy and excited because of the amount of Torah he had studied. Along his way, he came across a man who was exceedingly ugly. The ugly man greeted him, saying, ‘Peace be upon you, sir.’ Rather than return his greeting, Rabbi Eleazar exclaims, ‘Reika, how ugly are you! Are all your fellow citizens as ugly as you are?!’ The ugly man replied, ‘I do not know, why don’t you go and say to the craftsman who made me, ‘How ugly is the vessel which you have made.’”<sup>11</sup>

There are two ways of understanding this story. One is that Rabbi Eleazar is having a nice, peaceful journey after having spent time with his teacher, and finds himself faced with a person whose physical appearance is jarring compared to the scene around him. In this understanding, the words come out Rabbi Eleazar’s mouth from shock, rather than from a nefarious place inside him. The ugly man’s reaction in this explanation appears harsh, perhaps even overblown.

The second understanding hinges on the translation of the word “reika.” The word “reika” means empty. In this understanding, Rabbi Eleazar is making a snap judgment about the ugly man solely based on his appearance. His ugliness is a physical manifestation of his emptiness, and Rabbi Eleazar is calling him out for it, suggesting that he is lacking, good for nothing, and not worthy of any kind of dignity. Here the ugly man’s retort is one of righteous

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<sup>11</sup> Taanit 20a-b

indignation, reminding Rabbi Eleazar that he is not the one who is responsible for his appearance, and that it is unfair to judge him so harshly.

As the story continues, Rabbi Eleazar realizes the wrong that he has committed and apologizes profusely. But the damage has been done; Rabbi Eleazar cannot take back his words. One lesson that can be learned from this story is to not make quick judgments of people based on their physical appearance. A second, more important lesson, can be found in the ugly man's retort.

"I do not know, why don't you go and say to the craftsman who made me, 'How ugly is the vessel which you have made.'" The craftsman that the ugly man is referring to is G-d. He is reminding Rabbi Eleazar that the one responsible for his appearance is not himself, but G-d. The ugly man is also asking that we recall the first moment time when G-d created humans in Genesis 1. "G-d said, 'Let us make the human in our image, similar to our likeness...And G-d created the human in His image, in the image of G-d He created it, male and female He created them.'"<sup>12</sup> Not only did G-d create the ugly man, but G-d created all humans from the beginning, and created humans after the G-d's own likeness. Every human is a part of G-d's creation and deserves the dignity that comes with it.

There have been many issues over time that have caused divisions between people. In the story, above, the divisive issue is around ugliness and beauty. Through much of history, religion and belief has caused great divisions between people, leading to war and danger for

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<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

civilian populations. Today, one of the leading divisions people, fueling hate and bigotry, is race.

In response to the question, “Why do we hate?”, teacher and diversity trainer Jane Elliot, developer of the Blue Eyes-Brown Eyes exercise, replied: “We hate because we are taught to hate, we hate because we are ignorant, we are the product of ignorant people, who have been taught an ignorant thing, which is that there are four or five different races. There are not four or five different races, there is only one race on the face of the earth, and we are all members of that race, the human race...there is no gene for racism, no gene for bigotry, you are not born a bigot, you have to learn to be a bigot. Anything you can learn, you can unlearn. It is time to unlearn our bigotry.”<sup>13</sup>

Each of us is created in the image of G-d. Each of us is a part of the human race. Each of us is deserving of dignity. The next time you are confronted with someone, and you find yourself responding to their appearance, gender, religion, or race in the way that Rabbi Eleazar responded to the ugly man’s appearance, take a moment to pause. Remind yourself that the person in front of you is a human being, that there is more to them than meets the eye, and that they have a story to share. Greet them, ask them how their day is going, treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve. You may not be able to impact every single person, but each person you do encounter will have an impact on you.

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<sup>13</sup> Elliot, Jane. “There is only one race on the face of the earth” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVDVNdl2QSw>

# A Scholar is like a Seed under a Clod of Dirt:

## Text Studies for Staff Meetings

### **Rationale:**

As a human being, we never stop learning. Whether it is through formal studies or from life experiences, we are constantly changing and evolving as we learn. This is especially true of Jewish teachers and educators. While imparting knowledge and wisdom from our rich tradition to their students, Jewish teachers and educators learn from observing how their students interact with the material. Yet, this kind of learning does not often translate to the experience in staff meetings. My own experience with staff meetings at various religious schools has shown that either the same Jewish texts are consistently reused or no Jewish text is used at all. Continuing education is an important part of being a Jewish educator, and needs to be addressed.

Using a short text study to open each staff meeting has two benefits: introducing teachers to new material and framing the purpose of the meeting. While it is important to review previously studied material, continually using the same text studies during staff meetings stymies the growth of the teachers, both as individuals and as a community. Introducing new and unexpected sources opens teachers up to the full breadth of Jewish knowledge and insight. Staff meetings can often be wearing on teachers, with the focus predominantly on important, mundane, or stressful issues such as the calendar, behavioral problems, and lesson planning. Providing a text study at the beginning of each meeting brings a reminder that while the contents of the meeting are not always interesting, the purpose of the meeting is about improving the education of our students, a holy pursuit.

This short guide will provide a protocol for text study, as well as several texts from a section of the Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Ta'anit.

**Protocol:**

Each staff meeting should start with a fifteen minute text study. The time should break down as follows:

Pass out the text and pair up with another teacher. At each staff meeting, teachers should be encouraged to study with a teacher that they have not studied with before.

7 min – Partner Study. Each set of partners should read through the text together and offer their initial reactions. Then, they should turn their attention to answering the questions provided.

5 min – Group Discussion. Back together, each pair should share at least one insight from their partner study. Continue discussing the text and its questions.

3 min – Final Takeaway. Teachers should each answer the following question: How am I going to incorporate one lesson from this text into my teaching?

This protocol can be adjusted depending on the number of people at the meeting or the length of time available as the educator sees fit. If necessary, ask teachers to focus primarily on question 3 for each text study.

### **Ta'anit 7a**

Rabbi Bena'ah taught, “Whoever studies Torah for its own sake – their Torah study becomes a healing medicine for them, as it is said, ‘It is a tree of life to those who hold it fast (Proverbs 3:18)’...but whoever studies Torah for ulterior motives – their Torah study becomes a poison, as it is written, ‘My doctrine shall drop as the rain (Deut. 32:2)’”

Questions:

1. What does it mean to study Torah for its own sake?
2. What kind of ulterior motives could Rabbi Bena'ah be referring to?
3. How might this affect the way that you approach teaching Torah in your classroom?

### **Ta'anit 7a**

Rav Haninah bar Idda said, “How are words of Torah compared to water? As it is written, ‘All who are thirsty, come for water, (Isaiah 55:1).’ This is to say, just as water flows from a high place to a low place, so too words of Torah only endure with one who is humble in their knowledge.

Rav Oshaiah said, “How are words of Torah compared to water, wine, and milk?...Just as these three liquids only when kept in clay jars, so too words of Torah only endure with one who is humble in their knowledge.

Questions:

1. What comparison is being between Torah, a low place, and a clay jar?
2. Is it possible to maintain humility about your knowledge while teaching? If so, how?
3. How can you introduce the idea of humility into the classroom?

### **Ta'anit 21b**

Rabbi Yossi says: It is not the place honors the person, rather it is the person who honors the place. We find this to be the case in connection with Mount Sinai: While the Shekhinah, the Presence of G-d, was dwelling there, the Torah declared, “Neither the flocks nor the herds should graze before the mountain (Exodus 34:3)”; yet once the Shekhinah departed from Mount Sinai, the Torah said, “When the shofar blast is long, they shall come up to the mountain. (Exodus 19:13)”

Questions:

1. How does Rabbi Yossi explain that the Israelites showed honor for Mount Sinai?
2. What are some modern spaces that deserve honor?
3. How can you introduce the idea of respecting space into your classroom?

### **Ta'anit 20a**

Ahiyah the Shilonite's curse on Israel is better than Balaam's blessings on Israel.

Ahiyah the Shilonite cursed Israel by comparing them to a reed; he said to Israel, “For the Lord will smite Israel as a reed is shaken in water.” The reed grows by the water, grows new shoots, and has many roots. All the winds of the world could come and blow at it, the winds will not move the reed from its place; for it sways with the winds and as soon as they have stopped, the reed resumes its upright position.

Balaam blessed Israel by comparing them with a cedar, as it is said, “As cedars beside the waters. (Numbers 24:6)” The cedar does not grow by the water, it does not grow new shoots, and its roots are not many. All the winds of the world could blow at it, but they cannot move the cedar from its place. However, if the south wind blows at the cedar, the south wind uproots the cedar and turns it upside down.

Questions:

1. How could the reed have been understood as curse, and the cedar as a blessing?
2. Is something lost or gained by switching the reed and cedar?
3. In the classroom, is it more important to be a reed or a cedar?

## **Ta'anit 20a-b**

Once Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Simeon was traveling from the house of his teacher in Migdal Gedor, riding leisurely on his donkey by the riverside and feeling happy at the amount of Torah he studied. He happened to come across an extremely ugly man who greeted him, "Peace be upon you, sir". Rabbi Eleazar, however, did not return his greeting. Rather, he said, "How ugly you are! Are all your fellow citizens as ugly as you are?!" The man replied: "I do not know, but go and tell the Craftsman who made me, 'How Ugly is the vessel which you have made.'"

When Rabbi Eleazar realized his error, he dismounted from the donkey and prostrated himself before the man and said to him, "I submit myself to you, forgive me." The man replied: "I will not forgive you until you go to the craftsman who made me and say to Him, "How ugly is the vessel which you have made.'" Rabbi Eleazar walked behind him until he reached his hometown.

The man's fellow citizens came out to meet Rabbi Eleazar, greeting him with the words, "Peace be upon you, Teacher, Master." The man asked them, 'Who are you talking to?' They replied, "The man who is walking behind you." Upon hearing this, the man exclaimed: "If this man is a teacher, may there not be any more like him in Israel!"

The people asked him why and he recounted the tale of their meeting. They said to him: "Nevertheless, forgive him, for he is a man steeped in the Torah." The man replied: "For your sakes, I will forgive him. But only on the condition that he does not act in the same manner in the future."

Questions:

1. Who is in the wrong in this story?
2. Who is the craftsman and why is the craftsman important in understanding the man's anger?
3. Have arguments like this occurred in your classroom? How do you resolve them?



## **Ta'anit 20b**

Raba said to Rafram ben Papa: Tell me some of the good deeds of Rav Huna.

He replied: On cloudy days he would go about in a golden carriage, surveying every part of the city, and he would order the demolition of any wall that was deemed unsafe. If the owner possessed the means to repair it, he had to rebuild it himself; but if not, then Rav Huna would pay for it to be rebuilt.

Every Friday, he would send a messenger to the market and any vegetables that the farmers had left over he bought up and threw them into the river. Shouldn't he have distributed these among the poor? — He was worried they would become too reliant upon him... Then why did he purchase the vegetables at all? — Leftover produce could lead the farmers to do wrong in the future and not provide enough produce.

When he had a meal, he would open the door wide and declare, "Whoever is in need, let them come and eat."

Questions:

1. Are all of these actions "good deeds"?
2. How does access to money affect Rav Huna's ability for "good deeds"?
3. How do you balance the importance of tzedakah and personal action as paths for "good deeds" in your classroom?

## **Ta'anit 9a**

Rabbi Yossi ben Rabbi Judah says: Israel had three good leaders: Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and upon their merit three good things were provided for Israel: the Well, the Pillar of Cloud, and the Manna; the Well, for Miriam; the Pillar of Cloud for Aaron; the Manna for Moses.

When Miriam died the well disappeared...and there was no water for the congregation; but the well returned because of the merit of Aaron and Moses. When Aaron died the Pillar of Cloud and the well disappeared. The well and the cloud returned because of the merit of Moses, but when Moses died all of them disappeared.

Questions:

1. What made Moses, Aaron, and Miriam worthy of the three gifts they provided?
2. What can this text teach us about being present?
3. Have you ever had a time in your classroom where something seemed to be lacking because a particular student was absent?

## Tu B'shevat Seder Source Sheets

### **Explanation:**

Tu B'shevat, the fifteenth of the month of Shevat, is the Jewish holiday of trees. The first mention of this holiday is as the “new year for trees” is in the Mishnah.<sup>14</sup> This date coincides with the flowers of the almond trees starting to blossom, generally the first trees that start to rejuvenate as winter gives way to spring. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, the kabbalists created a ceremony for honoring the holiday and its connection to different themes in kabbalah based on the four cups of wine in the Passover seder. These four source sheets are intended to be used by a leader at a Tu B'shevat seder in a university setting, one sheet for each cup, not as a full hagaddah.

### **On each page:**

*Realm* – middle of the page, this section gives a brief description and particular focus on one of the four spiritual realms discussed on Tu B'shevat, according to Kabbalistic teaching.

*Cup* – left of the page, this section describes cup of wine or juice that should be drunk for that particular realm and how the colors are associated with one of the four seasons.

*Fruit* – right of the page, this section discusses the particular fruit associated with each realm. Each type of fruit also symbolizes different human personality types.

*Teaching* – bottom of the page, this section provides a text and discussion questions that connects to some aspect of the realm.

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<sup>14</sup> M Rosh Hashanah 1:1

When using the text sheets, the best method for moving around the page is to start in the middle, move to the left for the cup of wine, go to the right panel for the fruit, and then examine the teaching at the bottom of the page.

## **Food Blessings for Tu B'shevat:**

On Tu B'shevat, three blessings are generally used: *borei p'ri hagafen* – over wine and grape juice, *borei p'ri haetz* – over tree fruit and nuts, and *borei p'ri haadamah* – over produce of the ground. While majority of foods at the seder should come from trees, there are some fruits that can be used on Tu B'shevat actually receive the *borei p'ri haadamah* blessing. (Use the chart below as a reference.) When preparing food, try to have as many different foods that match the three types of fruit reflected in the seder.

<b>Blessing</b>	<b>Fruit with a hard outer shell</b>	<b>Fruit with a pit</b>	<b>Fruit that is wholly edible</b>
Borei P'ri Haetz	Almonds, Walnuts, Pomegranate, Oranges	Olives, Cherries, Nectarines, Dates, Peaches, Plums	Grapes, Apples, Pears, Carob, Figs
Borei P'ri Haadamah	Bananas, Pineapple, Peanuts, Melons		Cucumbers, Tomatoes, Strawberries

<b>Translation</b>	<b>Transliteration</b>	<b>Hebrew</b>
Blessed are you, Adonai, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.	<i>Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, borei p'ri hagafen.</i>	ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן
Blessed are you, Adonai, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who creates fruit of the tree.	<i>Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, borei p'ri haetz.</i>	ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ
Blessed are you, Adonai, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the ground.	<i>Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, borei p'ri haadamah.</i>	ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי האדמה

## Assiyah – Realm of Making

### First Cup:

All White

The first cup of wine is all white, symbolizing winter. Representing new beginnings, such as when light was created in darkness.

### Assiyah:

The realm of physical creation. Here we acknowledge the importance of being grounded and connected to our physical surroundings.

### Fruit:

The fruit associated with the realm of Assiyah has an inedible shell and an edible interior. This reminds us of the hardness of the ground in the midst of winter. It also symbolizes people who on the outside appear hard, but on the inside are kind and gentle.

### Teaching: Taanit 22a

Rabbi Beroka Hoza'ah used to frequent the market at Be Lapat where Elijah often appeared to him. Once he asked, "Is there anyone in the market who has a share in the world to come?"...he caught sight of a man wearing black shoes and who had no thread of blue on the corners of his garment and he exclaimed, "This man has a share in the world to come." Rabbi Beroka ran after him and asked, "What is your occupation?" And the man replied: "Go away and come back tomorrow." Next day he asked him again, What is your occupation? And he replied, "I am a jailer"... Rabbi Beroka asked the man, Why do you not have fringes and why do you wear black shoes?" He replied, "That the Gentiles amongst whom I constantly move may not know that I am a Jew. When a harsh decree is made against Jews I inform the rabbis and they pray to God and the decree is annulled." He further asked him, When I asked you, 'What is your occupation?' why did you say to me, 'Go away and come back tomorrow?'" He answered, "The government had just issued a harsh decree. I said I would first go and inform the rabbis of it so that they could pray."

Questions:

- 1) What makes the jailer's designation as "one who has a share in the world to come" questionable to Rabbi Beroka?
- 2) How does the jailer use the persona he has created to his advantage?
- 3) Share a time when you have hidden your true self from the world.

## Yetzirah – Realm of Formation

### **Second Cup:**

White with a hint of Red

The second cup of wine is white with a hint of red, symbolizing spring. The earth is starting to wake up with new shoots and leaves as each day brings more heat from the sun.

### **Yetzirah:**

The realm of inner growth. Not only is the earth starting to awaken with the first blossoms and the sun staying out longer each day, but the soul starts to grow and develop as well.

### **Fruit:**

The fruit associated with the realm of Yetzirah are edible on the outside, but have a hard pit in the middle. It reminds us to focus on the growth of the soul. It also symbolizes people who appear quite welcoming on the outside, but keep their inner selves guarded.

### **Teaching: Taanit 4a**

Raba taught: A young scholar can be compared to seeds under a clod of dirt; once he has sprouted, he shoots forward.

#### **Questions:**

- 4) What comparison is being made between a young scholar and a seed?
- 5) What other types of people can be compared to a seed?
- 6) Share a time when you noticed yourself start to “sprout” and grow.

# Beriyah— Realm of Creation

## Third Cup:

Half Red Half White  
The third cup of wine is half red half white, symbolizing summer. The earth is full as it earnestly begins to produce its yield throughout the warm months ahead.

## Beriyah:

The realm of creative balance. In this realm, there is no need for protection, either outer or inner. The physical and spiritual work together in the fullness of the world.

## Fruit:

The fruit associated with the realm of Beriyah are completely edible. It reminds us to find the balance between the physical and spiritual in our lives. It also symbolizes people who are authentic to themselves, who are the same on the outside as they are on the inside.

## Teaching: Taanit 24a

Rabbi Judah HaNasi declared a fast, but no rain came. Ilfa, some say it was Rabbi Ilfi, prostrated before the ark and prayed, “One who causes the wind to blow,” and the wind blew, “and the rain to fall,” and rain began to fall. Rabbi Judah asked him, “What sort of deeds do you do?” He replied, “I live in a poor, isolated place, where this is no wine for kiddush on Shabbat or for Havdalah. I go to great pains to bring wine for these rituals, and thus fulfill the obligation of the whole community.

Rav came to a certain place. He declared a fast, but no rain came. The prayer leader prostrated before the ark and prayed, “One who causes the wind to blow,” and the wind blew, “and the rain to fall,” and the rain fell. Rav asked him, “What are your deeds?” He replied, “I am a teacher of children, and I teach children of the poor and rich alike to read. And I do not charge a fee of anyone who cannot pay.”

Questions:

- 7) What could be missing from Rabbi Judah HaNasi and Rav to keep them from creating rain?
- 8) How doe Ilfa/Rabbi Ilfi and the prayer leader share that allows them to make it rain?
- 9) Share a time when your inner self and outer self were working together.



## Atzilut – Realm of Nobility

### **First Cup:**

Red with a splash of White.

This final cup symbolizes the autumn, both a time of the earth having produced its annual bounty and preparing to start the cycle over again.

### **Atzilut:**

The complete realm of the spirit. The spirit has reached its fullness after moving through the three lower realms, and revels in the awesomeness of the mysteries still to be discovered.

### **Fruit:**

There is no official fruit associated with realm of Atzilut, as it is the highest spiritual realm. Possible to eat all of the fruits of Assiyah, Yetzirah, and Beriyah, because without food to sustain the body, the soul cannot find its sustenance.

### **Teaching: Taanit 23a**

One day, Honi the Circle Drawer was traveling along a road. He came upon a man who was planting a carob tree. Honi asked the man, “How long does it take that tree to bear fruit?” The man replied, “It takes seventy years.” Honi exclaimed, “Are you sure that you are going to live another seventy years?!” The man replied, “I found a world of carob trees. Just as my fathers planted those for me, I am planting these for my children.” Further down the road, Honi sat down and fell asleep. While he slept, a rock formation grew around him, hiding him, and he slept for seventy years. When he woke up, he saw a man harvesting carob from the tree. Honi said to him, “Are you the one who planted this tree?” The man replied, “I am his grandson.”

#### **Questions:**

- 10) What is the difference between the mindset of Honi and the man?
- 11) If you were Honi, what would be your response after the last line of the story?
- 12) Share one way you would like to help prepare for future generations.