

THE PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHULCHAN ARUCH PROJECT

The Tu B' Shevat Seder

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The Significance of Tu B'Shevat

Introduction

We will outline the Halachic Significance and understanding of how one goes about observing **Tu B' Shevat** and how we can pass down the importance of this day to our children for the generations to come.

THE FIRST MISHNA IN ROSH HASHANA BRINGS DOWN THAT

“There are four New Years” etc.

“On the Fifteenth of Shevat (according to Bais Hillel) is the New Year for Trees.”

Starting with the *Gemara* on *Daf* 14a through 15b the *Halachas* are brought down including the impact this day has on the type of *Esrog* you will have on *Succos*. It is apparent that the *Rishonim* intended that *Tu B' Shevat* should be treated as a *Chag* as it is counted as one of the four New Years.

- A) Just like on three of the New Years a *Taanis* is forbidden (The first of *Nissan*, The first of *Elul* and the first of *Tisbrev*), so to the fourth which is the Fifteenth of *Shevat* it is forbidden to fast.
- B) Even a *Chasan* on the day of his Wedding is not to fast on *Tu B' Shevat*. When the Community desires to institute a fast on a Monday, Thursday and Monday, they should push off their fast so a fast should not be decreed on *Tu B' Shevat*.
- C) *Tachanun* is not said on *Tu B' Shevat* and *Mincha* on the day before.
- D) We also don't say *Kaal Erech Apiem* on Monday and Thursday in addition to not saying *Av HaRachamim* on *Shabbos* as well as *Tzedekesecha Tzedek* by *Mincha* on *Shabbos*.
- E) Many are not accustomed to give Eulogy's (*Hespeidim*).

Tu B' Shevat in Halacha Today

The *Rosh Hashana* or the New Year for Trees acts as the boundary or cut off date between one year and the next since most of the rains of the previous year, in *Eretz Yisrael* have already fallen. A certain percentage of the fruit have reached the stage where it has begun to ripen. This is defined as from the time of blossoming until the fruit has reached one third of its full growth. Fruit which have reached this stage are attributed to the previous year. Any new blossoming of fruit after this day falls into the category of the New Year. As a result *Tu B' Shevat* is a decisive factor in determining the Laws of *Maaser* and *Orlah*.

The Fifteenth of Shevat is the midpoint of winter and we are looking forward to the spring. The sap of the trees is beginning to flow and rise in the roots of the trees, though unseen by man and as a result the fruits are manifesting their first stage of formation.

The *Rosh Hashana* for Trees is a time of *Tefilla* (Prayer). We joyously celebrate this day in asking our creator to continue to shower his benevolence on his children the *Bnei Yisrael* as well as the rest of his creations in the world as it says in *Bircat HaMazon* “**Hazon es HaOlam Kulo Betuvo**” (He Nourishes the entire world in his goodness).



The Tu B'Shevat Seder

Despite the fact that *Tu B' Shevat* is discussed in both the *Mishna* and *Gemara* there is very little information available about the Holiday as well as not having a well defined structure to follow it. In the mid 1500's the students of the *Ari*, *Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi Zt'l* formulated a special *Tu B'Shevat Seder* that was set up along the lines of the *Pesach* (Passover) *Seder*. They wrote a brief pamphlet entitled the **Pri Eitz Hadar** which offers us a structure that provides a positive and enjoyable way to celebrate this spiritual and meaningful holiday. *This is the first stage of the countdown to Pesach which is in exactly 60 days from tonight.*

The Seder is broken down into 4 sequences. **In the beginning of each sequence wine is poured which we do not drink until the end of the sequence.** After the conclusion of the entire *Seder* a festive meal is served accompanied by music, song and the feeling of the joy of life while enjoying the wine and good food. White table cloths are placed on the tables with candles lighting up the room. One should dress up in their *Shabbos* clothes. Incense, preferably myrtle, which is taken during *Succos*, is placed on the tables as well as many flowers which are used to decorate the tables and give the air a pleasant fragrance. Your finest drinking vessels should be used as each participant will be drinking four glasses of wine or grape juice. The size of the glasses will determine how much wine will be needed. You will need an equal amount of Bottles of White and Red wine. A full wine glass (regular size). Figure 1 Bottle per person (½ Bottle Red and ½ Bottle White). If you use shot glasses then figure each bottle will be ample for 4-6 people.

NEEDED FRUITS

Olive, Date, Grape/Raisin, Fig, Pomegranate, Esrog (candied). Apple, Walnuts, Almonds, Carob, Pear, Azarole (or Mango), Quince (or Filbert), Cherry, Red Crab Apple (or Apricot), Pistachio, Pine Seed, Hackberry (or Prune), Lupine (or Pecan). Also one should have a wheat cracker or cake.

All should be reminded to check for Bugs where it may be a problem.

All should have a copy of a *Chumash* and a *Tanach* in a language that they can understand. Everyone at the *Seder* should have one of the Species, whole or a piece that will be glorified at the *Seder*...and eaten. Someone should of course lead the *Seder*. Now all should get comfortable and let's start the *Seder*.

Sequence I

Pouring the Wine The first sequence starts with everyone filling each others cups just like the Pesach Seder with all **white** wine. This first sequence represents the northerly direction and the winter season, when the earth is dormant and there is no vegetation. The white wine is the symbolic representation of a world without life blood.

Wheat Cracker Everyone takes a Cracker or Cake and makes the appropriate blessing (*Borei Me-nay Mezonos*) and says *Tebillim* (Psalm) 81:17 ***“But he would feed him with the finest wheat.”*** We now comment on the wondrous gift of wheat. Some say wheat was once a tree.

We now take the time to give notice of the taste-flavor, consistency, texture, color, etc. of the wheat. Our purpose in life is to give praise and acknowledge all the good our creator does in creating and sustaining us by providing the delicacies that are derived from wheat.

The Olive We now read from the verse from Jeremiah (*Yeremialh*) 11:16 ***“That G-d had called your name, “A leafy olive tree, beautiful with Shapely fruit.”*** We then make the Blessing prior to eating the Olive of *Borei Pri HaEitz*, (having in mind the rest of the fruits that will be eaten at the Seder that require the blessing of HaEitz). We then recite from *Tebillim* (Psalms) 128:3 ***“Your children shall be like Olive plants surrounding your table.”*** A characteristic of an Olive Plant is they never wither.

The Date No additional Blessing is necessary on all fruits until the conclusion of the Seder due to the initial Blessing on the Olive. We now read in *Tebillim* (Psalm) 92:13 ***“A Righteous man flourishes like the Palm Tree, like the Cedar in the Lebanon he will grow tall.”*** The fruit of the Palm Tree is sweet. We now read from the Verse in *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs) 7:9 ***“That your stature is like a Palm Tree.”*** The Palm tree doesn't bend or sway to the changing winds and so too the Jewish People who remain steadfast and strong throughout the generations in faithfully following the laws of the Torah in all its exactness.

The Grape *Tebillim* (Psalm) 128:3 ***“Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your house.”*** Since the vine is nearby, it receives proper attention. When a man gives his wife the proper attention and respect they will have many fine children.

The Wine The next verse is taken from *Ya'akov's* blessing of *Yehuda* that it would flow with wine like a fountain (*Rasbi*). It also refers to the *Moshiach* (Messiah) who would come from

Yebuda as well as his teeth which is white from an abundance of Milk. Now all read *Bereishbis* (Genesis) 49: 11-12 ***“He Loads his young donkey with grapes of vine, and his she-donkey’s foal with a vine branch. He washes his clothes in wine, and his cloak in the blood of grapes. His eyes are red from wine and his teeth are whiter than milk.***

Now we drink the cup of wine while reclining on our left hand side and reciting the Blessing of *Borei Pri Ha-Geffen*.

Sequence II

Pouring the Wine

The second sequence starts with everyone filling each others cups with $\frac{3}{4}$ white and $\frac{1}{4}$ red wine. ***This is the easterly direction and the spring season, when New Life enlivens the dormancy of the barren winter.***

The Fig

We now turn to *Mishlei* (Proverbs) 27:18: ***“He who guards the fig tree shall eat its fruit, and he who watches his master will be honored”*** If one doesn’t guard his fig tree another will come and eat its fruit. Similarly, he who helps his employer will be honored.

The Pomegranate

Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) 7:13 - ***“Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has flowered, if the grape blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in flower; there I will give you my loves.”*** The "*Ripening of Pomegranates*" alludes to those fitting to guide the Jewish people in the wisdom of the Talmud.

The Esrog (Citron)

Leviticus (VaYikra) 23:40) ***“And you should take for yourselves on the first day, the fruit of the tree hadar, branches of the palm trees, and the boughs of thick leaved trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the L-rd your G-d seven days.”*** From this verse, we learn of the commandment to take the four species: (1) *Lulav*, (2) *Esrog*, (3) *myrtle* and (4) *willow*, during *Succos*. Here the *Esrog* is described as the "*Pri Eitz Hadar*" (fruit of the majestic tree). On *Tu B'Shevat*, every tree is judged; either it will live or die, flourish or fade. Therefore, mystics have used this day to pray for a perfect *Esrog* for *Succos*. **DO NOT MAKE A SHECHIYANU ON THE ESROG.**

The Apple

Song of Songs (*Shir HaShirim*) 2:3: ***“Like the apple trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and***

his fruit was sweet to my taste." The flavor of the apple refers to the Jewish People's recognizing Hashem and the sweetness of Torah.

The Wine *Song of Songs: (Shir HaShirim) 2:4 "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."* Mt. Sinai was the banquet house where all Jews satisfied their desire for the truth. There they said: *"We will do and we will understand."*

Now we drink the 2nd cup of wine while reclining on our left hand side. (*A brocha is only said on the first cup*).

Sequence III

Pouring the Wine The third sequence starts with everyone filling each others cups with ½ white and ½ red wine. This is the direction of the south, and the summer season, where the trees are producing fruits and ripening.

The Walnut *Song of Songs (Shir HaShirim) 6:11: "I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine had blossomed, whether the pomegranates were in flower."* The garden of walnuts, with its pleasing fragrance, refers to the Temple. While the *Kohanim* offered sacrifices and burned incense, the Levites' sang Psalms. At the same time, the Israelites from all over *Eretz Israel* recited special prayers called "*mah-a-ma-dos*". These services enabled the *Great Sanhedrin* (Jewish Supreme Court and Legislature) to properly interpret the law.

The Almond *Numbers (Bamidbar) 17:22: "And it came to pass, that on the morrow, Moshe went into the Tent of Testimony; and behold, the rod of Aharon from the house of Levi had sprouted, and brought forth buds, and blossomed, and yielded almonds."* *Korach* contested the authority of his cousins, *Moshe* and *Aharon*. He believed that they had usurped the priesthood. The dispute was adjudicated in the following manner: The *Al-mighty* commanded *Moshe* to collect a staff from each tribe and to place them in the *Tent of Testimony*. The blossoming of *Aharon's* rod was conclusive proof that indeed, he had been divinely chosen. *Rashi*, the famous Biblical commentator, explains the significance of almond sprouting in this way: *"Just as the almond tree is quickest to sprout, so too, the one who arouses strife against the priesthood is quickly punished."*

The Carob *Genesis – 2:8-10: “And the Eternal L-rd, Al-mighty planted a garden eastward in Eden: and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Eternal L-rd, Al- mighty made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good food; the tree of life also, in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden.”*

After the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai fled from the Romans to a cave in the small Galilean village of Peki'in. For the next thirteen years, both he and his son, Elazar, toiled day and night writing the holy Zohar, the basis of Jewish mysticism. In order to sustain them, the Al-mighty created a spring and a carob tree outside their cave.

The Pear The reading for pears comes from the tractate “*Kilayim*” (Hybrids): the fourth Mishna of Chapter I: “*Amongst the trees, the pears, the Cursstumenian pears, the quinces, and the azarole are not heterogeneous. Therefore, a cross-breed between any two is Halachically permitted. The apples, the crab apples, the peaches, the almonds, the jujubes, and the lote, although resembling one another are heterogeneous and a crossbreed is prohibited.*”

The Wine Since twelve fruits (corresponding to the twelve arrangements of the Tetragrammaton) have been eaten, a special *I'chaim* for a “*bi'nas tova u-brocha, pree u-tnuvam*” (a year of goodness and blessing, gain and productivity) is made.

THE FOLLOWING VERSE FROM MICAH 4:3 4 IS RECITED:

“And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up a sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit, every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the L-rd of Hosts has spoken.”

Now we drink the 3rd cup of Wine while reclining on our left hand side.

Sequence IV

Pouring the wine The fourth sequence starts with everyone filling each others cups with $\frac{3}{4}$ **Red** wine and $\frac{1}{4}$ **White**. The fourth sequence is of the west, and the autumn season when the vast majority of the fruits have either ripened or are in the final stages of ripening; and winter's dormancy has begun to creep back into the earth.

- The Azarole
(or Mango)** *Mishna Brachos (Blessings) 6:2: "If one says over fruit of the tree the blessing, 'who creates the fruit of the ground', he has performed his obligation. But if he said over produce of the ground, 'Who creates the fruit of the tree', he has not performed his obligation. If he says 'by Whose word all things exist' over any of them, he has performed his obligation."* Fruit of the tree is considered "of the land" as well. The reverse, however, does not hold true. Everything fits into the category of "all".
- The Quince
(or Filbert)** *Mishna Brachos 6:3: "Over anything which does not grow from the earth one says: 'by Whose word all things exist'."*
- The Cherry** *Mishna Brachos 6:4: "If one has several varieties (of fruit) before him, Rabbi Yehuda says, that if there is among them one of the seven kinds (for which Eretz Israel is noted), he makes the blessing over that, but the Sages say that he may make the blessing over any kind that he pleases."* The law is according to Rabbi Yehuda (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 21 1: I).
- The Red Crab
Apple
(or Apricot)** *Mishna Brachos 6:6: "If those at the table are sitting upright (i.e. do not form a party), each one says grace-after-meals for himself; if they have reclined, one says grace for all."* The others fulfill their obligation by answering "Amen".
- The Pistachio** *Mishna Brachos 6:7: "This is the general principle: whenever, with one of food, another is taken as subsidiary, a blessing is said over the principal kind and this serves for the subsidiary."*
- The Pine Seed** *Mishna Brachos 6:8: "If one has eaten grapes, figs, or pomegranates, he says a grace of three blessings after them. So says Rabbi Gamliel. The Sages, however, say: (he says) one blessing which includes three."* Rabbi Gamliel is referring to grace-after-meals. He is of the opinion that it should be said after the fruits Israel is noted for. However, the law is according to the Sages.
- The Hackberry
(or Prune)** *Mishna Brachos 7:1: "If three persons have eaten together, it is their duty to invite (one other to say grace)."*
- The Lupine
(or Pecan)** *Mishna Brachos 8: 1: "Bais Shammai say that the blessing is said first on the day (e.g. Kiddush on Shabbos or festivals) and then over the wine, while Bais Hillel say that the blessing is first said over the wine and then over the day."*

The Wine Now we drink the 4th cup of Wine while reclining on our left hand side. After the fourth cup, the rest of the evening is spent singing, dancing, and learning Torah for the glory of the Eternal. Another ten varieties of fruit are eaten making a total of thirty.

The Festive Meal We now make our after *Bracha's* wash and serve the festive meal. Many have the custom of playing Music, singing, speaking more words of Torah. Feel the Joy of being Alive. Enjoy the wine and good food. *Daven for your ESROG and try to imagine its Size, Color and Shape...*

Our mystics teach that there are four worlds.

In descending order of purity they are:

Atzilus – The world next to G-d (i.e. His thought that wills existence), emanation, - The First Sequence

Briyah – the World of creation, - the Second Sequence

Yetzirah – The World of formation, - The Third Sequence

Assiyah – The World of integration (action) - The Fourth Sequence

This Seder is offered in Loving Memory of Yehoshua Moshe Ben Akiva Bergman Zt'l who spent countless days and nights in bringing the light of Tu B'Shevat into the world. In addition, we remember another special light, R' David ben Avraham Gold a"b, who was called to the Olam HaEmess whose legacy and the way he conducted himself is affecting 10's of thousands of others years after his passing which occurred on this holy day of Tu B'Shevat. We as well as remember Devorah bas Moshe Avigdor Ha Levi a"b, who left on the 12th of Shevat and who was the epitome of what a Jewish Grandmother should be in carrying on and passing to her grandchildren and great grandchildren the proud traditions from a world that was almost totally destroyed. Despite being the sole survivor of a huge family that was destroyed in the Holocaust, she always maintained her sweetness, smile and pureness of Heart. They are all sorely missed. The uniqueness of this work again comes from the Diaspora Yeshiva in Yerushalayim which continues to bring so much light into this world, may they continue their holy work until the days of Moshiach and beyond.