

A SEDER FOR
TU B'SHEVAT





When you think of a new year, what do you picture? Your birthday, your own special new year with candles and a cake? January 1, with noisemakers, party hats, and streamers? The beginning of the school year, with a new notebook, book bag, and lunch box? Or maybe Rosh Hashanah, with apples, honey, and the sound of the shofar.

Tu B'Shevat, the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, is another new year, the New Year of the Trees. In Hebrew, it is called Rosh Hashanah Le'Ilanot. Like other new years, Tu B'Shevat has a rich tradition of celebration.

The Hebrew letters Tet and Vav which spell Tu have a number value of 15. Tu B'Shevat means "the 15th of Shevat."

Two Opening Videos

[Shehecheyanu](#) [Tu B'Shevat and Winter](#)

Tu B'Shevat falls in late January or early February. In many parts of the world, the ground is snow-covered, and birds have flown off to warmer spots. In Israel, however, where the holiday began more than 2000 years ago, the winter rains have tapered off, and the sap that brings food to the limbs of the tree starts to rise. Buds appear, and the land takes on a springtime glow. As nature comes to life, it feels like a new year.

The Kabbalists, a group of Jewish mystics living in Israel in the 16th century, created a Seder for Tu B'Shevat. They gathered in the evening around a beautiful table decorated with sweet-smelling flowers and lovely candles. Long into the night, they sang, and talked, and ate.

Today, we gather as they did to study, sing, and celebrate the great miracle of trees.

How good it is that we have come together!

All sing:

Hinei mah tov u'mah na'im shevet achim gam yachad.

(Music p. 29)

THE FIRST CUP OF WINE

We begin our seder for Tu B'Shevat, as we begin all holiday celebrations, with the drinking of wine or grape juice. Before the seder is over, we will drink four cups. Each cup reminds us of a season in Israel.

The first cup is entirely white wine or juice, reminding us of winter, when nature is asleep. The earth is barren, sometimes snow-covered, awaiting the rebirth of spring.

THE SEDER PLATES

On the table are three plates of fruit, each of them different. During our seder, we will taste fruits from each plate, so we may notice and appreciate their differences.

According to the Kabbalistic tradition our world is comprised of 4 worlds and each of these worlds is associated with one of the four seasons. The first world, the world of Assiyah, is the word of tangible physicality and is associated with winter. In winter the ground is frozen, but we know it contains the life of the spirit below.

The white wine or juice we drink in recognition of the world of Assiyah symbolizes winter's pale light and white snow.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.

First Seder Plate

Fruit and Nuts with a hard shell and soft on the inside

The different types of fruit and nuts, just like the different types of wine are associated with each of the 4 Kabbalistic worlds and the different seasons. Just like the white wine is associated with the world of Assiyah and winter, so too are the fruits and nuts on the first Seder plate that have a hard exterior and a soft interior: the Orange, Pomegranate and Peanuts.

In winter we layer ourselves in clothing, blanketing ourselves from the cold just as the earth is insulated by snow. The fruit we eat for the world of Assiyah, likewise has a protective outside and soft interior. Removing the hard outer layer of the pomegranate, peanuts and tangerine or whatever other kind of fruit and nuts in this category exposes a vulnerable inside.

The shell which conceals these fruits also protects. We know what that feels like. In the world of school, work, and everyday activity, our spiritual selves require protection and nurturing. Sometimes we wrap ourselves in a tough outer shell, to protect our feelings and our hearts.

As we eat these fruits representing Assiyah, may we find healing in our physical lives: in our relationships with our bodies, in our strength, in all matters physical and practical, in our environment.

This type of fruit and nuts represents people who are tough on the outside and soft on the inside. The peel and the shell represent boundaries or protective layers. Once the hard outer covering is removed the essence is revealed. As we eat the orange, pomegranate and peanuts let us ask ourselves, “when do we need to be tough on the outside to preserve our inner core?” A native born Israeli is called a Sabra, after a cactus fruit that is hard on the outside and sweet on the inside. When did I meet a barrier that then softened when I was able to persevere? Sometimes things are difficult at the start, but then get easier as you go further.

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of Assiyah, the world of tangible physicality:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.

THE SECOND CUP OF WINE

The second cup of wine is darker. We pour a bit of red wine into the white. Watch it change colors.

In Israel, as spring approaches, the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth. Gradually the land changes its colors from white to red, as pink and white cyclamens appear in the mountains.

The second of our worlds according to Kabbalah is the world of Yetzirah. This world that is associated with spring is a world of change, emotion and transformation. In this world we turn clay into bricks, iron into plows, words into poetry. In this sphere we celebrate creative power: both ours, and God's. We celebrate change and creativity, flux and flow.

To symbolize this world, we drink white wine or juice with a dash of red. This gradual deepening of color parallels the reawakening of colors in nature as the sun brings the earth back to life. In spring, the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth and the first flowers appear on the hillsides. As we drink the second cup of wine or juice, white with a dash of red, may we, like the flowers, blossom and reach toward our full potential.

We add a bit of red wine or juice to the white and recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.

The Second Seder Plate

Fruits that are soft on the outside, with a hard pit inside

To acknowledge the world of Yetzirah, we eat fruits without protective shells —dates, apricots, peaches and plums — to symbolize how, in spring, we will forget our protective attire and expose our soft bodies to the sun. Still, these fruits contain pits, reminding us that we may still have hardness around our hearts. Despite the wondrous expressions of our spirit, each of us is still tied to the hard stone of ego. We still feel the need to protect what makes us vulnerable.

As we eat the fruit of Yetzirah, may our hearts be open to the feelings and needs of ourselves and others, allowing the warmth of our care to extend to the whole the world. May we find healing in the realm of emotions; may we find healing in our hearts.

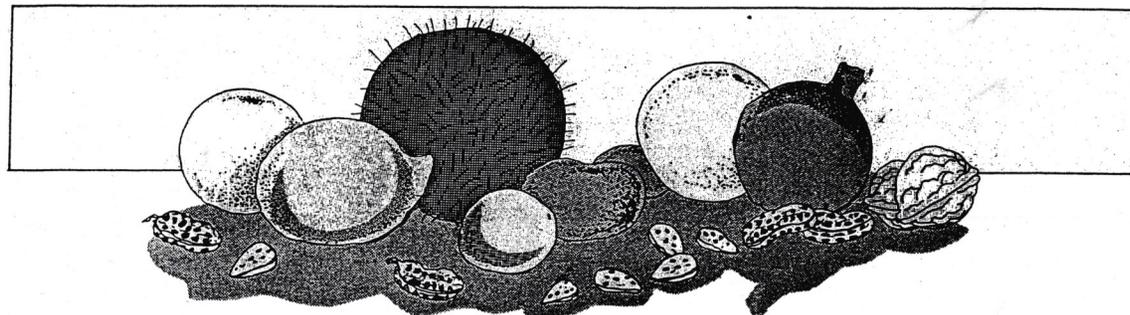
As we eat this type of fruit, let us each ask the question, “when do I want to make sure my outside is soft and inside clearly strong? Sometimes things seem easy at first, but then get harder. When do we hit a wall or a plateau, and what does it take to persist?”

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of Yetzirah:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

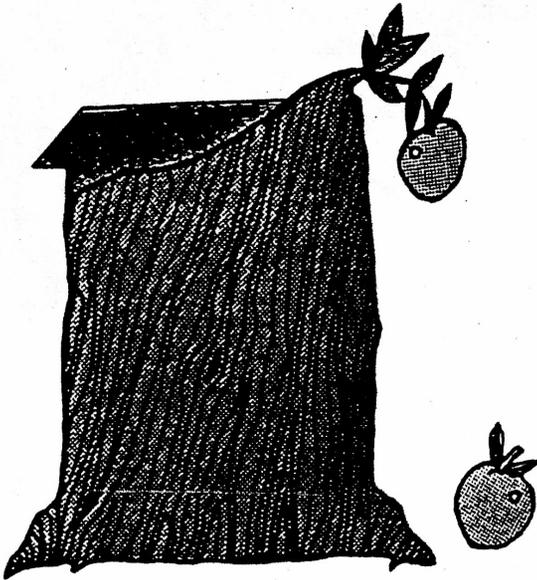
Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.



FOUR QUESTIONS FOR TU B'SHEVAT

Why is this day different from all other days?



Other New Year celebrations honor events and people. Why does this New Year honor trees?



On other days, we eat many kinds of foods. Why today do we especially eat fruits which grow in Israel?



On other days, we take trees and fruit for granted. Why today do we think about conserving and sharing?



In many parts of the world, it is wintery and cold. Why today do we speak of planting?

As we answer these questions, we will learn about the holiday we have come to celebrate.

1. WHY TODAY DO WE HAVE A NEW YEAR JUST FOR TREES?

Certain mitzvot in the Torah make it very important to know the age of trees.

The Torah requires farmers to give a tithe (one tenth) of all crops grown during a given year to the priests of the Holy Temple. Tu B'Shevat marked the beginning of the year for tithing trees.

The Torah also says that we may not eat the fruit of a tree until the fourth year after it has been planted. Tu B'Shevat figures into this calculation as well.

In addition to these practical reasons for celebrating the birthday of trees, Tu B'Shevat celebrates the Jewish people's love of trees.

In the Talmud, we learn that when a new baby was born, the parents planted a cedar tree for a boy and a cypress tree for a girl. The children cared for their trees, and when they grew up and were ready to be married, branches from the two trees were used to make the pillars of the chuppah, the marriage canopy.

By planting trees, people showed they believed in a future for their children, who would grow up enjoying the fruit, shade, breeze, and beauty provided by trees.

2. WHY TODAY DO WE ESPECIALLY EAT FRUITS THAT GROW IN ISRAEL?

After the Temple was destroyed, and the Jews were forced to leave the land of Israel, the original purpose of Tu B'Shevat was lost. The laws of planting and tithing crops did not apply outside of Israel. But the holiday was preserved as a symbol of the love of the Jewish people for their land.

It became a custom to eat fruits that grow in the Holy Land—almonds, dates, olives, figs, carob, and pomegranates.

The Kabbalists created a formal Tu B'Shevat celebration modeled after the Passover Seder. Their Haggadah, called *Pri Etz Hadar, The Fruit of the Goodly Tree*, contained readings about trees from the Bible and the Talmud. They ate 15 different kinds of fruits, nuts, and grains, and drank four cups of wine.

In modern times, Tu B'Shevat has taken on new meaning. With the rebirth of the State of Israel, trees have become the symbol of rebuilding the land. When the early pioneers came to Palestine 100 years ago, the land was barren from centuries of wars and neglect. They planted trees and made the land bloom again.

Let us sing a song the Israeli pioneers sang while they planted:

Artzah alinu, artzah alinu, artzah alinu. (2)

K'var charashnu v'gam zaranu (2)

Aval od lo katzarnu. (2) (Music p. 29)

We have come up to the land, we have tilled the soil, and sown the seeds, but we have yet to harvest our crop.

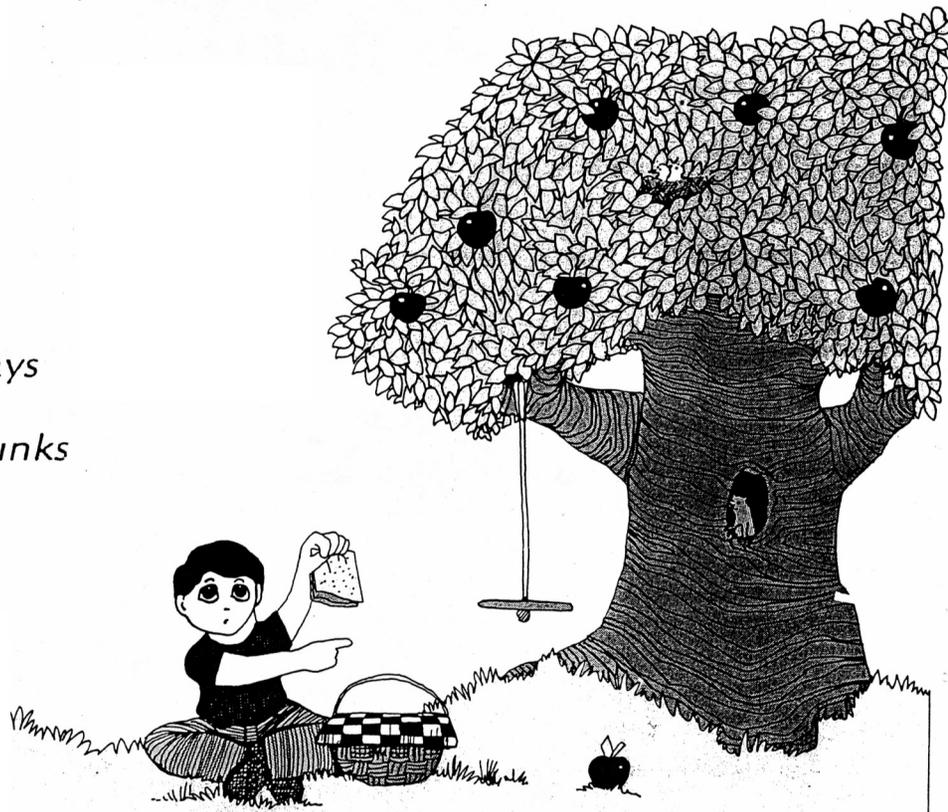
3. ON OTHER DAYS, WE TAKE TREES FOR GRANTED. WHY TODAY DO WE THINK ABOUT CONSERVING AND SHARING?

Trees were so important that Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai taught: If you should be standing with a sapling in your hand when the Messiah arrives, first finish planting the tree, then go and greet the Messiah.

And the Bible tells us that when you make war against a city, you must not destroy its trees, because the trees of the field are your life.

The rabbis interpreted this as meaning that we should not be wasteful or destructive. Preventing forest fires, conserving energy that is needed to produce food, and recycling paper products are things we all can do to help our environment.

*It doesn't seem fair
that a tree
that makes such
a good place
to hang your swing
and give shade
to people on hot days
and homes
to birds and chipmunks
could someday
get to be
a paper napkin.*



Throughout history, the Jewish people have cared about those who are hungry. The laws of the Torah required farmers to leave the corners of their wheat, grape, and olive fields uncut. Harvesters could not pick up any stalks they had forgotten or dropped. These “leftovers” were reserved for the poor and the stranger to gather and eat. The Rabbis called the Torah *Etz Chayim*, the Tree of Life. Do these laws help explain why?

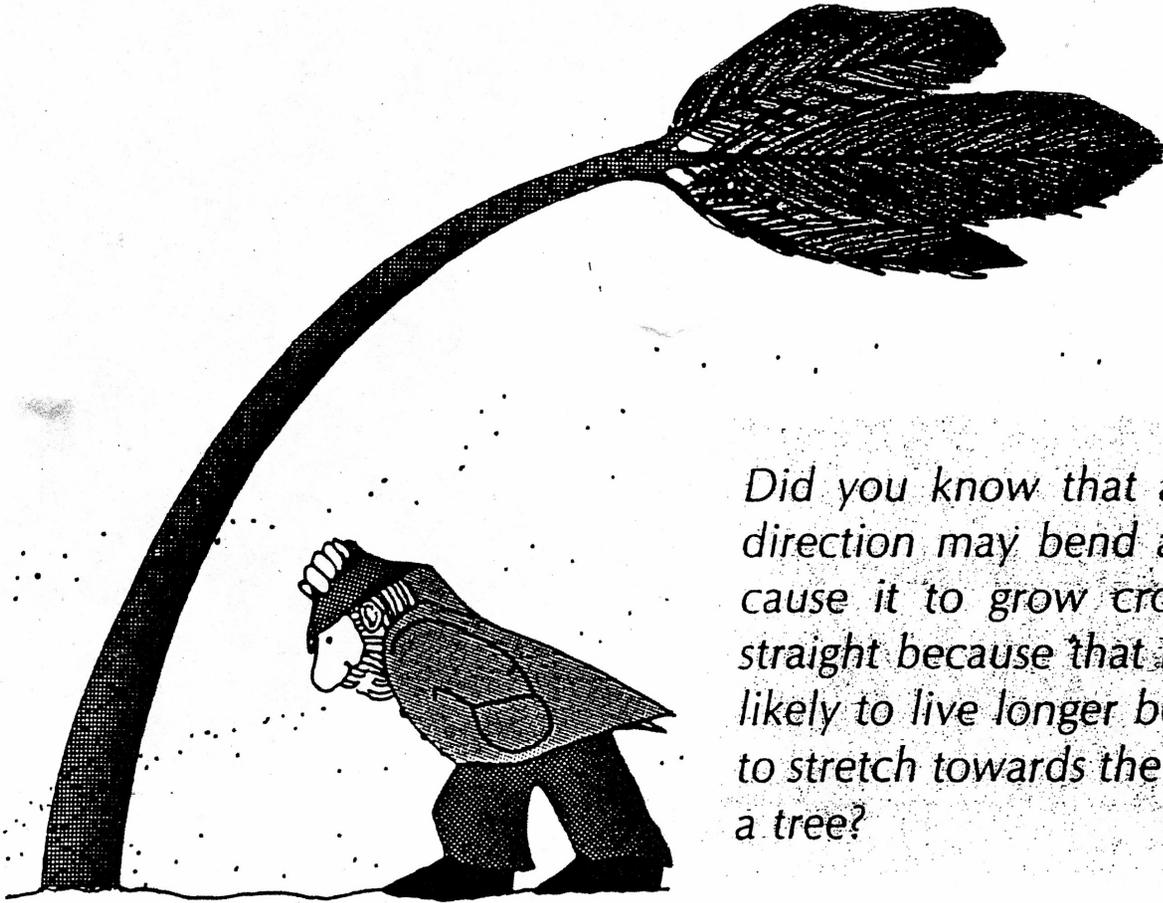
A *tzadik*, a righteous person, is often compared to the *erez* or cedar tree. The cedar grows straight, and so does a righteous person. The cedar’s shade extends a great distance, just as a righteous person’s good deeds help many others.

There is a Tu B’Shevat custom of giving *Ma’ot Perot*, money to needy families so they can buy fruit. We pass a tzedakah box around the table to collect coins for *Ma’ot Perot* and to plant trees in Israel.

As we participate in the mitzvah of tzedakah, let us sing a song together:

*Tzadik katamar yifrach, yifrach }
Tzadik katamar yifrach } 2
K’erez ba’Levanon yisgeh (2)
K’erez ba’Levanon yisgeh, yisgeh. (Music p. 30)*

The righteous shall flourish like a date palm; he shall grow tall as a cedar in Lebanon.



Did you know that a steady wind blowing from one direction may bend a tree, and that uneven light will cause it to grow crooked? But a tree usually grows straight because that is the best way for it to grow. It is likely to live longer because its leaves have more room to stretch towards the sun. Do you think a person is like a tree?



Eli Cohen

Eli Cohen, an Israeli spy who got the Syrians to plant Eucalyptus trees to shade the Syrian Bunkers in the Golan Heights. When Israel was attacked by the Syrians during the 6 day war of 1967, the Israelis were able to defeat the Syrians because they knew exactly where their bunkers were as marked by the trees. [Click here](#) for a short video about this story.

THE THIRD CUP

The third cup of wine is still darker. We fill our kiddush cups with red wine and add a dash of white wine. Watch the colors mix.

As summer arrives, the land of Israel becomes bright red. Tulips and red poppies burst forth and bloom. The ground becomes soft. The farmer turns over the earth and drops in the seeds. Water, sunshine, and time combine to create new life.

The third of our worlds, according to Kabbalah, is the world of Briyah: the world of air, thought, and contemplation. Briyah is the world of the holy breath of creation. We breathe out what the trees breathe in; God breathes in us and through us. We recall the words of Genesis: “Adonai formed a human from the dust of the Earth, and blew into its nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being...placed in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and protect it.”

In the world of Briyah, that is associated with the season of summer, we drink red wine or juice with a dash of white, reminding us that as the land becomes warmer and the colors of the fruits deepen as they ripen, we too become warmer and more open.

We add a bit of white wine or juice to the red and recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.

The Third Seder Plate

Fruits that are completely edible inside and out

In acknowledgement of the world of Briyah, we eat soft fruits that have no shells or pits to remind ourselves to relinquish both our shells and the stones we carry inside us. These types of fruit are soft inside and out. They are like people who are easy to get to know.. They represent times when we want to be totally open, outside and inside, as with a good friend or soul mate.

In our deepest relationships, may we be like the fruit of Briyah, with no inner shell and no outer façade.

As we eat the fruits representing Briyah: grapes, raisins, blueberries and strawberries, may we find healing in our intellectual lives: in our minds, in our thoughts, in the heat of passionate argument and the light of brilliant insight.

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of Briyah:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.



4. WHY ON A COLD AND WINTER DAY DO WE TALK ABOUT SPRING PLANTING?

In Israel, Tu B'Shevat has become a day for planting trees. Children go out into the fields, valleys, and deserts and plant hundreds of saplings. Jewish children all over the world contribute money for tree-planting.

When the Israeli children plant their trees, they sing a song about the *shkediya*, the almond tree, the first to bloom in the spring. Let's sing it, too:

*Hashkediya porachat, hashemesh gam zorachat
Tziporim al rosh kol gag m'vasrot et bo he'chag.
Tu B'Shevat higiya, chag ha'ilanot. (2) (Music p. 30)*

The almond trees bloom under the sun's rays. The birds on the rooftops chirp a welcome. Tu B'Shevat, the holiday of trees, has arrived.



THE FOURTH CUP

Our fourth cup of wine is all red. Summer ends, the trees are filled with blossoming flowers, and the crops are growing tall as we reach autumn, the season of the harvest.

The fourth of our worlds according to Kabbalah is the world of Atzilut essence and spirit and is associated with the season of Fall... This is the world of that which is intangible. To represent Atzilut, we drink deep red wine or juice. The pure red liquid represents the full bloom of nature before the cold winter. In this world we know what is and we can feel what is, even though we cannot physically touch it. As we drink the fourth cup of pure red wine or juice, may we feel the essence of life and become strong, like healthy trees, with solid roots in the ground and with our arms open to the love that surrounds us.

We take up a cup of red wine or juice and recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the vine.

To acknowledge this world of Atzilut, we eat no fruit. In this spiritual world, we become aware of God's love, mercy, and wisdom perceived with our hearts, not our senses. Our hearts are full and we praise the Source that renews all creation. The Four Worlds (Assiyah, Action, Yezirah, Emotion, Briyah, Thought, and Atzilah, Spirit) are each nested inside each of the others. We live in all four realms at once. Sometimes we have hard shells, like the nuts and fruit of Assiyah. Sometimes we have a rock inside us, like the pit in the fruits of Yetzirah. Sometimes we are soft all the way through, like the fruits of Briyah. And sometimes we are so connected with the Holy One of Blessing that we melt beyond our bodies altogether, living in Atzilut. May we find blessing in each of these four ways of being, each of these four seasons, each of these four worlds.

A Prayer of Reb Nachman of Bratzlav:

Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone; may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass — among all growing things and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer, to talk with the One to whom I belong. May I express there everything in my heart, and may all the foliage of the field — all grasses, trees, and plants — awake at my coming, to send the powers of their life into the words of my prayer so that my prayer and speech are made whole through the life and spirit of all growing things, which are made as one by their transcendent Source. May I then pour out the words of my heart before your Presence like water, O Lord, and lift up my hands to You in worship, on my behalf, and that of my children! May it be Your will, O God of our ancestors, that through our eating of the fruits You have created, the trees be filled with the glory of their ability to renew themselves for new blossoming, from the start of the year to its end, so that our lives too will be renewed and filled with goodness, blessings, and peace.



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי
מְזוֹנוֹת.

Bārūkh Ata Adonai, Eloheynu Melekh haOlam, boray minay m'zonot.

**Praised are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe who creates various kinds
of foods.**

for processed foods (jams, canned foods, fruit juice, etc.)

We end with the blessing of thanks for the food and wine we have shared:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, עַל הַגָּפֶן וְעַל פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן,
עַל הָעֵץ וְעַל פְּרֵי הָעֵץ:

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam al hagafen v'al p'ri hagafen, al ha'etz
v'al p'ri ha'etz.*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, for the vine and its fruit and the tree and its fruit.

May it be Your will that the trees whose fruit we have eaten and blessed will be filled with the strength to flourish and grow during the coming year...for goodness and for blessing, for life and for peace.

In every seed, there is the promise of a new and vital plant. So it is with every child. Each young life holds the promise of a new generation.

לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה פְּרִי וְתְנוּבָה!

L'SHANAH TOVAH U'VERACHA P'RI U'TENUVAH

MAY THE YEAR BE FRUITFUL AND BLESSED!