

ראש השנה לאילנות

Tu B'Shevat (The new year of the trees)



Tu B'Sh-WHAT?

Tu B'Shevat (the 15th of Shevat) marks the end of the agricultural year for trees. The rabbis of the Mishnah set the date as the cut off point so that people would know which year their fruit of their trees would be taxed in.

That's probably not the Tu B'Shevat that you know. Perhaps for you it's a time to be grateful for nature. Perhaps you think of planting trees, or perhaps you've taken part in a Tu B'Shevat seder and have met the more mystical side of the day.



This resource explores some of the different ways that Jews connect to Tu B'Shevat, and contains questions to explore and ways to celebrate.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions— drop us a line!

Tu B'Shevat in the Mishnah

"There are four "beginnings of the year." The first of Nissan is the beginning of the year for kings and holidays. The first of Elul is the beginning of the year for animal tithes. Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say that animal tithes start on the first of Tishrei. The first of Tishrei is the beginning of the year for years, for the Sabbatical years, the Jubilees, for planting, and for vegetables. **The first of Shevat is the beginning of the year for trees, so says Beit Shammai. Beit Hillel says it is the 15th of that month"**

Talmud Rosh Hashannah 2a

In Mishnaic times, Tu B'Shevat, the 15th of the Hebrew month of Shevat, was... a date relevant to calculation of taxes. The exact middle of winter was chosen as the end of the financial year for trees: tithes on fruit after this date belonged to the next year. So the Mishnah in Tractate Rosh Hashanah labels it "the New Year of the trees."

The Israelites didn't sweat over tax forms, though, worrying about getting a check to some priestly taxman. Economics and spirituality, environment and society, were more integrated: part of the fruitful bounty received from God via trees was 'returned to God' via the priests and the Temple, while part was redistributed to care for the poor.

[adapted from Jeremy Benstein]



After the destruction of the second temple, there was no priest or temple to bring tithes to, so the observance of Tu B'Shevat faded away...

How (or should) we continue to mark dates in the Jewish year when their original purpose no longer exists?

Some of the tithes that ancient Israelites gave to the priests were given to the poor and others to the priests for the upkeep of the temple. They were a way of making sure that society was taking care of those who weren't able to feed themselves

The **IF campaign** is a new campaign that has just launched to do something about the fact that the world produces enough food for everyone, but not everyone has enough food.

The campaign is based around 4 messages that they want to take to the G8 in June.

IF we give enough aid to stop children dying from hunger and help the poorest families feed themselves.

IF governments stop big companies dodging tax in poor countries.

IF we stop poor farmers being forced off their land and grow crops to feed people, not fuel cars.

IF governments and big companies are honest and open about their actions that stop people getting enough food.



Scan the code on the right to see the film and get involved.

Tu B'Shevat and the Kabbalists

In the 17th century, Jewish mystics in the town of Tzfat brought new meaning to Tu B'Shevat. They created a 'seder' (like we have on Pesach). Like on Pesach, there were four cups of wine, readings and fruit to eat.

The Tu B'Shevat seder has become a popular way to celebrate, here's an easy guide to creating your own:

You will need:



Fruits

- 1.) A fruit with an inedible shell. The shell conceals what is inside and also protects it. These fruits remind us of our own personalities, often hardened on the outside. It also reminds us of our connection and reliance on a world enveloped by materialism. e.g. Tangerine, Grapefruit or Kiwi
- 2.) A fruit with an inedible pit or seed. Deep inside us is where we find our truest self, this is about getting in touch with and honouring the still small voice inside us. e.g. Peach, Avocado or Olive
- 3.) Fruits which are edible inside and out. Is it possible to be at one with ourselves and with the world around us at the same time? Celebrate a way of living with no barriers, no holding back, and fully living an awesome life. e.g. Grape, Fig or Apple
- 4.) Instead of fruit, the 4th plate contains different seed packets for planting. We take action to make the world a better place. Think about how seeds hold the potential for new life, rebirth, hope, and change.

4 Cups of Juice

The different colours of white and red grape juice represent the changing seasons:

1st Cup. This one is just the white grape juice. It represents winter, when nature is asleep. The earth can be snow covered, taking a rest from blooming and blossoming.

2nd Cup. This one is white juice with a little red mixed in. It represents the spring approaching and the colours of the season changing as the snow melts and flowers begin to show themselves.

3rd Cup. This is mostly red with a little white mixed in. It reminds us of summertime, and flowers in full bloom.

4th Cup. This one is all red. It represents the rich and dark fall autumn colours. Leaves are changing, crops are growing, and the trees are filled with blossoms.

4 questions

This is up to you— have a look at the themes of the fruits and cups of juice, or perhaps invent your own?

[This resource is adapted from shirlala.com]

Tu B'Shevat and Israel

For many Jews, Tu B'Shevat is closely associated with planting trees, but do you know where this tradition comes from?



The tradition of planting trees on Tu B'Shevat was started by early Zionists. Theodore Herzl famously planted a Cypress tree in the Jerusalem hills during his first visit to Israel. Initiated by communities in the Galilee, the day was taken on by teachers during the British Mandate and was marked in schools with parades and festivals and by excursions to plant trees in nearby forests. Planting trees (especially Eucalyptus trees) was an essential part of draining swamps that covered parts of the Land of Israel to make them inhabitable for the new communities.

Have a look at this quote from the book of Amos:

"I will restore my people Israel. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine. They shall till their gardens and eat their fruits. And I will plant them on their soil, nevermore to be uprooted from the soil I have given them"

Amos 9:14-15

According to the quote, what is the importance of planting for Israel?

How do you spell טו בשבט?

As (c)hanu(c)ka(h) has taught us, transliteration is a tricky topic. At The Movement for Reform Judaism we write Tu B'Shevat— which is the most popular way to spell it. Others write Tu Bishvat, Tu B'shvat, Tu Beeshvat, Tu Bi'Shevat or one of another 10+ versions that Google tells us exist.

What's the challenge?

Tu B'Shevat is a Hebrew date. *Tu* (tet vav) is the Hebrew letters 9 and 6 which tells us it's the 15th. *B'* means 'of' and Shevat is the month of the Hebrew calendar. Because of the way the Hebrew is put together and the way the words conjugate, we pronounce it as Tubishvat.

BUT...

If you don't speak Hebrew, or even if you do, would you know that Tubishvat was made up of 3 parts? Would you be able to work out how it is spelt in Hebrew? Does it even matter? The war over how to spell Tu B'Shevat has been raging on several Jewish blogs.

Mah Rabu (<http://mahrabu.blogspot.co.uk/2006/02/tree-tree-tree-tree-tree-tree.html>) argues...

The name of the 11th month is Sh'vat or Shevat. There is a sheva under the first letter, and it's a sheva na (vocal sheva) because a sheva under the first letter is always na. The name of the month is prefixed with the preposition b' or be- that's the letter bet with another sheva.

Hence, many think that the result is "B'Shevat" or some such. BUT there is a rule that a word may not begin with two shevas. So... the preposition becomes bi -- the sheva is lengthened to a chirik (that's the vowel that's just one dot under the letter). The sheva under the shin becomes nach (quiescent), since it's no longer at the beginning of a word; now it's just at the end of a closed syllable (bish).

Hazon (<http://www.hazon.org/how-do-you-spell-tu-bshvat/>) responds...

Finding a way in English to give a sense of the grammar/structure of the Hebrew. My problem with the "correct" transliteration in this instance is that "Bishvat" doesn't in any way convey to a non-hebrew speaker that - בשבט b'shvat - is a prefix followed by the Hebrew month of Shvat. Tu B'Shvat is, to my mind, a much clearer conveying of what's going on in the Hebrew than Tu Bishvat.

Tu B'Shevat and the Environment

"The Torah compares humans to trees because, like humans, trees have the power to grow. And as humans have children, so trees bear fruit. And when a human is hurt, cries of pain are heard throughout the world, so when a tree is chopped down, its cries are heard throughout the world." (Rashi)



On Tu B'Shevat we often hear the story of Honi the circle maker:

One day, Honi the Circle Maker was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked the man, "How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit? The man replied, "Seventy years." Honi then asked the man, "And do you think you will live another seventy years and eat the fruit of this tree?" The man answered, "Perhaps not. However, when I was born into this world, I found many carob trees planted by my father and grandfather. Just as they planted trees for me, I am planting trees for my children and grandchildren so they will be able to eat the fruit of these trees."

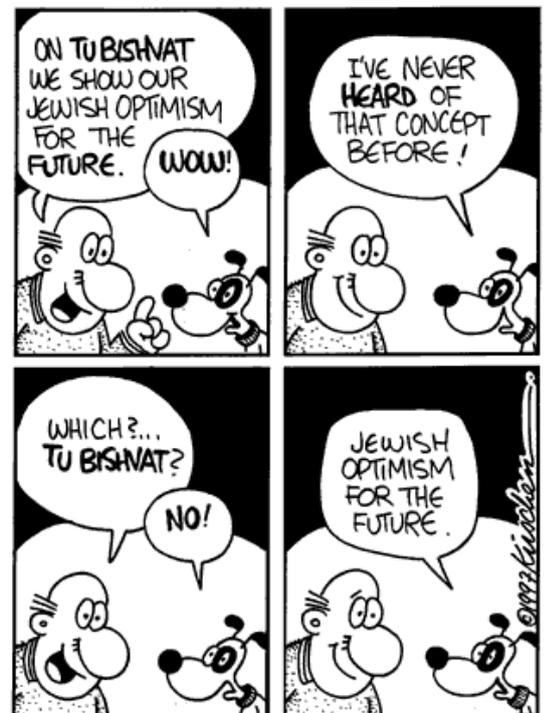
How can the story of Honi the circle maker help us think about the environment? What are we doing now that will impact the lives of those who come after us?

Environmental work that builds bridges

As part of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, a piece of land was set aside that has special status under international law. The peace park or 'Island of Peace', as it is known, is a joint project of the Israeli and Jordanian governments to rehabilitate the Jordan River.

The park is used to educate people about issues of water use and sustainability and is being developed as a sanctuary for wild birds.

To find out more about the park, or other projects that bring people together to care for the environment, visit the Friends of the Earth Middle East website www.foeme.org



Kibbutz Lotan is a Reform Kibbutz in the Arava Valley in Southern Israel.

They "strive to fulfill the biblical ideal "to till the earth and preserve it," in our home, our region, the country, and the world. We are working to create ways to live in harmony with our desert environment."

Thinking about the environment we live in, and the impact we have upon it is an important part of Tikkun Olam (the repairing of our world), The residents of Lotan dedicate their lives to this mission.

What do you do in your daily life to care for the environment?

Our Sources

This resource was compiled with the help of several sources, here's what they were:

Tu B'shvat– A 1973 Choveret from The Youth and Hechalutz Department of the Jewish Agency

The Four Faces of Tu B'shvat– Jeremy Benstein

Create Your Own Tu B'shvat seder– Shira Kline (shirlala.com)

If you want to get in touch about this resource, or to suggest ideas for future ones, please be in touch:

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