

MoHo Den Food Justice Tu B'Shevat Seder

Program Schedule:

- 5 minutes introductions/welcome to Moishe House
- 43 minutes Seder
 - 5 min Background/Intro to Tu B'Shevat - Community Member (Jake?)
 - 3 min - Banana & 1st Sip - All White
 - 10 min Food Supply Chain
 - 5 min Info - Community Member
 - 5 min Discussion
 - 3 min - Dates & 2nd Sip - ½ Red and ½ White
 - 10 min Food Apartheid
 - 5 min Info - Community Member
 - 5 min Discussion
 - 3 min - Figs & 3rd Sip - ¾ Red and ¼ White
 - 3 min - Honi the Circle Maker - Community Member
 - 3 min - Spiritual Sustenance & 4th Sip - Red with a hint of white
 - 3 min Closing of Seder and Transition
- 12 minutes beeswax reusable food wrap

*Sections of the Seder will be assigned ahead of time to community members

References:

- Food Apartheid - Kimberlee Crenshaw
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQeorPkPLmU>
- Supply Chains
 - <https://youtu.be/um2Q9aUecy0?t=2880> stop @ 49:37

Program Goal:

Educate the community on food injustice and sustainability through the lens of Tu B'Shevat

Materials Needed (Delivered to participants):

- Banana
- Dates
- Figs
- Barefoot bottles of Wine
 - Red
 - White

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What is Tu B'Shevat?

Tu B'Shevat is one of the four Jewish New Years mentioned in the Mishna - or oral law, that usually takes place in late January or early February to celebrate the New Year of the Trees and renew our focus on sustainability and justice. **Tu** means 15, and B'Shevat means in the month of **Shevat**, the Jewish month we're currently in which is why we celebrate the holiday on the 15th of the month.

Historically, Tu B'Shevat was a tax holiday - Think of April 15th. Tu B'Shevat marked the transition from one fiscal year to the next. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the exile of the Jewish people, Tu B'Shevat lost its original meaning and was reinvented.

This reinvention came in the form of the Tu B'Shevat Seder. In an echo of the Passover Seder, the Tu B'Shevat Seder has four cups of wine and symbolic foods. This Seder was created in the 16th century by Kabbalists in Tzfat. Kabbalah is Jewish mysticism that seeks to understand the true essence of the Divine. Kabbalists believe in the concept of the **Etz Chaim** or tree of life. This tree is made of 10 **Sefirot**, which are aspects of the Divine and a blueprint for the creation of the world. Each of these **Sefirot** is a way to approach the **Ohr Ein Sof**, light without end (another way to describe God). During the seder, we progress from white wine to red, from fruits with thick peels to unprotected fruits - symbolizing a transition from the physical to the spiritual realm. There are four kabbalistic realms, moving from the most physical to the most metaphysical.

Another aspect of Tu B'Shevat is ecological awareness and justice. This is because trees are a major factor in the health of our planet, with forests serving as "Earth's lungs." Today, we will be approaching this holiday through the lens of food insecurity and sustainable food systems.

Before we get to our first cup of wine and first fruit, we will say the prayer for positive new experiences, including the each annual holiday.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחַיֵּנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְמַן הַזֶּה
*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, Shehecheyanu, vekiyanu vehigiyanu
lazman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, Who has caused us to live,
and has sustained us, and has enabled us to come to this time.

First Cup of Wine and First Fruit

The first cup of wine we will be drinking is pure white, like the winter. It represents the beginning, the time when creation began with the separation of light from darkness. The seedling of the tree is like this first light. It is a spark of divine creation which contains within it the potential to become a tree. We will pour the white wine into our glasses and drink half of the cup:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

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

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

The first fruit is a fruit with an inedible outside and an edible inside. This is representative of the world of action, the concrete world farthest from the **Ohr Ein Sof**. In the physical world, the need is greatest for protection, for shields and defenses. It is risky, at this level, to let our defenses down, to open up, to peel off protective shells. And therefore, we will peel and eat our banana - reciting the following blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה.

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

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the earth.

Sustainable Food Systems

This is a holiday focused on trees. Through that focus, we can look at the broader food supply chain and its impact on the planet. One of the leading contributors to the current environmental crisis is the way the modern food system is set up, with factory farming and industrialized agriculture wreaking havoc on ecosystems across the planet. Trees and forests are particularly impacted by modern agriculture, with large swaths of the Amazon and other rainforests being clear cut for cattle grazing and monoculture plantations for crops such as cocoa or coffee beans.

We will now watch a brief clip from the Netflix nature documentary series *Our Planet*. The episode is entitled "Jungles" and this section is about the rainforests of Borneo and the orangutans who make these jungles their habitat.

Activity:

1. Calculate your carbon footprint
<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/carbon-footprint-calculator/>
2. Come back together and discuss “scores,” especially food implications
 - a. The average household uses 7 tons of CO2 acquiring, cooking, eating and wasting food per year.
3. What’s one step you’re willing to take to cut back on your food carbon footprint?

Second Cup of Wine and Second Fruit

Our second cup of wine consists partly of white light - the spark of Divine holiness. Yet, we already see the red flame of life which has begun to burn within it. The flame symbolizes the tree’s growth as she is nourished. Beginning as a small sapling, she starts to gain her physical and spiritual strength. The small trunk reaches toward the sun, roots soaking up water from the ground, tiny leaves breathing in air, and the fire of life swelling within her. This is the cup that represents the spring, the beginning of new growth. We add red wine to the white wine that is already in our cups, so that the cup is again full, say the blessing together, and then again drink only half of the wine in the cup:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha’olam, borei pri ha’gafen.

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

The second fruit is one with an edible outside and an inedible inside. This represents our emotional states - of inwardness, of a sense of feeling. The need for protection and reinforcement is an inner matter of the core, of the heart. We remove the pit from our date and eat, reciting the following blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

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

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the tree.

Food Insecurity

As we eat fresh fruits and celebrate the bounty given to us by the trees, we must also grapple with how access to things like affordable fresh fruit is not a given for many in this country.

While many of us may have heard of the term **food deserts**, Food deserts, per the US Department of Agriculture, are areas that have limited access to affordable and nutritious food. The issue with the term food desert (and its opposite, a food oasis) is that it gives a connotation of this being a natural occurrence. A better term for the same concept is **food apartheid**. This is because the choice of where grocery stores and other places that sell nutritious food is not a fact of nature, but a choice made by the grocery stores and governments. Using an intersectional lens, as pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw, we can see that many places that are considered food deserts are disproportionately low-income neighborhoods with a majority of Black or Brown residents. Access to grocery stores may be limited due to the fact that many people suffering under food apartheid have limited finances or rely on government assistance, such as food stamps; may rely on public transportation as opposed to private vehicles, making buying in bulk difficult; have limited education on nutrition information; and often do work multiple jobs outside of the traditional 9-5 business day, making getting to the grocery store before close a daunting task.

We will now watch a short video from NPR detailing one DC resident's struggle to find accessible, healthy food.

Discussion:

1. What is the overall effect of food apartheid? How do they contribute to the disenfranchisement of the populations living there?
2. How can we eliminate food apartheid and improve food access?

Third Cup of Wine and Third Fruit

This cup of wine or juice is partly white and mostly red. The tree has rooted itself firmly in the earth, grown into its full being and is blooming. The shade, wood, fruit and flowers that are the simple and modest gifts to the earth. Humankind can now embrace the tree as a provider. This is the cup of summer, with life in full swing. We each add more red wine to the mixture of wine that is already in our cup, so that the cup is again full, say the blessing together, and then drink all of the wine in the cup except for a small drop:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

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

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

The third fruit is completely edible, representative of a realm closest to pure spirit. Here no protective shells, neither internal nor external, are needed. And we take our fig - a historic symbol of summer - and eat it whole, reciting the following blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ.

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

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the tree.

Trees in the Talmud

The following are a pair of stories that illustrate the importance of trees in the Jewish tradition. The first is about a mythical figure named Honi the Circle-Maker. He is a figure who appears in the Talmud performing magical acts such as summoning rain.

“One day, Honi the Circle Maker was walking on the road, and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked the man, “How long will it take this tree to bear fruit?” The man replied, “Seventy years.” He asked, “Are you quite sure you will live another seventy years to eat its fruit?” The man replied, “I myself found fully grown carob trees in the world; as my forebears planted for me, so am I planting for my children.”

Based on Talmud Ta'anit 23a

The second is a saying attributed to Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai, a 2nd-century rabbi who is most famous for authoring the foundational text of Kabbalah - the Zohar. He is quoted as saying:

“If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone says to you that the Messiah has come, stay and finish the planting, and then go to greet the Messiah.”

Avot DeRabbi Natan 31b

Discussion:

1. What do these two parables say about the importance of trees in the Jewish tradition?
2. What do these stories teach us about future sustainability?

Fourth Cup of Wine

This cup is the highest level of creation. We see the tree aflame with life, so much so that the red flame completely overpowers the white light which was its beginning. Here is the tree in her full glory. All aspects of growth and life are contained within her, and her divine spark is completely concealed. This deep red wine is the autumn harvest, the festivals of Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot. The drop of white is Yom Kippur, the spiritual concealed within the physical. The cup of red wine symbolizes the source of our strength, the source of our connection with the earth. We fill our cups once again with red wine, adding to the small drop at the bottom that still contains some white, say the blessing together and then drink the entire glass

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

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

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

There is no fourth fruit. The fourth world is about our highest selves, when we are not eating, when we are not thinking of our bodies, in which we have all the tools to bring in pure holiness in each moment. Yes, we can emanate and be pure holiness while eating and while grounded in our bodies. However, the fourth world, according to kabbalists, is the world that is floating above our earthly desires – sacred though they are. In an attempt to gain an understanding of the divine implications of this realm, we do as our ancestors did and look to the tree as a symbol of life – a life without shells, a life of replenishing the earth, and a life of balance in which there is an inherent understanding of the place of both humans and nature.

Concluding the Seder

We bring the act of eating to a conclusion by thanking the Divine for our meal. However this does not go far enough in thanking those who do the work to bring food to our plates. As famed rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “Empirically speaking, would it not be more correct to give credit to the farmer, the merchant and the baker? [Rather] we bless God who makes possible both nature and civilization.” While his point is valid, it is also incredibly important to consider all the hands that made it possible for fruits and wine from across the world to make it to us today. As we recite the most concise possible form of grace after meals (Berakhot 40b), try to think of the journey that the food we consumed took to reach us here in Denver. And we conclude with the following prayer:

בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָא מַלְכָּא דְעָלְמָא מְרִיָּה דְהַאי פִּתָּא.

B'rich rachamana malka d'alma marey d'hai pita.

Blessed are you, Merciful One, Master of All, Creator of this food.