



## Tu B'shevat Resources

### Identify

*Tu B'shevat provides an opportunity to think about thankfulness, sustainability, environmentalism, and much more. The concepts described below help us reflect on the way we use land, the way we approach tzedakah, and the potential that exists in our natural resources.*

*Use the ideas below to challenge your chapters, your families and friends, and push them towards a more environmentally sound world.*

### What is Tu B'shevat?

Tu is not actually a word, but is two Hebrew letters, *tet* ט and *vav* ו, that together make up the number 15. Tu B'shevat is celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Shevat and marks the growth of new fruit on Israel's trees. This year the celebration begins on the eve of Wednesday, January 15.

By the middle of the Hebrew month of Shevat, the rains that began during Sukkot have absorbed into the soil and we begin to see buds on the trees. For that reason we consider Tu B'Shevat to be the birthday of the trees. It is a Jewish custom to eat more fruits than usual on this day in an effort to give thanks to G-d for all forms of fruits created.

### The Cycle of a Tree

Recognizing the birthday of a tree may sound odd but throughout Jewish history trees have been relied upon for the fruits they yield in a given year. Each year portions of fruit from the trees are given over as a sacrifice of thanks to G-d, and as sustenance for those in need. It is important to know when a new year begins so that we can adequately calculate a harvest.

*Ma'asserot* (מעשר)– Dues from the harvested agriculture of most years, given to the priests as sacrifice and to the poor as *tzedakah*.

*Orlah* (ערלוח)– Translated to mean uncircumcised fruit, produce from a tree in its first three years is not allowed to be consumed.

*Shmittah* (שמיטה)– A sabbatical year where no harvesting is done of any growth from the land. The land may be maintained, but anything that does grow is considered ownerless and open to be picked by anyone.

### Objects/Fruit

The *Shivat Haminim* or Seven Species are the fruit considered to be abundant in Israel, and those celebrated on Tu B'shevat. They are wheat, barley, grapes (vines), figs, pomegranates, olives and dates (honey). It is customary to celebrate by eating these foods, but many have taken a modern approach to Tu B'shevat and recognize it as an opportunity to celebrate more than just the fruits found in Israel. It has also become a time to celebrate all that the land has to offer.

Over the years various practices have been developed to celebrate the *Shivat Haminim*, including a Tu B'shevat seder that highlights each species individually. For more information see the "Great Chapter Programs" below!





## Lessons from Tu B'shevat

### *Has it grown yet?*

Our great scholars, Hillel and Shammai argued over when to recognize the birthday of the trees. *Beit Shammai*, the House of Shammai, said that by the 1<sup>st</sup> of Shevat the rains in Israel are done, and as such we should celebrate the new year at that time. The rains have come and gone and the trees have all the moisture from the earth that they need to produce fruit. However, *Beit Hillel*, the House of Hillel, maintained that we should not celebrate until the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month as that is when we see the blossoms of fruit for the first time. Like other disputes, *Beit Shammai* focused on the potential. The rains have done their work and we WILL see new growth because of it. However *Beit Hillel* focused on the actual – by the 15<sup>th</sup> we DO see the growth and thus we should celebrate. As with most arguments, scholars sided with *Beit Hillel* and we now celebrate on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat.

### *If a tree falls in the forest...*

Tu B'shevat marks the new year of growth for a tree, an important date that helps farmers determine how much of their fruit is considered new growth, and therefore eligible for harvesting, sacrifice, or *tzedakah*. But what of the fruit that falls from the tree? In Leviticus 19:10 we are told that we are not permitted to harvest any fruits that have fallen from the vine or the tree. All must be left to be gathered by those in need.

### Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think fruits from a tree in its first three years are forbidden?
2. Why do you think farmers are instructed to leave all fruits that have fallen unharvested?
3. Most of us do not live in places where dates, figs, and olives grow. What are the symbolic fruits or vegetables that our communities celebrate, and how do we celebrate them?
4. Hillel and Shammai represent two different outlooks on life – potential outcomes and actual outcomes. Which argument resonates more with you?
5. Why do you think Jews have a *Shmittah* year for our harvests?
6. For most of us our wealth isn't measured by a harvest. How do you see a connection to this holiday in your life? What parts of nature are you thankful for?





## Celebrating in Your Lives Connect

*Tu B'shevat gives us the opportunity to connect with the land of Israel, even if we have never been there. The nature of a holiday that celebrates Israel's trees pushes us to explore our own environmental practices and learn from the successes and challenges Israel has faced. Take this opportunity to share ideas with your chapters about local environmental causes that mean something to you.*

### Rituals and Blessings

#### Blessing for fruit:

The celebration of Tu B'shevat requires us to partake in fruits, especially those grown in Israel, and ones we have not yet eaten this year. Like all other foods, there are special blessings for fruit.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam borei pri ha-aitz.*

Blessed are You, Adonai Eloheinu, Sovereign of the universe who creates the fruit of the tree.

#### Shehecheyanu:

Since we are commanded to eat fruit that we have not yet eaten this year we also have the opportunity to say *Shehecheyanu*, a blessing recited specifically on first occasions. We are thankful to G-d for allowing us to reach milestones and participate in special times. If new fruit is being eaten, this blessing should be said first.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam shehecheyanu v'kiyimanu v'higi'anu laz'man hazeh*

Blessed are you, Adonai, Eloheinu, Sovereign of the universe who has kept us alive, sustained us and enabled us to reach this season.

### Where Israel is leading the way

Israel is a marvel to us in so many ways. We have taken a land that is primarily desert and turned it into a garden. In Deuteronomy we are told of the explicit things this land will yield and we are thankful for them.

ז כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה: אֶרֶץ, נְחָלִי מַיִם--עֵינֹת וְתַהֲמַת, יְצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָר. 7 For Hashem your G-d brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing forth in valleys and hills;

ח אֶרֶץ חִטָּה וּשְׂעֵרָה, וְגִפְנֵי וַיְתַאֲנֶה וְרִמּוֹן; אֶרֶץ-זֵית וּשְׁמֹן, וְדָבָשׁ. 8 a land of wheat and barley, and grape vines and figs-trees and pomegranates; a land of olive-trees and honey (dates);

ט אֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְמִסְכָּנֹת תֹּאכַל-בֶּה לֶחֶם--לֹא-תִחְסַר כֹּל, בָּהּ; אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבִנֶיהָ בְרִזְלִי, וּמִהַרְרֵיהָ תִּחְצַב נְחֹשֶׁת. 9 a land where you will eat bread without scarceness, you will not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass.

י וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ--וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, עַל-הָאֶרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ. 10 And you will eat and be satisfied, and will bless Hashem your G-d for the good land which G-d has given you.



# Happy Tu B'Shevat

Chag Sameach  
חג שמח



Today Israel uses the celebration of Tu B'shevat as a time to focus attention on all that the land can offer. No longer is the emphasis simply on trees, but also on water sources, environmentalism, and all agricultural practices. The early settlers of Israel were dedicated to the idea that they wanted to make it a desert that would bloom. Over the years Israeli farmers have mixed hard work with innovation to cultivate the land, and today their practices are shared all over the world.

- Israel is one of only 2 deserts in the world that are shrinking instead of growing.
- Israel has cross-pollination practices to allow bumble bees and fruit flies to control pests in an environmentally friendly way.
- Israel has developed safe and animal-friendly practices to enable the highest output of milk from dairy cows around the world.
- Israel is able to reuse 75% of its wastewater for agriculture, the highest rate in the world.

## What is your environmental hot button topic?

Israeli scientists take challenges like these and come up with inventive solutions that utilize what they have at their fingertips. Can you do the same? **To learn more about these and other world-leading strategies employed by Israel, check out [StandWithUs](#)' environmental booklet. Then challenge your chapter and your families to learn one new thing about Israel's environmental work each week.**





## A Birthday for the Trees *Improve*

*A birthday party is a fantastic reason to get together and Tu B'shevat celebrations are a great idea for chapter programs. Build connections with Israel or take the opportunity to do some advocacy on local environmental issues. Find a cause that speaks to you and challenge your friends to speak up with you.*

### Great Chapter Programs

Fruit Seder – The word *seder*, meaning order, is usually associated with Passover, where we eat a special meal and practice rituals in a specific order that remind us of our liberation from slavery in Egypt. According to a Kabbalistic tradition originating in Tzfat, the *Shivat Haminim* are supposed to be consumed in a special order and many have taken to having a Tu B'shevat *seder* to celebrate. The organization Hazon has created great resources to hold your own Tu B'shevat seder. Check out their [website](#) for instructions and other great ways to celebrate the foods we grow.

Tu B'shevat snacks – Add some flavor to your chapter meetings by bringing dates, figs, almonds, grapes, etc. as a special treat. Have members discuss how Israel is relevant in their lives.

Support the greening of Israel's land – For decades people have been supporting Israel by planting trees through the [Jewish National Fund](#). Want to welcome a new member to your chapter? Plant a tree in their honor and present the certificate to them at a program. Looking for a philanthropy cause related to Israel? Have the whole chapter raise funds for a portion of a forest named after the chapter.

Community gardening - Looking for a way to green your own backyard? Many neighborhoods have small parks or gardens that bring joy, and even some fruits and vegetables to local residents, but can easily fall into disrepair. Find one near you and have your chapter spend a Sunday afternoon cleaning and replanting.



# Happy Tu B'Shevat

Chag Sameach  
חג שמח



## Additional Tu B'shevat Songs

### Hebrew

השקדיה פורחת  
ושמש פז זורחת  
צפורים מראש כל גג  
מבשרות את בוא החג

ט"ו בשבט הגיע – חג  
האילנות!  
ט"ו בשבט הגיע – חג  
האילנות.

הארץ משועת:  
הגיעה עת לטעת!  
כל אחד יטע פה עץ,  
באתים נצא חוצץ:

ט"ו בשבט הגיע – חג  
האילנות!  
ט"ו בשבט הגיע – חג האילנות

### Transliteration

Hash'ke'diyah porachat  
veshemesh paz zorachat,  
tziporim merosh kol gag  
mevarshot et bo hachag.

T"u bish'vat higi'a  
chag la'ilanot.  
T"u bish'vat higi'a  
chag la'ilanot.

Ha'aretz meshava'at  
higi'ah et lata'at  
kol echad yikach lo etz  
be'atim nitze chotzet.

T"u bish'vat higi'a...

### Translation

The almond tree is  
blooming  
and the golden sun is  
shining,  
birds atop each roof  
brush (bless) the arrival of  
the festival.

Tu bishvat has arrived  
(it's) the festival of trees.  
Tu bishvat has arrived  
(it's) the festival of trees.

The land is crying out  
the time of planting has  
arrived  
each person shall take a  
tree  
we'll stride out with spades.

Tu bishvat has arrived...

