



Torah for Turbulent Times

"A Time for Renewal"

Tomorrow is the Jewish holiday of Tu B'shevat (15th of the Hebrew month of Shevat). "It is the 'New Year of the Trees,' but here the ground is frozen under the crust of snow. The trees snooze, their buds tight as nuts..." (Marge Piercy) In Israel the almond trees are beginning to bud and the majority of rainfall has likely occurred. It's hard to envision a new year or time of renewal for the trees, as we're bundled up in layers to protect us from the freezing temperatures of the Upper Valley. But, let's take a moment to imagine the change and flow of the seasons and to look forward to what comes next.

This sacred time is one of renewal. It's an invitation to reconnect to the earth and to envision the divine ebb and flow of time. Adapted from the Passover seder, the brief Tu B'shvat seder (informational video and haggadah below) provides a reason to gather together at our kitchen tables to bless, nosh on fruits and nuts, and say "*l'chaim*" to life!" We taste and drink from the sacred sap of life energy with a short spiritual map of unique blessings. Waiting patiently amidst a long winter, we anticipate what comes next in our lives. While moving it along faster isn't within our purview, being open to a moving experience or moment is within our control.

Here's a taste of the mystical blessing, abbreviated from the 18th Century original Tu B'shevat haggadah, *Pri Etz Hadar* (Venice). "Holy One, who makes, forms, creates, and emanates the highest worlds! You made the trees and grasses grow from the ground in the shape and pattern of these highest worlds. And this full moon is the beginning of Your work to renew and ripen the fruit trees, to bring forth the fruit of 'the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden.' May it be Your will that our eating and blessing and meditating on these fruits will strengthen the flow of love and blessing over the trees, to make them grow and bloom, for good life, for blessing and for peace. May all Creation return to its original strength and may we see the rainbow rejoicing in its colors. And may all the sparks of divine energy, whether scattered by our hands, or by the hands of our ancestors be returned and included in the majestic might of the Tree of Life." Amen!

As the divine energy of the universe and the energy within each of us and our community is renewed, we pause to reflect and connect. It's been said that one silver lining in the pandemic is that the earth itself is having a chance to breathe again. The contemporary Tu B'shevat Haggadah takes its readings from both Jewish and non-Jewish sources. We can choose to do the brief seder or simply read the above blessing and this accompanying reading by Chief Seattle. "Teach your children what we have taught our children — that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth...This we know. The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; We are merely a small strand in it."

May our community, the trees, and our planet be renewed for strength and sustained for life at this time.

Rabbi Mark

Video: ["What is Tu B'shvat?"](#) (text by me)

PDF: [Rabbi Mark's Haggadah](#) of choice for this year