



## ***Tu B'Shevat of Hope and Strength***

### **Introduction for Facilitators:**

Hundreds of Tu B'Shevat seders, resources, and activities have been developed over the years, each with a different thematic emphasis - spiritual, environmental, Zionist.

Like with the Passover seder, we strive to make the Tu B'Shevat seder relevant and meaningful for students and children, anew each year.

This year, we are immersed in the tragedies of war in Israel and the fears of rising antisemitism in the Diaspora. But, the ancient metaphors of Tu B'Shevat remind us that our personal and national lives are - like the seasons of the natural world - cyclical and ever-changing.

The Mishna proclaims the 15th day of Shevat as a New Year for trees - New years are always a time for hope in the future. Jews around the world eating the fruits of Israel is a beautiful symbol of our spiritual and national solidarity, no matter where we are physically located.

The texts and activities we have curated for this year's seder will focus on fostering hope and strength - for the Jewish People, for Israel, and for the world.



# WINTER:

Almond | שקד | *Shaked*

First Cup: All white

Fruits: inedible outside and edible inside



Just as I watched over them (“shaked”) to uproot, break down, demolish, destroy and to afflict, so will I watch over them (“shaked”) to build and to plant, says the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:28

”  
..וְהָיָה כִּאֲשֶׁר שָׁקַדְתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם לְנִתּוֹשׁ וּלְנִתּוּץ  
וּלְהַרֵס וּלְהַאֲבִיד וּלְהַרְעֵךְ בְּנֵי אֲשֶׁקֶד עֲלֵיהֶם לְבָנוֹת  
וּלְנִטֵעַ נְאֻמ־יְהוָה

Everything has a season, and there is a time for every matter under the heaven. time to give birth and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot that which is planted.

Kohelet 3

”  
לְכָל, זְמַן; וְעַת לְכָל-חַפְצֵי, תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם, עֵת  
לְדָדָת, וְעֵת לָמוֹת עֵת לְטֻעַת, וְעֵת לְעִקּוֹר נְטוּעַ  
לְכָל זְמַן וְעֵת לְכָל-חַפֵּץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:



Why do you think the seder starts with winter? What might the winter symbolize?



Do you find Kohelet's words reassuring? Why or why not?



Can you think of examples when destruction has proceeded or led to something positive?



Where else is the almond tree mentioned in Biblical texts?



Winter

We begin the seder with winter because this season reminds us that even when things are dark and desolate, there is always potential and hope that there will be growth, celebration, and light again in the future. Even when the tree branches seem dry, bare and lifeless, beneath the surface there is hidden movement. Like the dormant plants and the fleshy fruit under the hard shell, we believe in future goodness even when we cannot yet see it.

**Example Fruits:**

- ✓ Orange
- ✓ Banana
- ✓ Walnut
- ✓ Almond

Almond · שקד · Shaked

The earliest blooming tree in Israel is the almond tree. Its pink and white flowers fill the landscapes around Israel as they “awaken” and proclaim the end of their winter hibernation. Although they are the first tree to blossom, they are the last to bear fruit. The Hebrew word for almond, shaked, means to “watch” or to “wake.” Jeremiah famously saw an almond tree in one of his first prophetic vision. God promises Jeremiah that he is watching and that redemption will come, even if it is slow-coming like the fruit of the almond tree.

Older children:

We suggest dividing students into small groups to read the two Biblical texts and discuss the guiding questions. In addition to Jeremiah, the almonds are also mentioned in the list of gifts that Jacob sent to Esau (Genesis), in the story of Aaron’s blossoming staff (Deuteronomy), and in the description of the menorah (Exodus).

Younger children:

Print out cards with images from each stage of the lifecycle of an almond tree and have them try to put them in the correct order: dormancy, blooming, growing up, cracking open, harvesting, shelling, sizing. Ask students to think about how their personal lives or our national history might compare to the slow and surprising stages and seasons of the almond tree.

Art Corner:

Van Gogh made this painting (The Almond Blossom, 1890) to hang in his new baby nephew’s nursery. The hope expressed in the painting is bound up with new human life and thoughts of the future. This is a painting that students can easily replicate using q-tips to dot on the flowering buds.



## SPRING:

Olive | זית | *zayit*

Second cup: White with a few drops of red

Fruits: fruits with hard pits at their center



Why is Israel said to be like the olive tree? To tell you that just as the leaves of an olive tree do not fall during the summer nor during the rainy season, so Israel will never cease to be, not in this world nor in the hereafter.

Why is Israel compared to the olive? Just as the olive has to be crushed and beaten in order to produce the finest olive oil; so too the people of Israel. Their finest side comes out only after they go through much crushing and suffering.

Talmud Menachot 53b



אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי למה נמשלו ישראל לזית לומר לך מה זית אין עליו נושרין לא בימות החמה ולא בימות הגשמים אף ישראל אין להם בטילה עולמית לא בעוה"ז ולא בעולם הבא. אמר רבי יוחנן למה נמשלו ישראל לזית לומר לך מה זית אינו מוציא שמנו אלא ע"י כתיחה אף ישראל אין חוזרין למוטב אלא ע"י יסורין



What is the Jew? What kind of unique creature is this whom all the rulers of all the nations of the world have disgraced and crushed and expelled and destroyed; persecuted, burned and drowned, and who, despite their anger and their fury, continues to live and to flourish? The Jew is the symbol of eternity. A people such as this can never disappear. The Jew is eternal. He is the embodiment of eternity.

Leo Tolstoy, 1828-1910



What are the main qualities that the olive tree and the people of Israel seem to share?



What other meanings do you associate with the olive from biblical or rabbinic literature?



Do you agree that the "best" of the Jewish people comes out as a result of suffering? Do you have any examples of when you seen this to be true?



## Spring

Just as only a few simple drops of colored wine slowly transforms the hue of our glass, each flower begins with just a single bud and the gradual process of spring's rebirth begins.



## Example Fruits:

- ✓ Dates
- ✓ Cherries
- ✓ Olives
- ✓ Pears
- ✓ Plums
- ✓ Apricots
- ✓ Hackberries
- ✓ Avocados



## Olive · זית · Zayit

In Jewish tradition, the olive tree represents longevity, resilience, continuity, and connection to the Land of Israel. It is one of the seven species mentioned in the Bible and has been cultivated in the region for thousands of years, with some trees in Israel believed to be centuries old. Because of their ability to survive in harsh conditions- poor soil, draught and heat - olive trees are often used as an apt metaphor for the Jewish people who have always survived despite the harsh circumstances over the course of our history.



## Older children:

We suggest dividing students into small groups to read the two Biblical texts and discuss the guiding questions. You may discuss with them examples of unprecedented unity, strength, and kindness in the Jewish and Israeli communities in the aftermath of October 7th.



## Younger children:

Taste test a variety of olives including raw, salted, brined, or flavored. With a food processor and cheesecloth, you can even make your own olive oil from scratch!



## Yoga Practice:

The message of the texts are that the Jewish people - like the olive trees - have a very very long history and continue to survive and stand strong despite - or maybe even because of - brutal conditions. If you can, go out into nature to do a yoga practice or meditation. Begin tree pose by guiding the child to stand with their feet hip width apart, stretching their arms out to either side, like branches. Now imagine the wind is starting to blow and there branches sway and move with the wind but they continue to stand firm and grounded. You can continue to add all sorts of obstacles to the tree and encourage them to stay strong and rooted in their stance nonetheless.



Third Cup: red with a dash of white

Fruits: entirely edible

# SUMMER:

Carob | חרוֹב | Charuv



One day, Honi was walking along the road when he saw a certain man planting a carob tree. Honi said to him: This tree, after how many years will it bear fruit? The man said to him: It will not produce fruit until seventy years have passed. Honi said to him: Is it obvious to you that you will live seventy years, that you expect to benefit from this tree? He said to him: That man himself found a world full of carob trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me: I too am planting for my descendants.

Taanit 23 a

יוֹמָא חַד הָוָה אָזַל בְּאוֹרְחָא, חֲזַיִיה לְהוּוּא  
 גְּבַרָא דְהָוָה נִטַע חֲרוֹבָא, אָמַר לֵיהּ: הַאי, עַד  
 כְּמָה שְׁנִין טַעִין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: עַד שְׁבַעִין שְׁנִין.  
 אָמַר לֵיהּ: פְּשִׁיטָא לָךְ דְחַיִּית שְׁבַעִין שְׁנִין?  
 אָמַר לֵיהּ הַאי גְבַרָא: עֲלָמָא בְחֲרוֹבָא  
 אֲשַׁנְחִתִּיה. כִּי הִכִּי דִשְׁתַּלוּ לִי אֲבָהַתִּי –  
 שְׁתַּלִּי נְמִי לְבְרָאִי.



What is the man's reason for planting a tree when he himself will not actually live to see or benefit from its fruits?



What have you worked on or taken care of that will take many years before you can see the "fruit" or benefit of your contribution?



Can you think of things that your parents or grandparents did for which only their subsequent generations benefited?



**Summer:**

We drink red wine with a splash of white, reminding us that, as the land becomes warmer, the days grow longer and fruit becomes ripe and ready to eat.



**Example Fruits:**

- ✓ Strawberry
- ✓ Blueberries
- ✓ Raspberries
- ✓ Seedless grapes
- ✓ Figs



**Carob · חרוב · Charuv**

Although the Carob tree is not mentioned in the Tanach, it appears many times in the Talmud and continues to line the streets of Israel to this day. While the seventy years mentioned in the Honi story is exaggerated, it does take 6-7 years for the tree to bear fruit. Like the olive tree, the carob tree is known for its longevity and resiliency, endurance and continuity. The story of the carob tree can be comforting during these challenging times as it reminds us that we must continue to “plant seeds” (tradition, good deeds, etc) even if we don’t see the “results” today or even in our lifetime. Planting is an act of faith and hope in future generations who will continue the path we started.



**Older children:**

We suggest dividing students into small groups to read the Talmudic story and discuss the guiding questions. A powerful message for older children can also be found in the Diary of Anne Frank. Anne describes how she was inspired daily by a majestic chestnut tree she saw outside of the annex. In 2005, before the tree collapsed, the Anne Frank House gathered chestnuts, germinated them, and hundreds of saplings were planted around the world - including at Yad Vashem. The trees continue to provide lasting symbols of life and hope - even after the original tree and the girl who admired it are gone.



**Younger children:**

The story of Honi and the carob tree is one that even young children can enjoy and understand. Read the story or have the children act it out as a skit or puppetshow.



**Tree of hope:**

You may not be able to plant real trees, but you can plant potted parsley (which looks like a mini-tree) and explain that you are planting it now for the sake of the future Passover Seder in the spring. Alternatively, create a collaborative tree made up of leaves designed and decorated by each student on which they write what they hope for the future. You can give them specific directions like: *I hope for myself...* *I hope for Israel...* *I hope for the Jewish people...* *I hope for the world...* *I hope for my family...*



**FALL:**

**Pomegranate** | רִימון | *Rimon*

Fourth cup: all red

Fruits: with a tough skin and a sweet center.



“Even the emptiest Jews are as full of mitzvot and good deeds as a pomegranate is of seeds.”

(Yalkut Shimoni, Shir Hashirim)



“How did Rabbi Meir continue to study with Elisha ben Abuya after the latter became a heretic?”

“Rabbi Meir found a pomegranate. He ate its meat and threw away its peel.”

(Chagigah 15b)



“When you eat a pomegranate, intend to judge favourably every Jew, no matter who he is...because they are all as full of mitzvot as a pomegranate. This is the meaning of ‘he ate its meat’ – one values their good points and, as a result, ‘he threw away its peel’ – their bad side is nullified. For when you find the good in Jewish souls, the bad is nullified.”

(Yitzchak Buxbaum, "A Person is Like a Tree")



According to these texts, what do the seeds of the pomegranate represent?



The peel of a pomegranate is bitter but its insides are sweet. Are there people or situations in your life which seem bitter on the outside but are ultimately sweet?



How would our community look different if we related to every Jew “like a pomegranate” - full of goodness?



## Autumn:

Autumn and its changing leaves is a time of transformation, as we enter the high holidays, celebrate the fall harvest, and prepare for the winter again.



## Example Fruits:

✓Banana ✓Mango ✓Pineapple ✓Pomegranate ✓Sabra



## Pomegranate · רימון · Rimon

The pomegranate is one of Israel's seven species and is most identified as a Rosh Hashana food, symbolizing fertility, blessing and prosperity. They are a particularly interesting fruit because there is no flesh, only seeds.



## Older children:

We suggest dividing students into small groups to read the texts and discuss the guiding questions. The text highlights the value of every single Jew. A similar message is connected to the palm tree that "has nothing wasted from it: the dates are for eating, the branches are for the lulav, the fibers are used to make rope, the stems are used to make sieves, the many branches are used to make a roof for houses. Similarly, no person is wasted in the People of Israel."

(Bamidbar Rabbah 4)



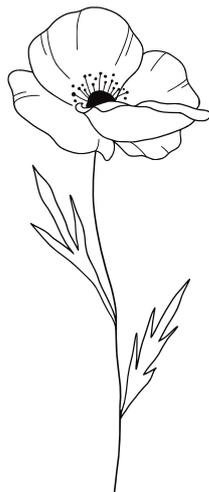
## Younger children:

Let children "dissect" and investigate a pomegranate by separating the peel and the seeds and the flesh. You can even let them use a magnifying glass and then try to sketch its different parts. They can also guess how many seeds they think there are and then actually count them and compare the results.



## Project Kalaniyot:

Since this last cup is all red, it also reminds us of the red flowers of Israel - the Kalaniyot (anemones) which begin to bloom around Tu B'Shevat. This year, red Kalaniot are particularly significant because they grow wild and plentiful in the fields surrounding many of the Negev kibbutzim that were attacked on October 7. Jewish and Israeli artists have been using the Kalanit to as a symbol of solidarity. Many examples can be seen at <https://www.mykalaniyot.com/>. Have students look through this gallery and choose an image that they find particularly powerful. Students can also submit their own visual interpretations of the Kalanit. You can also share the famous Israeli song, written by Natan Alterman and sung by Shoshana Damari. These verses speak to the resilience of the kalaniyot, noting how they may wither and fade, but they will always bloom again.



***Sunset on the hill will blaze and go out  
but the anemones will always bloom.  
Storms will thunder and roar greatly  
but the anemones will always bloom.  
Yes, generations come and pass without end  
but each generation has an anemone in a tune.***



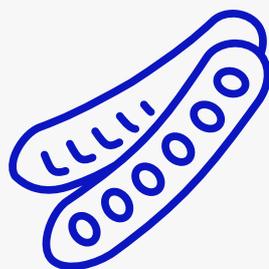
### WINTER:

The first tree to “wake up” from the winter, the **almond tree** reminds us that the darkness of winter always ends, seasons cycle, and growth - and life - begins again.



### SPRING:

Just as the **olive tree** endures harsh conditions to live for centuries, so too the Jewish people have survived many hardships throughout our history.



### SUMMER:

Since **Carob trees** take many years to grow , they remind us that we don't only act for ourselves, but we act on behalf of future generations who will come after us.



### AUTUMN:

The **Pomegranate** reminds us to value and appreciate the goodness and the beauty that can be found in all parts of the Jewish people.

