“To Till and to Tend”

A Tu B’Shvat Seder

Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Welcome: Congregation President Steven Getz

Havdalah Service

Adam Feder:

As the sun descends and shadows lengthen, let us bid farewell to Shabbat. Havdalah means “separation,” a separation between rest and activity; between sunlight and darkness; between the busy-ness of daily routine and the privilege of private reflection. It impresses upon us the reality of moral distinctions in the universe.

The symbols of the Havdalah observance are a twisted candle (one candle with at least two wicks), wine, and a box of fragrant spices.

First, we bring forth this candle to relieve the darkness. All that is obscure and vague in life, all that frightens and confounds, finds a home in unlit spaces.

This twisted Havdalah candle represents the many sources of light which, when combined, bring joy to our hearts, wisdom to our minds, and peace to our lives. Even as these intertwined strands of wax come
together in the warm glow of a single flame, so do goodness and knowledge, joy and hope blend to nourish and enrich our lives.

Precious is the light in the world.
Precious is the light within each of us.

[Light candle]

Dan Armin:

We celebrate the fruit of the vine as we lift this cup and sip. May the taste of this wine stir within us a reverence for nature and respect for the sand, the trees, the animals, the oceans, the earth and all that live upon it, and the sun, moon and stars in the sky.

Precious is nature
Which ripens the fruit of the vine.

[Pour wine]

Adam:

The spices in this box represent the fragrant beauty of all that is good and true in life. We inhale their aroma with the hope that the days to come may be complete with the sweetness of health and the joy of fulfillment.

[Inhale aromas]

In the coming week, and all the weeks:
May we seek the truth more devotedly,
That we may act more wisely;
May we reflect more searchingly,
That we may know ourselves more completely;
May we love more freely,
That we may forgive more quickly;
May we act more courageously,
That we may live more nobly.

[Pour wine into dish & dip candle to extinguish flame]

Shavua tov!

Live songs in tonight’s event will be performed by Adam Feder
**SONG: Od Yavo' Shalom Aleinu** (Peace Will Come to Us)

Od yavo' shalom aleinu  
Od yavo' shalom aleinu  
Od yavo' shalom aleinu  
Ve al kalam (x2)

Salaam (Salaam)  
Aleinu ve al kol ha olam,  
Salaam, Salaam (x2)

**Structure of the Seder**

**Rochelle Green:**  
Hi, I’m Rochelle Green, CHJ's Ritual Committee Chair. I’m so glad you have joined us tonight for our seder. I’m here to provide a brief background of this lovely holiday and what you can expect tonight, but first let me note that we are recording. If you do not wish to be seen, please turn your video off.

*Tu B'Shvat* originated as part of an ancient pagan festival honoring Asherah, goddess of farmers and fertility. Centuries later, the Kabbalists of Safed created a Tu B'Shvat seder.

It was loosely modeled on the Passover seder, in that it follows a specific order, set forth in a Haggadah. As on Passover, we drink four cups of juice or wine, but on this occasion each cup will change color as we mix red and white to correspond to the changing seasons. Also unique to the Tu B'Shvat seder is the ritual consumption of different types of fruits and nuts, each corresponding to a season, and each season representing an aspect of the human condition.

We hope you will sample your own supply of drinks, nuts, and fruits as we make our way through the seasons.

Our Haggadah is dedicated to the memory of longtime CHJ member Lucy Katz, who was instrumental in creating and guiding this celebration for many years. Her deep commitment to Tikkun Olam (repair of the world) was evident in all she did. Her love for this holiday lives on in our service today.

And please note: Although everyone except designated readers will remain on mute during tonight's event, we invite you to direct your comments, personal messages, and questions to the chat.

We now begin the four main parts of the seder, starting with Winter, led by CHJ members Jenny Ginsberg and her daughter Margo Libre.
Winter: The First Season

Jenny Ginsberg:
In Israel, Tu B’Shvat is a celebration of spring; the trees are budding. Here in North America it is still midwinter and the trees seem barren and forlorn. Yet Tu B’Shvat reminds us that even now, the life-juice begins to rise again in the natural world, and we look with hope to the coming spring. With Jewish communities around the world we celebrate our "Jewish Earth Day," a day of attention to healing and preserving the natural environment. We organize seders, tree-plantings, environmental restoration activities, and educational events, all of which provide an opportunity to express a Jewish commitment to protecting the earth.

Margo Libre:
We gather on Tu B’Shvat as Jews of conscience, with a deep bond to the world’s natural wonders, to affirm and preserve creation. We recall the words in the Book of Genesis, which states that God placed man and woman in the Garden of Eden “to till it and to tend it.” We take these words to mean that our ancestors wanted us to be stewards of the land, to depend on it for sustenance and to serve as responsible caretakers, passing it on for the benefit of future generations.

We are grateful for creation in all its majesty: the ever-flowing waters, the azure skies, the complex life of earth’s forests, the myriad of life forms.

The life of all creatures and our own lives are one, profoundly dependent upon each other.

The Ginsberg/Libre family’s Personal Reflection

SONG – Garden Song, Ernesto Villalobos
Message from Ernesto to CHJ: This arrangement of the classic Garden Song by David Mallett is the result of an invitation by my friend Adam Feder to "sing a song about nature" for Tu B'Shvat, for the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County, Connecticut. The holiday is also called Rosh HaShanah La'Ilanot (Hebrew: ראש השנה לילנות), literally ‘New Year of the Trees’, so this song made perfect sense. In contemporary Israel, the day is celebrated as an ecological awareness day, and trees are planted in celebration. I wrote (and will perform) two new verses for it, in Spanish.

Jenny:
To celebrate winter, we first drink a cup of white wine or grape juice. The white symbolizes the sleep that descends upon nature when the sun's rays begin to weaken. In winter the earth is sometimes barren, covered with snow. In winter we layer ourselves in clothing, blanketing ourselves from the cold just as the earth is insulated by a blanket of snow.
In order to appreciate properly the special in the ‘ordinary,’ Judaism instructs that we reflect on every action we take.

We are grateful for the fruit of the vine and the many ways we are protected from the harshness of winter. May we feel the sleep of the winter as it refuels our body and makes us strong, and prepares our soul for the lengthening of the days, and the rebirth of nature.

[Drink the first cup of white wine or juice]

Margo:
Next we eat nuts, with their hard shells and soft, edible insides. These nuts also symbolize the winter season with its protected outside. Removing the hard shells exposes a fleshy vulnerable inside.

Some people are like nuts. They are hard on the outside and difficult to get to know, but we are rewarded when we peel away the top layer and discover their inner warmth and love.

As we eat these nuts, may we acknowledge our strength that protects us and allows us to act in the world, but may we also have the strength to reveal ourselves, to be vulnerable, to love and be loved, to grow, and to repair and help heal.

We’ll pause as we all eat the ceremonial winter food, nuts.

[Eat nuts with hard shells and soft insides such as walnuts, pistachios, almonds]

**SONG “Tree of Life”**

*It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it and all of its supporters are happy.*

*It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it and all of its supporters are happy,*

*Shalom, Shalom (repeat)*
Spring: The Second Season

Melissa Axen:
Spring is the season when the world is transformed, and when it is the most vulnerable. The beauty of new birth in the spring overwhelms us; spring is an emotional world, full of joy and of hope for a new beginning.

We drink white juice with a dash of red, and we eat fruits with soft outsides and hard inner cores. The juice symbolizes the gradual deepening of color, the reawakening of colors in nature as the sun brings them back to life.

As we drink this second cup, we look forward to spring, when the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth and the first flowers appear on the hillsides. May we enjoy the full warmth of spring, when we can run freely outdoors. May we, like the flowers, blossom into our full potential.

[Drink second cup]

Juliette Axen:
We eat fruit containing hard center pits to remind us that although we throw it away, the hard, unyielding pit is the source of new growth and new life. Some people are like the spring fruits, with a hard inner core capable of harshness or arrogance, who also contain the potential for compassion and love.

We include olives with our spring fruits. In Judaism, the olive tree is a sign of hope that despite the enormity of destruction, life can be restored. When the great flood began to subside, Noah sent out a dove. "The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a leaf it had picked from an olive tree." (Genesis 8:11)

We'll pause as we all eat the fruit of the emotional world. May our hearts be open to joy and to compassion for all beings, allowing the warmth of our caring to flow throughout the world.

[Eat from among fruits with hard center pits: olives, apricots, dates, peaches]

The Axen family’s Personal Reflection

Melissa:
In spring, even as the natural world blossoms, we must remember that our planet is in danger. An ecological crisis threatens our health, the future and well-being of the world’s children, the survival of multitudes of species, the very integrity of our world.

We must also recognize that it doesn’t affect us all equally. Climate change disproportionately impacts communities of color, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups. Some of the Marshall islands, for example—a nation of small islands stretching across the Pacific—may be submerged by rising sea levels in a mere 15 years.
As we come together tonight, let us renew our commitment to be responsible custodians and healers of all the natural world.

Tell Them

tell them we are a proud people  
toasted dark brown as the carved ribs  
of a tree stump  
tell them we are descendants  
of the finest navigators in the world  
tell them our islands were dropped  
from a basket  
carried by a giant  
tell them we are the hollow hulls  
of canoes as fast as the wind  
slicing through the Pacific sea  
tell them we are sweet harmonies  
of mothers, aunties, sisters  
songs late into night  
tell them  
we are days  
and nights hotter  
than anything you can imagine  
tell them we are little girls with braids  
cartwheeling beneath the rain  
tell them we are shards of broken beer bottles  
burrowed beneath fine white sand  
we are children flinging  
like rubber bands  
aver a road clogged with chugging cars  
tell them  
we only have one road  

and after all this  
you tell them about the water  
tell them how you have seen it rising  
flooding across our cemeteries  
gushing over our seawalls  
and crashing against our homes  
tell them what it's like  
to see the entire ocean level with the land  
tell them  
we are afraid  
tell them we don't know  
of the politics  
or the science  
but we see  
what's in our own backyard  
tell them some of us  
are old fishermen who believe that God  
made us a promise  
tell them some of us  
are a little bit more skeptical  
but most importantly you tell them
that we don't want to leave
that we've never wanted to leave
and that we
are nothing without our islands.

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner

**SONG: “Bashana Haba’a”**

*La la la, la la la*
*La la la, la la la*
*Ba-sha-na ba-sha-na, ha-ba’a*

*Od tir-eh, od tir-eh*
*ka-ma tov yi-h’-ye*
*Ba-sha-na, ba-sha-na, ha-ba-a*

Soon the day will arrive
When we will be together
And no longer will we live in fear.

And the children will smile
Without them wondering whether
On that day, dark new clouds will appear.

Wait and see, wait and see
What a world there can be
If we share, if we care, you and me.

Wait and see, wait and see
What a world there can be
If we share, if we care, you and me.

Some have dreamed, some have died
To make a bright tomorrow
And their vision remains in our hearts.

Now the torch must be passed
In hope and not in sorrow,
And a promise to make a new start.

*La la la, la la la*
*La la la, la la la*
*Ba-sha-na ba-sha-na, ha-ba’a*

*Od tir-eh, od tir-eh*
*ka-ma tov yi-h’-ye*
*Ba-sha-na, ba-sha-na, ha-ba-a*

*La la la, la la la, la la la…*
Summer: The Third Season

Deirdra Preis:
Summer, the third season, represents the world of ideas and rebirth, when we are nurtured by the warm air and the rest it brings us. We drink red wine with a dash of white, reminding us that as the land becomes warmer and the colors of the fruits deepen as they ripen, we too become warmer and more open.

As we drink the third cup, may we cherish the warmth of the season, a chance for new ideas and plans, and for greater awareness of our obligation to the earth and to others.

[Drink the third cup.]

The fruit we now eat is soft and edible inside and out, like people with whom we form quick and lasting friendships. As we eat these fruits of summer, may our thoughts and actions be integrated. May we create ease and harmony in our lives and in the world.

[Eat from among the soft fruits with edible skin: apples, strawberries, figs, grapes, etc.]

The Preis family’s Personal Reflection

Dana Preis:
On this “New Year of the Trees,” we find wisdom in the ancient Jewish texts.

In the second century, Rabbi Simon bar Yochai advised: “if you are holding a sapling in your hand and someone says the Messiah has drawn near, first plant the sapling, then go and greet the Messiah.” (Avot d’Rebbe Natan 31b)

From the Torah we learn that even in the course of war, we should not cut down the fruit trees of a besieged city (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). That, explains 14th-century scholar Rabbeinu Bachya, is because destroying fruit trees is like destroying human life, so greatly do people depend on them.

Perhaps even more relevant to today’s observance is Bal Tashchit, an important principle of Jewish Law. It means “do not needlessly waste or destroy,” and includes the needless destruction of the air, water, and earth, and the plants and animals that live there.
Deirdra:
Global temperatures last year were among the highest on record, contributing to shrinking glaciers, dangerous sea rise, destructive wildfires, and an increase in catastrophic weather events.

But there are signs of progress and cause for optimism, such as President Biden’s executive order for the United States to rejoin the Paris climate agreement. Increasingly, businesses and governments worldwide are committing to clean energy, and falling costs for renewable energy sources now make them an affordable option.

SONG: “All the Rivers Run” by Two of a Kind

We all live on a planet so big and blue - All the rivers run.
So much to learn, so much to do - All the rivers run.
There are mountains high and valleys low - All the rivers run.
And in between them, waters flow - All the rivers run.

(Chorus:)
All the rivers run
Dancing in the sun
Cradled in their watersheds
All the rivers run.

When the sun comes up and warms the land - All the rivers run.
There’s a world of wonder at every hand - All the rivers run.
Dew-drop, rain-drop, river or sea - All the rivers run.
The water cycles endlessly - All the rivers run.
(Chorus)

See millions of interlinking threads - All the rivers run.
This is the web of life, it’s said - All the rivers run.
The tapestry of life is knit - All the rivers run.
And water flows through all of it - All the rivers run.
(Chorus)

When the rain comes down in your hometown - All the rivers run.
It joins your creek and rolls on down - All the rivers run.
Then your creek runs all the way - All the rivers run.
Into your river, then down to the bay - All the rivers run.

(Chorus - repeat)
Autumn: The Fourth Season

Emily Shufrin:
The fourth season is Autumn and represents the world of the spirit or life energy. We drink deep red juice and eat no fruit, for this season is not represented by any particular fruit. We nourish ourselves instead with a deep breath joining our spirit with the world. Let us do that now; everyone take a long, deep breath and let it out. (Pause)

The pure red represents the full bloom of nature before the cold winter. As nature expends its last bit of energy, a full cycle is completed. As we have passed through each season, we have changed. We began by protecting our soft inner self and slowly peeled our hard outer layer. Within that soft layer we found a hard core, protected by the softness which surrounded it. We then came to a place where there was no distinction between the protected and the protector.

David Shufrin:
As we drink the fourth cup, the red wine or juice on its own, may we become strong, like healthy trees, with solid roots in the ground and with our arms open to the love that is all around us. We rejoice in the goodness of the earth and in the fruit of her bounty. We rejoice in our friends and families and those with whom we share this TuB’S’vat seder. We rejoice in the dream of world peace.

[Drink the fourth cup, the red wine/juice]

The Shufrin family’s Personal Reflection
SONG: “Peace Is” by Fred Small

Peace is the bread we break  
Love is the river rolling  
Life is a chance we take  
When we make this earth our home  
Gonna make this earth our home

Feel the cool breeze blowing through the smoke and the heat  
Hear the gentle voices and the marching feet  
Singing call back the fire, draw the missiles down  
And we'll call this earth our home

Peace is the bread we break  
Love is the river rolling  
Life is a chance we take  
When we make this earth our home  
Gonna make this earth our home

We have known the atom, the power and pain  
We've seen people fall beneath the killing rain  
If the mind still reasons and the soul remains  
It shall never be again

Emily:
When we are most vulnerable, we might wonder, what miniscule difference can we as individuals or even as congregations, make in the vast scheme of things. Maimonides teaches that we should consider the entire world as if it were exactly balanced between acts of righteousness and of evil. The very next action we take, therefore, can save or condemn the world.

Swedish teenager and environmental activist Greta Thunberg is a role model in this way. She organized a Climate Strike in 2019, where students in 150 countries held a massive coordinated strike from school to protest government and business inaction on climate change. In her speech at the UN Climate Conference, Greta said these words:

“...I've learned you are never too small to make a difference. And if a few children can get headlines all over the world just by not going to school, then imagine what we could all do together if we really wanted to. But to do that, we have to speak clearly, no matter how uncomfortable that may be.

We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis. ...And if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself.
David:

It Matters To Me

As I walked along the seashore
This young boy greeted me.
He was tossing stranded starfish
Back to the deep blue sea.
I said “Tell me why you bother,
Why you waste your time this way.
There’s a million stranded starfish
Does it matter, anyway?”
And he said, “It matters to this one.
It deserves a chance to grow.
It matters to this one.
I can’t save them all I know.
But it matters to this one,
I’ll return it to the sea.

Noah:
It matters to this one,
And it matters to me.”

Author unknown

Emily: Let us take from this seder an important message. Let us resolve to do at least one act this year to heal the world and its physical environment.

May I, may you, may we
Not die unlived lives.
May none of us live in fear
Of falling or catching fire.
May we choose to inhabit our days,
To allow our living to open us,
To make us less afraid,
More accessible,
To loosen our hearts
Until they become wings,
Torches, promises.
May each of us choose to risk our significance;
To live so that which comes to us as seed
Goes to the next as blossom
And that which comes to us as blossom,
Goes on as fruit.

Dawna Markove, from Prayers for a Thousand Years

David:
Focus on Tikkun Olam—repairing the world, including our earth and environment—remains an important part of CHJ’s mission and our Sunday School curriculum. As a congregation and as individuals we have taken steps to reduce, reuse and recycle, but there is still more we can do. Let us always be open to new ideas and opportunities to be loving stewards of this planet we call home.
Our thanks to CHJ Events & Partnership Coordinator Rachel Dreyfus, the driving force behind this year’s Tu B’Shvat seder; all of our members who contributed to and took part in this service; our mitvah class students who decorated the Goodie Bags, and our wonderful musicians, Adam Feder, Ernesto Villalobos, and our member singers, who you will hear now in our concluding song…

“Shalom Chaverim” (Peace, Friends, Until we Meet Again) 
performed by Adam Feder and CHJ members

Shalom Chaverim is wishing our friends well, wishing them luck, it is saying that whether they are going or coming, wherever it is that they want to go, whatever it is that they want to do, that they do so in a way that brings peace, and blessings, into their lives and the lives of others.

Concluding remarks from Nancy Shiffman, Stamford JCC

Thank you for attending our Seder! Chag Sameach!!

Credits

Our Haggadah was compiled and edited by Rachel Dreyfus, Rochelle Green and Gail Ostrow from the original version by Lesley Apt, Susan Boyar, Lucy Katz and Marcia Kosstrin. It is based on “The Trees Are Davening, a Tu B’Shvat Haggadah Celebrating Our Kinship With The Trees And The Earth,” from COEJL, the Coalition on the Environment in Jewish Life, www.coejl.org, and developed by Dr. Barak Gale, Congregation Sha’ar Zahav, San Francisco and Dr. Ami Goodman, Congregation Beth Sholom, San Francisco.


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