

“To Till and to Tend”

A Tu B'Shvat Seder

Congregation for Humanistic Judaism



Art by Emily Rubenstein

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 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 braided 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]

Marcia Kosstrin:

We celebrate the fruit of the vine and the bounty of nature as we lift this cup and sip. May the taste of this wine stir within us a reverence for the natural world and respect for the trees, the sand, 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:

These spices 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 replete 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!

Songs in tonight's event will be performed live from New York City 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 kulam (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, and I'm so glad you have joined us for our Tu B'Shvat Seder. I'm here to provide a brief background of this festive holiday and what you can expect tonight as we celebrate the New Year of the Trees.

Tu B'Shvat falls on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shvat. It originated in an ancient pagan festival honoring Asherah, goddess of farmers and fertility, whose symbol was a tree. Centuries later it gained in meaning and popularity when the Kabbalists, or Jewish mystics, created a Tu B'Shvat seder.

The service 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 changes 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 symbolizing a season and marking the rebirth, growth and flowering of both the earth and the human spirit.

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 led the way in creating and guiding this celebration for many years. Her deep commitment to Tikkun Olam and to Jewish values was evident in all she did. Her love for this holiday lives on in our service today.

One last note: Although everyone except designated readers will remain on mute during most of tonight's event, we invite you to direct your comments and questions to the chat.

We now begin the four main parts of the seder, starting with Winter, led by CHJ members Donna Soucy and George Rockmore.

Winter: The First Season

Donna Soucy:

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.

George Rockmore:

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.

Donna: Personal Reflection on Winter

SONG: "Na'aseh Shalom" (Let us bring peace in the world)

*Na-a-seh sha-lom ba-o-lam
Na-a-seh sha-lom a-ley-nu.
V'al kol ha-o-lam
V'im-ru, im-ru sha-lom.*

*Na-a-seh sha-lom
Na-a-seh sha-lom
Sha-lom a-ley-nu,
V'al kol ha-o-lam.*

*Na-a-seh sha-lom
Na-a-seh sha-lom
Sha-lom a-ley-nu,
V'al kol ha-o-lam.*

George:

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]

Donna:

Next we eat nuts, with their hard, outer shells and soft, edible insides. These nuts also symbolize the winter season with its protected outside.

Some people resemble nuts, in that 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 compassion and inner warmth.

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

Myrna Retsky:

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 wine or juice with a dash of red, and we eat fruits with soft outsides and hard inner cores. Our drink now 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]

Marcia Kosstrin:

We eat fruit containing a hard center pit to remind us that although we throw it away, it 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, but 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. May we, in our lives, plant seeds of wisdom, friendship and peace.

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

Myrna: Personal Reflection on Spring

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



Jessica Wolf:

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.]

Jessica: Personal Reflection on Summer

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) This is an obligation to ourselves and to the generations that follow, for if we do not assume our stewardship of the earth, no one else will be there to do so.

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). As 14th-century scholar Rabbeinu Bachya explains, that is because destroying fruit trees is like destroying human life, so greatly do people depend on them.

Also relevant to today’s observance is *Bal Tashchit*, an important principle of Jewish Law. It means “do not needlessly waste or destroy,” and includes needless destruction of the air, the water, the earth, and the plants and animals that live there.

The wisdom of this law is perhaps most poignant in the heat of summer. Last year was the earth’s hottest on record, contributing to shrinking glaciers, dangerous sea rise, destructive wildfires, and an increase in catastrophic weather events.

But there are signs of progress in the effort to stem climate change, including increases in the global use of renewable energy. In Glasgow last November, at the United Nations

climate convention, 40 nations committed to begin phasing out coal and more than 100 pledged to end deforestation by 2030.

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

Ruth Light:

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.

Taegun Moon:

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'Shvat seder. We rejoice in the dream of world peace.

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

Ruth: Personal Reflection on Autumn

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*

*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*

Taegun:

Thank you, Adam, for all of your moving live performances tonight! 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 climate activist Greta Thunberg is a role model in this way. In 2018 she inspired a global movement with her unvarnished outrage and urgent calls to action. Increasingly, young people throughout the world are responding, raising their voices at protests and in climate conferences, aware that the future they're trying to save is their own.

Donna: Amanda Gorman is another young woman who makes a compelling appeal on the planet's behalf. Gorman captured the nation's interest at the Presidential Inauguration last year with a passionate delivery of her poem, "The Hill We Climb." A few years earlier she recorded her poem "Earthrise," on video, which we will share later in the service.

But first, 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

Taegun:

Tikkun Olam—repairing the world, including our earth and environment— has always been an important part of CHJ’s mission. As a congregation and as individuals we have taken steps to reduce, reuse and recycle, but there is still more. Let us always be open to new ideas and opportunities to be loving stewards of this planet we call home.

SONG: “Not By Might, Not By Power” by Debbie Friedman

*Not by might and not by power,
But by spirit alone,
Shall we all live in peace.
Not by might and not by power,
But by spirit alone,
Shall we all live in peace.
The children sing
The children dream
And their tears may fall
But we'll hear them call
And another song will rise
Another song will rise
Another song will rise! (repeat)*

*Not by might and not by power,
But by spirit alone,
Shall we all live in peace.
Not by might and not by power,*

*But by spirit alone,
Shall we all live in peace.
Not by might!
Not by power!
Shalom!*

Adam: And now, presenting “Earthwise,” by Amanda Gorman

VIDEO: *Earthwise* by Amanda Gorman

Rochelle: And that concludes our seder...you are invited to “unmute” and say Shalom to our friends at this time.

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 planning and took part in this service; Emily Rubenstein, who decorated the Goodie Bags, and our wonderful musician from the Shul Band of New York, Adam Feder.

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’shvav 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 Shalom, San Francisco.

Portions also come from Morim, Tu BShvat Seder, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, www.Morim.org. Other sources include: Tu B’Shevat, The Jewish Earth Day, Humanistic Judaism, Winter, 1993; One Tree, Two Peoples, One Land: Tu B’Shvat Resources from Rabbis for Human Rights and Brit Tzedek v’Shalom, Tu B’Shevat: *Truth and Justice, Trees and Land* by Rabbi Michael Cohen, Jan. 20, 2008, *Here is Our Light*, *Humanistic Jewish Holiday and Life-Cycle Liturgy for Inspiration and Reflection*, Society for Humanistic Judaism, 2019

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