

“To Till and to Tend”

A Tu B'Shvat Seder

Congregation for Humanistic Judaism



Welcome: Congregation President Ruth Light

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]

Sheila Felsen:

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 and sip 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 Mike and Myrna Retsky.

Winter: The First Season

Myrna Retsky:

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.

Mike Retsky:

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.

Mike and Myrna: Personal Reflection

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.*

Myrna:

To celebrate winter, we first drink a cup of white wine or juice. The white symbolizes the sleep that descends upon nature when the sun's rays begin to weaken. We recall the quietness of a snow-fall, the infinite variety of snowflakes, the warmth of home and family, and the natural cycle of birth, growth, death and rebirth.



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]

Mike:

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

Marilyn Brownstein:

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]

Jessica Wolf:

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]

Marilyn: Personal Reflection

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



Sheila Felsen:

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.]

Sheila: Personal Reflection

Alan Smith:

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.

Rhona Robbin:

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. In 2022, heat-trapping greenhouse gases reached a new peak, causing effects that scientists had long predicted: sea ice loss, accelerated sea level rise, more intense heat waves, and devastating floods.

But there some signs of progress in the effort to stem climate change. Renewable sources account for a growing fraction of the energy supply, and prices are dropping every year. In many countries, emissions from fossil-fuel sources have plateaued or declined.

And in the U.S. last summer, Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which includes a historic climate investment aimed at reducing the country's planet-warming carbon emissions by about 40% this decade.

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

Linda Russell:

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.



Steve Getz:

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

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

Steve and Linda: 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*

*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*

Linda:

Thank you, Adam, for that lovely song and 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.

Jane Hirshfield is an American poet whose work often explores environmental concerns. In "Let Them Not Say," read by Deirdra Preis, she fiercely holds us accountable to the Earth, to one another, and to future generations.

Deirdre Preis:

*Let them not say: we did not see it.
We saw.*

*Let them not say: we did not hear it.
We heard.*

*Let them not say: they did not taste it.
We ate, we trembled.*

Let them not say: it was not spoken, not written.

*We spoke,
we witnessed with voices and hands.*

*Let them not say: they did nothing.
We did not-enough.*

Let them say, as they must say something:

*A kerosene beauty.
It burned.*

*Let them say we warmed ourselves by it,
read by its light, praised,
and it burned.*

Jane Hirshfield

Steve: 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. We installed solar panels and drive hybrid cars. But there’s still so much more we can do – and many ways to work collectively to address the devastating impact of global warming.

Let’s hear now from CHJ’s Social Action Committee chair, Rachel Dreyfus, about her important work with the Jewish Climate Alliance as it lobbies Congress for stronger regulation in the battle against climate change.

Rachel Dreyfus

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!*

Rochelle: And that concludes our seder! **Chag Sameach!!**

You are invited to “unmute” and say Shalom to our friends at this time.

Acknowledgments:

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