

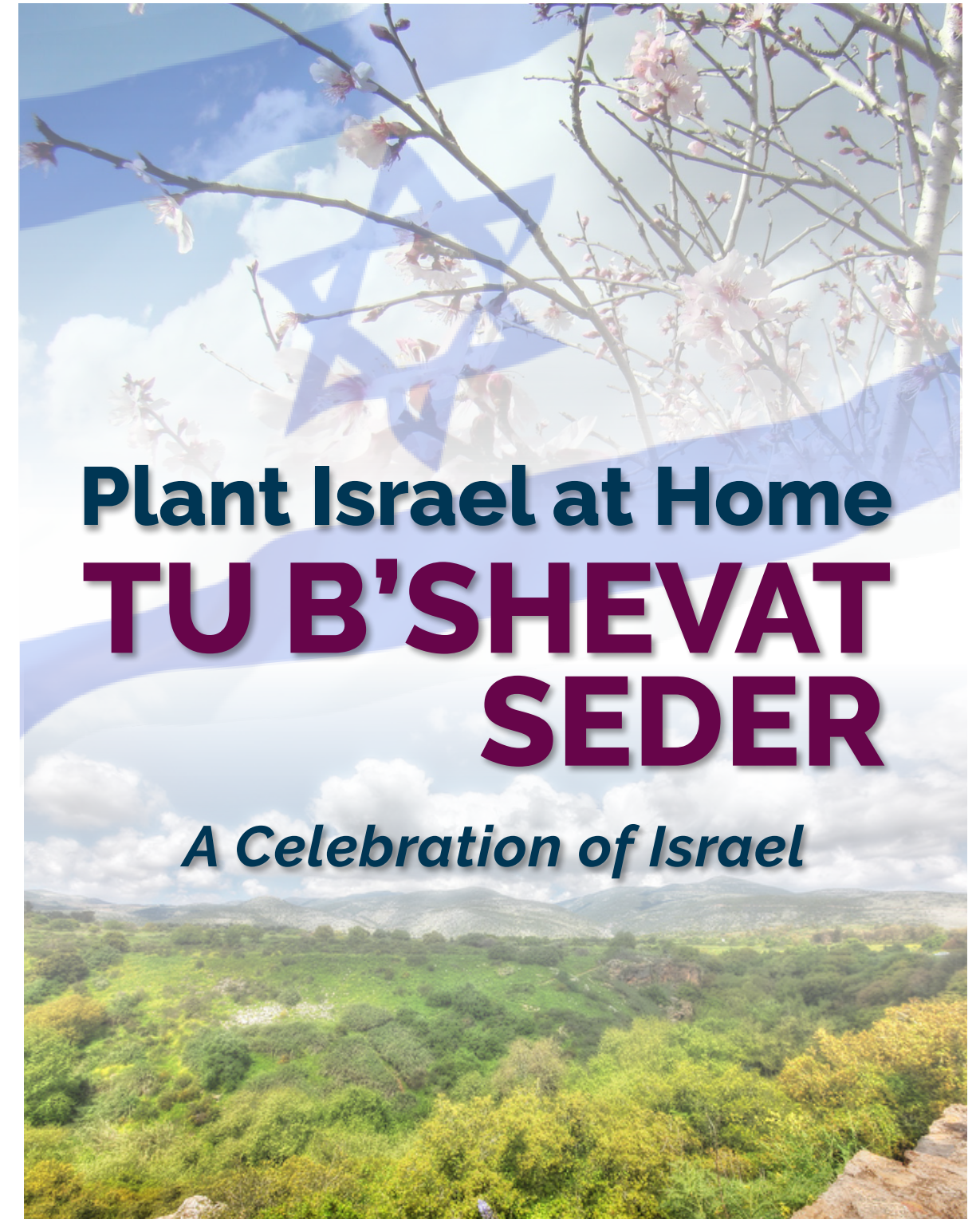


Plant Israel at Home **TU B'SHEVAT** **SEDER**

A Celebration of Israel

THE
Israelforever™
FOUNDATION

The Israel Forever Foundation is proud to welcome you to



Cover and inner design by Mushkie Uliel

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We are proud to bring to you this special Tu B'Shevat celebration that invokes the Israel connection this holiday so deserves, and offers you a way to plant a small piece of Israel in your very own corner of the world.



Our connection to our homeland continues to grow and be strengthened through the seeds we plant today and for generations to come. Just as a tree needs water, pruning, and attention to extend its life, so, too, does our relationship with Israel - with proper care, we can perpetuate a love, respect, and pride in our homeland!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: A History of Tu B'Shevat 6

Tu B'Shevat Seder: Celebrating Israel 11

Plant Israel at Home Activities 26

Additional Readings and Songs..... 28

Taste of Israel Tu B'Shevat Recipes..... 39



Introduction: A History of Tu B'Shevat

In Jewish tradition, Tu B'Shevat, the New Year of Trees, is celebrated on the 15th (ט"ו=15) day of the Jewish month of Shevat-שבט. This is one of the four New Years mentioned in the Mishnah. Known in Hebrew as "Chag HaIllanot" (אילן=tree), we honor this day when budding fruit enters a new year of life and the first bulbs of spring are beginning to blossom on the trees throughout Israel.



The rabbis chose the 15th of Shevat even though it is in the midst of Israel's rainy season, rather than during the seasons of agricultural planting. It is this time of year that the almond (shkediya שקדיה) trees and other early bloomers awake from their winter slumber, sap begins to drip, and a new fruit-bearing cycle begins. Throughout the Land of Israel, tiny pink and white blossoms start to open and grace the hills with the first sign of the new year of the tree's life that inaugurates the annual Tu B'Shevat celebrations.

The date for Tu B'Shevat was used from early Temple times to calculate the age of fruit-bearing trees - a measurement essential to the practice of **tithing**, the practice of not eating the first fruits of a new tree for the first three years of a tree's life. In the fourth year, the first fruits were intended to be used in Temple ceremonies only (Leviticus 19:23-25). An accurate accounting of a tree's age was needed both in these first years, as well as throughout its life to allow for the observance of the law of *shmitta* שמיטה: when the fruit of the land in the seventh year cannot be eaten, used or sold.

And so the counting of a trees' birthday continues today: the fruit of the trees that bloom before Tu B'Shevat would be counted toward the previous year, and those budding after Tu B'Shevat would be the first fruits of the new "tree year".

Both of these superbly illustrate the ecological integrity of Judaism both in ancient time and today!

In honor of this holiday, there is a long-standing tradition to eat fruits and grains native to the Land of Israel, the seven biblical species - Shivat Minnim שבעת מינים, mentioned in the Torah:



1. Wheat - Chita - חיטה
2. Barley - Se'orah - שעורה
3. Grapes - Anavim - ענבים
4. Fig - Te'enah - תאנה
5. Pomegranate - Rimon - רימון
6. Olive - Zayit - זית
7. Honey - D'vash - דבש

”כי ה' אלוקיך מביאך אל ארץ טובה, ארץ נחלי מים, עיינות ותהומות יוצאים בבקעה ובהר, ארץ חיטה ושעורה וגפן ותאנה ורימון ארץ זית שמן ודבש”

דברים ח:ז-ח

“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; A land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey.”

Deuteronomy 8:7-8

During our many years in exile, gifts of dried fruit were commonly exchanged as a reminder of the bounty of the Land. Israelis continue this tradition and today, in markets throughout Israel, dates, pomegranates, olives, avocados, persimmons,



oranges, carobs, *sabres* (cactus fruit), and other beautiful fruits are transformed into delicious confections to be shared between family and friends and at the Seder held in honor of Tu B'Shevat each year.

In the 1600s, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria and other Kabbalists in Tzfat began honoring this special day with a seder, or ordered meal, in which the fruits and trees of the Land of Israel were given symbolic

meaning. It was believed that eating 15 (“TU”) specific fruits and drinking four cups of wine in a specific order while reciting the appropriate blessings would bring both human beings and the world closer to spiritual perfection.

They believed that every cup of wine corresponded with a specific element from the four mystical worlds of creation: “All that is called in My Name, for My Glory, I have created it, I have formed it, and I have made it.” (Isaiah 43:7)

THE FOUR WORLDS OF TU B'SHVAT



Atzilut- Emanation, formulation of ideas

B'riah- Creation, ideas become patterns

Yetzirah- Formation, patterns take shape

Assiyah- Action, material world -developed from ideas

Each of these four worlds reflects a spiritual significance in terms of the creation of trees and the seasons of the year resulting from the creation of the world. Moreover, they reflect our connection as human beings to the world, in Judaism, to our environment, and to the formation and fulfillment of actions that remind us of the value of our connection to the land.

Each of these realms are also present in our relationship with Israel. Additionally, with each viable and vibrant life for our modern Jewish State, we succeed in enriching our understanding of the gift bestowed to the Jewish People 3000 years ago. It is the perpetuation of this knowledge and connection that embodies the practical significance of Tu B'Shevat.

The most common Tu B'Shevat tradition is the planting of new trees – an idea borne from the mitzvah known as "yishuv ha'aretz," ישוב הארץ, settling the land.



"I will bring you to the land, concerning which I raised My hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a heritage." (Exodus, Shmot 6:8);

This tradition is not exclusive to the ingathering of Jews that make their homes in the Land of Israel. Rather, Yishuv HaAretz invites everyone from all over the world to join in the effort of working hand-in-hand on the land to make the desert bloom, to grow roots in our ancestral soil and to ensure that another generation of trees will prosper for the next generation of our Jewish people to enjoy, in Israel and throughout the world.



Tu B'Shevat Seder: Celebrating Israel

A Tu B'Shevat Seder is a meaningful way to bring everyone together for a Virtual Israel Connection experience!

For this Seder you will need:

Fruits of the Land of Israel separated into platters:

- Figs
- Olives
- Dates
- Wheat Product (Cookies, cake, crackers or our delicious bread recipe!)
- Pomegranate seeds
- Orange
- Cherry Tomatoes
- Carob
- Grapes or Raisins
- Almonds



Israeli wine or grape juice - both red and white

Plates and Cups

Copies of the Seder program for everyone in attendance

Israeli Flags!

NOTE TO COMMUNITY LEADERS: *The following Tu B'Shvat Seder is set up so that everyone can read a paragraph. It is important that there be one person who "leads" the Seder - assigning the readings as well as generating and leading the discussions. Selections in **bold** are perfect for reading aloud as a group, and of course the songs are for everyone to join in!*

To help personalize the Seder, ask everyone to bring a special song or poem related to trees, nature, fruit, flowers, anything that reflects the spirit of this Birthday of Trees and a symbol of their personal connection to Israel.

“וכי תבוא אל הארץ, ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל”

ויקרא יט:כג

“And when you shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food...”

Leviticus 19:23

The mitzvah of *yishuv ha'aretz* requires us to develop the natural world to provide for our needs: that we should have a suitable place to live, work, learn, and serve our Creator, that we should have the ability to develop appropriate systems for the supply of food, energy, water; and to allow for our transportation needs. All aspects of this development must be in balance with other considerations to maintain the ecological integrity of the land.



The desire to make the desert bloom in the 1800s was transformed into a passion for planting trees throughout the Land of Israel. Thanks to the efforts of Israelis and all the important contributions of Jews from all over the world, facilitated by the Jewish National Fund/Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael, Israel was one of the only countries to end the last century with more trees than it had 100 years earlier!

Jews all around the world have found many ways to celebrate Tu B'Shevat: as a celebration of nature, as a spiritual renewal, or as a way to connect with the environment. **But what better way to honor the legacy of this unique holiday than by connecting with the land in which it was born, and to which we are all linked!**

SHALOM EVERYONE AND WELCOME!

Tu B'Shevat Higiya, Chag Hallanot! Tu B'Shevat has arrived! The “New Year of Trees!”

We come together today to celebrate Tu B'Shevat, the New Year of Trees in the Land of Israel, the land of our forefathers.

By gathering as a community, sharing stories, reciting blessings, and partaking of fruits native to Eretz Yisrael, we have the opportunity to deepen our connection to Israel.

We come together to celebrate the roots of her soil, the fruits of her trees, and the meaning she imbues on our lives.

Sing: “Hinei Mah Tov”

Hi-nei ma tov u'ma na-im
she-vet a-chim gam ya-chad.

How good and pleasant it is for brothers
and sisters to dwell together in unity.



Sacred trees and groves are scattered throughout Eretz Yisrael. Many are hundreds of years old, some thousands, and their stories have been passed down to us as an inheritance.

From their planting to the laws regarding their use in the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the trees and fruits that grow today are a reflection of what our nation has built.

In the custom of the rabbis in Tzfat, we sit together and eat fruit symbolic of that which grows in Israel rather than what is in season, as a reminder of our ancient connection to the land, its history, and our return.

As we drink 4 cups of the fruit of the vine, we invite our senses to experience the colors of Israel's natural landscape during the changing of her seasons and to relish the sweetness of the fruits and nuts in honor of our land and all her bounty. By partaking in this tradition, we can consider the memories as well as the flavors as a way to help us in understanding why Israel is important to us as individuals and as a nation.



First Blessings: Historical Connection and Exile

Trees embody perpetuation, renewal, roots, and tradition. Trees are part of our faith, and our destiny.



The Tree of Life, symbolic of the Torah, evokes a feeling of our shared roots, of the fertility of our nation. It reminds us of the challenges we have endured and the cycle of life and death. The Tree of Life gives us hope for the future.

The Tree of Knowledge, which put forth blossoms and fruit, teaches us of good and evil and the value of personal experience. It encourages questioning while teaching consequence. It teaches us to strive for good, and to seek truth. The

Tree of Knowledge can help us navigate through the darkest of times that arise against us in every generation.

The trees planted by our ancestor Abraham were an act of pride - to demonstrate his taking root in a new homeland. Over thousands of years, many other nations have planted trees in the Land of Israel. We celebrate the trees among which our forefathers and foremothers lived and wandered as a free people in their own land.

*"I will bring you to the land, which I raised My hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a heritage."
(Shemot 6:8)*

"You shall possess the Land and dwell in it, for to you have I given the Land to possess" (Bamidbar, 33:53)

With these words, our ancestral link to the land of Israel is endowed. With these words, a people were given a home.



As we make our first blessings, we remember that it was in the Land of Israel where we became a nation, and from the Land of Israel that we were cast away from our home. We remember the history that connects us - through good and evil, when war, persecution and exile were forced upon us, and through which we have survived with the Torah and hope as our guide.

Fig - תאנה - Teenah

The first fruit we taste today is one of the oldest fruits of the land. (*Hold up figs for everyone to see.*) Symbolic of "Netzach - נצח," endurance and longevity, the fig is believed by some to be the tree of "national Israel." It reflects the everlasting fruitfulness of the Jewish people and our capacity to endure and survive in spite of every hardship.

Together we say the blessing for the fruit of the trees of Israel and taste of their sweetness:



ברוך אתה יי אלוהנו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ

Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, Borei Pri HaEtz
Blessed art Thou, Lord of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

Enjoy a fig!

After the arid, hot summer, Israel is covered in the dust that has settled on the dried grains of the fields. As the first rains come, and the branches begin to lose their leaves, the first flower indicating the fall - the chatzav – חצב – arrives, along with other light-colored wildflowers.

This first cup of wine that we drink is therefore white, to symbolize the spectrum of soft shades that embrace the land at the arrival of fall and to remind us of the simplicity of our bond with Israel as the origin of our people.



ברוך אתה יי אלוהנו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Borei Pri HaGefen

Blessed art Thou, Lord of the Universe who creates the fruit of the vine

Drink from the First Cup.

Second Blessings: Memory and Commitment

For 2000 years, we lived in exile, dispersed among the nations. Just as seeds are scattered by the wind, so too, were our people scattered throughout the world. During these years, the Land of Israel was but a distant dream evoked only by the legends of the Bible and traditions passed down from one generation to the next.



As the distance and time between our presence in the land grew, we clung to the legacy of what we knew of her, as it was written:

For Hashem your God is bringing you into a good land. A land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths springing forth in valleys and hills,

A land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of (olive) oil and (date) honey, a land wherein you shall eat without scarceness, you shall not lack anything in it...

And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless God for the good land, which is being given unto you (Deuteronomy, 8:7-10)



We partake of the seven species native to the land because they remind us of our origins, of a place where we could feel a sense of belonging as a people. We outlasted nations that time and time again sought to eliminate us, and we remained eternally linked to this land in spite of war and persecution, never relinquishing our connection.



Similarly, the olive tree has endured and remains one of Israel's oldest native trees. It withstands all seasons, never loses all of its leaves, and can grow even in poor conditions. Used for religious practices and health purposes alike, olive trees - much like the Jewish People - reach an age of several thousand years and can regenerate after a fire, drawing strength from within and outlasting so many others.

Just as an olive tree may lose its branches or be uprooted from its soil, so, too, have the Jewish people continued to prosper in exile, always perpetuating an appreciation of why the Land of Israel has always been an integral part of our identity, our community, and our faith.

Olive – זית - Zayit

As we eat of these olives as our second fruit, we remember the olive branch brought to Noah after the flood, the olive oil used in the Temple ceremonies, the miracle of the oil found by the Maccabees, and the symbol of our eternal hope for a return to Tzion so that we could live in peace.

B'teavon! (Eat the olives)



In the midst of Israel’s rainy season, the landscape slowly begins to come alive. Although it is still winter in Israel, the first blossoms of the almond tree begin to bud on the branches, awaiting the warmth of the spring sun and the annual renewal of life.



The slow emergence of the blossoms reminds us of the patience with which we awaited our return from exile and with which we continued to embrace the memory and the connection to the land from afar. Our senses come alive with the awakening of the new season. And so we add a touch of red wine or grape juice to our cup of white to symbolize the awakening of our people to the potential fulfillment of our ancient dream to return home to our land. *L’Chaim! (Drink from second cup)*

Third Blessing: Return

G-d promised, *“Fear not, Israel, for I am with you. I will bring your seed from the east... and from the west... and from the north... and from the south “; to be planted again in G-d’s vineyard in the Holy Land. (Isaiah 43:5)*



Pioneers returned to Tzion throughout the 1800s seeking the fulfillment of the 2000 year old dream: fostering rebirth in our ancient home. As our people and our land were reunited they recalled the commandment in the Torah:

“And the Lord G-d planted a garden in the first instance in Eden” Bereshit 2:8, and so

do you also, when you enter into the land, occupy yourselves first with nothing else but plantation; hence it is written, “And when ye shall come into the land, then ye shall plant.”

They began to make the desert bloom, investing their every effort into the building of Israel. We followed in the footsteps of Abraham and planted trees to establish roots, a way of healing our land that was degraded after centuries of neglect during our exile.



“We will conquer the wilderness, we will make the Land bloom.” Vintage poster courtesy of Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet L’Yisrael)

The excitement of our people was awakened, inspired by the return of these brave young men and women. We were reminded of the ancestral heritage that binds us to this land, and we joined in the efforts to rebuild and reconnect. No longer was it a lofty dream, no longer was it confined to our imagination. The spiritual value of Israel took on new life, new meaning, and gave birth to new pride.

SY Agnon, the great writer of Israel, once wrote: *Happy is the one who devotes himself to the Land and engages in its settlement, proclaims the unity of His great Name in heaven and on earth, and increases the honor of Israel.*

From the Tu B'Shevat Seder in the hills of Tzfat hundreds of years ago to our Seder gathering today, we share a common purpose: to celebrate and strengthen our connection to Eretz Yisrael and its spiritual value in our lives.

As we partake of our third fruit of Israel, we think of the years when we began to again taste the freedom of having come home.

Date – תמר - Tamar

We eat dates to celebrate the sweetness of this reunification, borne of trees that now grow in the ancient sands of our homeland. A fruit that is mentioned in the stories of Moses, David, and Tamar, whose branches provided food, shelter and sustenance for our people for so many years, and was the recognized symbol of the Kingdom of Judea.



Israeli historians discovered a 2000 - year - old seed on Masada. Just as this seed was planted and has begun to grow, so, too, did we plant within ourselves the seed of hope and watch it prosper and, together share a commitment to honor Israel. Let us enjoy the sweetness of the Tamar!

B'teavon! (Eat the dates)

Our third cup of wine is two-thirds red and one-third white. It symbolizes spring overtaking the winter and the rush of new colors in the landscape. Fields of Calaniot – poppies, cascade over the rolling hills. The white, bare winter is giving way to new season, just as the chalutzim – חלוצים – pioneers brought new color, new life to the land. With this cup, we awaken ourselves



to the significance of Israel in our own lives even from a distance as we celebrate the search for a new connection, a deeper meaning, in our appreciation of our homeland.

L'Chaim! (Drink from third cup)

Fourth Blessing: Planting Seeds Today for Future Generations

One hundred years ago, Israel was barren of trees or fruits, a desert awaiting its rebirth.



By the Declaration of Israel's Independence in 1948, the leaves of the first trees were already emerging. Today, the Land blooms with trees, flowers, and vineyards and continue to provide the seven species with which the land was blessed.



The dream of Tzion emanated through the hearts of Jews throughout the world, and the call of duty was expressed by sharing any zloty, ruble, dollar, or pound a family could manage. Even in the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto, the little blue boxes of the Jewish National Fund were discovered.

We join together today to celebrate those whose vision and fortitude enabled us to plant new trees in our ancestral soil, to ensure another generation of trees will prosper and grow.

Just as we plant our trees in Israel, so, too, shall we plant Israel at home, in our hearts, and in our lives as has been accomplished for over 2000 years.

Today, Israel lives and we are a part of that life, from whatever corner of the world in which we sit. We are able to witness its beauty through the photographs and films, and to taste of its bounty through foods both fresh and dried.

For our last blessings, we relish in a collection of tastes of Israel that reflect the new fruits of the land as well as the old, reminding us of our ongoing relationship and continued efforts to celebrate and strengthen our personal connection to our one and only Jewish State, now and in the future.

Wheat - חיטה - Chita

Images of wheat stalks decorate the stories of our past. Murals, mosaics, and elaborate tales invoke appreciation for the grains that nourish both our physical bodies and our spiritual aspirations.

It must be planted, plowed, harvested, cared for, winnowed, ground, sifted, kneaded and baked- a long and difficult process. Similarly, when we are far away from the land, our connection to Israel needs to be nurtured throughout our lives.



Take a piece of cake or crackers made from wheat and recite the blessing:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהנו מלך העולם בורא מיני מזונות
Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, Borei Minei Mezonot
Blessed art Thou, Lord of the Universe, who creates different types of nourishment.

Pomegranate - רימון - Rimon

The pomegranate grows throughout Israel, her red flowers marking the arrival of Spring and her fruits ripening just in time for Rosh Hashanah. It is believed that every Rimon has 613 seeds, symbolic of the 613 mitzvot.



Just as we strive to fulfill as many good deeds in our life, may these seeds also plant within us an abundance of love for the land from which our people have grown and prospered and may this prosperity be perpetuated for future generations.

**Citrus – פרי עץ הדר – Pri Etz Hadar
*(the Fruit of the Beautiful Tree)***



Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Israel’s first settlers, by the late 1920s, oranges were the most recognized citrus fruit cultivated from the Land of Israel, exported throughout the world. By the 1960s, the Jaffa Orange was one of the agricultural emblems of the Jewish State. From Caesarea in the north to Ashkelon in the south, the fertile Sharon plain of Israel’s central and south coast blooms with aromatic groves and fruit so sweet, it is like candy. As we eat of Israel’s citrus, we recall the excitement of those enjoying their first taste of Israel’s sunshine.

Cherry Tomato – עגניות שרי – Agvaniyot Sherry

Israeli professors perfected the cherry tomato, but one example of the innovation for which Israel is known. A favorite of Israeli children over the years, just pop one in your mouth and let the burst of sweetness make you smile!



Carob - חרוב - Charuv

The Jewish people have always understood the value of planting trees today for future generations to enjoy. Planting a tree symbolized our belief that our descendents would be dwelling in the same place and would be able to benefit from the work we have done in the present.



Honi was walking one day and saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked, “How long will it take for that tree to grow?” The man replied, “Seventy years.” “How do you know that you will live another seventy years?” asked Honi. I don’t,” replied the man. “But just as my grandparents and parents planted for me, I am planting this tree for the generations to come.”

The carob trees that grow throughout Israel are a reminder of the lesson from the Babylonian exile: “When G-d returned the exiles to Zion, we were as dreamers.” Today, our ancient dream has been fulfilled and a Jewish land thrives, but our work remains and we shall continue to protect our dream, our history, and our fortitude to protect Israel forever.

Almond – שקד - Shaked

As the last fruit of trees from which we eat, it is fitting that we should taste of the almond that is the “symbol” of Tu B'Shevat.

Jacob, Moses, Jeremiah, and Ecclesiastes all recalled the almond as one of the choicest fruits of the Land of Israel.

Bursting into bloom while other trees are still



bare and asleep, the almond - whose name Shaked- שקד, means “watchful, diligent, alert” - reminds us of our obligation to be forever mindful of Israel in our lives and that of our children and our children’s children.

The fourth and last cup we drink is entirely red. As we again reach the autumn season, with their roots buried safely in the ground, the trees of Israel are already preparing for the next cycle of nature. As the flavor of the grapes touch our lips, we complete the process of awakening and celebrate the privilege of living at a time when we can honor both the ancient and the modern trees of Israel.

ברוך אתה יי אלוהנו מלך העולם
שהחיינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, Shechyanu
V'Kimanu V'Higyanu L'zman Hazeh

*Blessed art Thou, Lord of the Universe, who granted us life, sustained us,
and allowed us to reach this time.*

L'Chaim!



Israel is an integral part of the past, present and future of the Jewish People, wherever we may be in the world. It is the heart, it is the soul, and it is our common bond as a people.

Just as our roots were planted thousands of years ago, so, too, shall we nourish these roots and protect the legacy for years to come as we weave Israel into the branches of our lives.



לשנה הבאה בירושלים
L'Shanah HaBa'ah B'Yerushala'yim

Next year in Jerusalem!

Discussion Activity

How does Tu B'Shevat help you understand the value of Israel as a part of our Jewish Identity?

What does it mean to you to have “roots” in a land that is so far away?

Does the idea of Israel give you a feeling of that you belong to something bigger, a piece of history that you can identify with?

Have you ever planted a tree in Israel? Why was that experience special to you?

If you could sit under a tree anywhere in Israel, where would it be?

How can we in the Diaspora protect and nourish our connection with Israel?

What will you remember most about this Tu B'Shevat Seder?



Plant Israel at Home activity or distribution of seeds to participants

Plant Israel at Home Activity

Israeli wildflowers are a thing of beauty. Their diversity is a reflection of the culture, society and history of Israel – so many different peoples, so many eras, leaders and wars, which all come together within one small section of the world. They brighten the winter, they soften the spring.

In honor of Tu B'Shevat, we plant the seeds that will grow our love for Israel every day.

With family and friends, or for a community event, plant Israeli wildflower seeds in your garden, in a planter to put on the window sill, or anywhere that will always remind you of your little piece of Israel.

Rav Nachman said, "Our Father, Jacob did not die...just as his seed lives on so does he live on forever." (Taanith [5]b).

Similarly, every tree lives and dies, but so long as it has produced seed that is perpetuated through the generation, the tree lives on forever.

Design your own unique Israel planters!

Have participants bring a canister for planting (upcycled milk cartons or plastic bottles are a great way to stay green!) or provide clay to make pinch pot planters

What you will need:

🌿 Seeds of Israel

-Israeli wildflower seeds from Israel Forever

-Seeds of any of the seven species native to Israel or any other of Israel's celebrated trees such as the olive, fig or almond.

🌿 Provide pictures of Israel, sayings in Hebrew, Israeli flag images

🌿 Scrapbook or paper-mache onto a planter

🌿 Soil (wouldn't it be heavenly if everyone could have a touch of Israeli soil to plant in? Maybe next year!)



Make sure to take lots of photos of everyone with their Plant Israel at Home™ seeds and send it to media@israelforever.org to show the world your Israel garden and to join our Virtual Israel Forest!

Additional Readings: Trees of Israel

There used to be a custom in Beitar to plant a cedar tree for a baby boy and cypress tree for a girl. The children would care for the trees as they grew up and on their wedding days would use the wood as poles for their chuppah. From one generation to the next, love flourished from the intertwining of branches, uniting souls through the growing of shared roots.

The Grieving Olive Tree

After the Babylonians destroyed the Second Temple, there was widespread grief and mourning throughout the country. It is believed that, to demonstrate their extreme grief, all the trees of the country shed their leaves. Only after the other trees were bare did the people notice that the olive tree still retained its leaves.



Representatives of the trees approached the olive tree and asked “Why don’t you shed your leaves in grief over the destruction of the Temple?” The olive tree responded: “You, my brothers, show your grief on the outside for all to see. My grief will be carried within for all times.” And so it is, that each year the olive tree eats away at itself in grief and sorrow until it is nothing more than a hollow strip of bark.

A Tree in Israel Speaks by Yaffa Klugerman

“Even if every wind in the world were to come and blow upon it, they could not shift [a tree] from its place.” (Pirkei Avot 3:22)

I dare you to walk by me without stopping. Go ahead, try it; I’m certain you will fail. Few among you can resist the lure of my majestic presence beckoning you to lounge in

the shade by my side. What causes such confidence? History, my friends--the history of this place.

For centuries, pilgrims have walked along the path from Tzfat to where I was planted in the 15th century, a solitary guard at the graves of Rabbi Abba Halafta--a second-century Talmudic sage--and his beloved sons Yossi and Shimon. If you could step back in time, you’d witness much the same scene as the one that lies before you even until today. Aside from a modern wall built around the sages’ tombs, the winds of change seldom blow this way.

I remember when Rabbi Moses Basola, an Italian religious leader, visited in 1523. “The place is lush and fertile and full of everything good,” he wrote to friends back home. “There is also a spring with good water. I prayed there over the grave of Rabbi Halafta, which is on the plain, and a large oak tree is over it.”

That’s me. The oldest Mount Tabor oak tree in the Land of Israel. Then, fewer trees bloomed in the land, and people considered me a special landmark of the many years through which we have remained linked.



Tzfat and I grew together, each of us sending roots deep into the land. When scores of Jews fled here from Spain in 1492, many pious Jews made Tzfat their home. I fondly remember Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulhan Arukh, the Code of Jewish Law, and Rabbi Solomon Alkabetz, composer of Lekhah Dodi. Rabbi Yitzchak Luria-Known as HaAri-who compiled the Kabbalat Shabbat prayer service in the 16th century, stood taller than most. I’ll never forget those Friday evenings when he led his students into the fields to welcome Shabbat. The dry mountain air in the Galil carried their spirited prayers to me. Today, Jews still pray in HaAri’s synagogue, which stands on the exact spot where he and his students once sang; I know, because I hear their voices and the voices of other local communities who welcome Shabbat the same way. Nowadays, most people pray indoors, and some of the melodies have changed. But

HaAri planted those beautiful Shabbat prayers deep in the hearts of Jews everywhere, and these same words to God’s glory have nourished Jewish lives for centuries, like my own extensive roots have helped nourish me.



I survived hard times too: an epidemic decimated the community in 1747, and the earthquake of 1759 destroyed Tzfat and killed 2,000 people. After those tragedies, I worried that the area would never recover, but the Jews rebuilt Tzfat, and continued to live there. Every minor rumble after that scared me, but in 1837, my branches shook violently again as another earthquake claimed the lives of 5,000 people. I saw many people pass by as they left the demolished town to build homes elsewhere. Yet, in the same way that I remained steadfast, Jewish ties to the land endured. I heard the rumble of explosions in May 1948, when 200 Jews bravely defended Tzfat against thousands of Arab troops. It then officially became a Jewish town, though I know better than anyone that it has always been so.

So much has occurred in my 600 years of life, but I often marvel at how much remains the same. Perhaps people dress differently, ride cars instead of horses, and travel a road to Tzfat instead of a path. Yet the sun continues to rise and set, seasons come and go, and everyone still appreciates the simple pleasure of sitting in my shade.

The Botanist’s Palms

Drivers traveling along the coastal highway near Atlit on the Northern coast of Israel will notice two neat rows of tall palm trees disappearing into the countryside. These trees are a living monument to the life and sacrifice of Aaron Aaronsohn. They lead from the town of Atlit on the coast, to an agricultural experimental



station he helped found below Zichron Ya’acov. The trees, California Fan Palms, are close to 90 years old.

Aaronsohn moved with his family at the age of 6 to Palestine. His father was one of the founders of the town of Zichron Ya’acov. After studying in France, he returned to Israel, where he became a well-known botanist. With the help of influential Jewish leaders and philanthropists he raised funds for the establishment of an agricultural experiment station at Atlit between the years 1909-1910.

Aaronson is also known for his part in the Nili spy group, which helped the British in their aim to conquer Palestine from the Turks. He was killed in an airplane crash over the English Channel on May 15, 1919.

The Roots of Alon by Erez Strasburg



There is one ancient Oak tree in Israel, found in the lower Galilee that will forever remind me of a story and of something my father would say to me as a boy that, to this day, fills me with confidence. He would say: "Go on son, try finding your own way, but remember that we are here to back you up whenever you need us."

This simple but important message reminds me of the young Yigal Alon, one of Israel’s greatest leaders and this is the story of how he picked his last name.

At 13 years old, Yigal Paykovitz’s father called him to the grain storage and said to him: “You have reached the age of your Bar Mitzvah. You are a man and it is time for you to have your own pistol and to become one of the fighters of Israel, defending our people,

our land and our legacy.” He removed a small pistol and handed it to his son with pride. “Tonight”, said the father, “you will be guarding on your own in our old oak fields. Make sure that you never use this pistol unless your life is in danger. If thieves come to the field, don’t fire at them immediately but fire your pistol into the air as warning.”

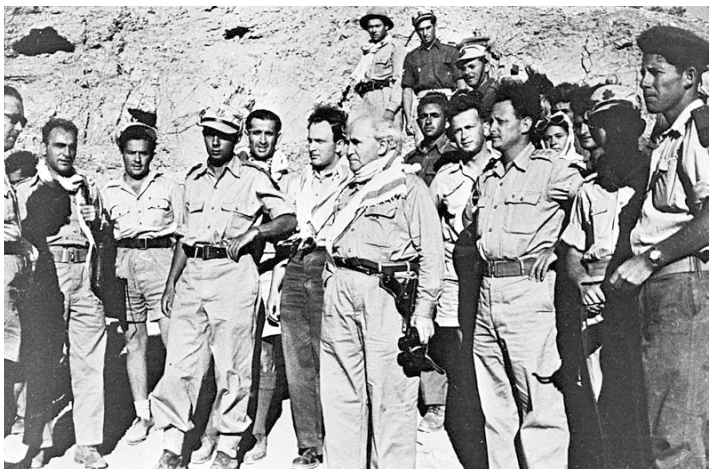
Excited and nervous, the young Yigal walked 4 ½ kilometers to the oak fields. He hid behind a large rock, his pistol in hand, and guarded the fields. At 2 AM, Yigal noticed 3 Bedouins on horseback approach the field and begin to collect the crop. This was a moment of truth.

He cried out loud in Arabic “Andak” - stop - but the 3 men did not run away. Instead they started to walk towards the boy. Yigal shot his pistol in the air as his father had instructed but the 3 men continued to near.

Suddenly, from out of the darkness, a loud voice was heard: “Andak!” in a heavy Russian accent. A man on a horse galloped into the field shooting a pistol into the air. The 3 men escaped to their horses and ran away. Under the light of the moon, Yigal recognized the mysterious rider. It was his father, hiding nearby the whole night, watching over the young guard.

The moral of the story for me was that simple message that I so often heard from my own parents: Go your own way. Take risks. You will always have us at your back.

When Yigal Paykovitz was asked by David Ben Gurion to take on a Hebrew last name, as was a common practice in the early years of the state, Yigal remembered his first experience in combat in the oak fields. The Oak Tree (Alon) - that was his inspiration. And Yigal Alon came to be.



David Ben Gurion (center), Yigal Alon (right), Yitzhak Rabin (behind) 1948



Just as the roots of Yigal’s Oak Tree are grown deep into the Land of Israel inherited by our ancestors, so, too, is our connection to Israel. Just as Yigal’s parents always “had his back,” so, too, do we, the generations of Jews scattered around the world, feel a commitment and responsibility to the land and our modern State of Israel which will always be there to protect us, to provide for us, and to welcome us.

The Settlers’ Eucalyptus Grove

When early visitors came to Palestine they saw not one, but two lakes in the northern section of the Land of Israel. Visible on all old maps, this lake north of the Sea of Galilee was known as Lake Hula. It covered 5 square miles and was surrounded by extensive swamps which covered close to another 4 square miles.

The lake supported a tremendous variety of animal and plant life. Unfortunately, it was also a fertile breeding ground for the mosquito that carried the dreaded malaria disease. In 1934, the Jewish Agency for Israel purchased the rights to a large part of the Hula Valley, with the intention of draining the area to eradicate the disease from the area and increase land for farming.

One of the villages that directly benefited from the draining of the Hula was Yesod Hama’aleh. The early years of the village were difficult and many of the settlers were stricken with malaria. Soon after the founding of the village, in the 1880s, the residents planted a grove of Eucalyptus on what was then the bank of Lake Hula.

The grove is located on a small knoll near the entrance of the Hula Nature Reserve. The trees once on the edge of the lake are now in the middle of the Hula Valley.



Tu B'Shevat: A Family Legacy By Elana Heideman

Tu B'Shevat is, for some, but an insignificant holiday on the Jewish calendar. I recall the first time it had real significance to me: on a family trip to Israel in my late teens when my Grammy Esther was along for the ride.



As we drove through Tel Aviv, Grammy suddenly burst out with excitement, “Oh my goodness! I think I planted those trees! I remember planting those trees right there!”

She went on to tell us that, growing up in Eretz Yisrael, then Mandate Palestine, it was customary for every child, every school, every family to take part in the planting of trees, keeping alive a tradition that seemed as ancient as the soil in which they were planting.

Born in 1924 in Rovno, Poland (now Ukraine), her father Shraga brought the whole Vorona clan to the Holy Land when Grammy was only 9 months old. Ironically, she doesn't actually know her real birthday on the secular calendar, but she will always know that she was born on Tu B'Shevat, which her father made a big deal of every year when they went planting. Not only were they celebrating a new year of life for the trees of Israel, but also for little Esther – a tradition that makes my own celebration of Tu B'Shevat that much more special.

Being in Israel with Grammy will always be something incredible for me, as I feel my life is intertwined with hers and the legacy her own father and mother set forth when they came here all those years ago.

Grammy ended up moving to the US in 1946 to marry my Grampa Max who she met while he was stationed here serving in the US navy (and that is a whole other incredible tale to be told). All these years later, she still reminds people that she isn't

Israeli, because she wasn't here when the state was declared. But she is very proud of her family history, her connection to this land, and her ability to speak to my own Sabra children in Hebrew, helping them to feel close to her even though she lives so very far away.



I have taught my boys about the trees in Tel Aviv that Savta Esther planted when she was a child. And we have now been planting our own every year since they were born.

But most importantly, I make sure they understand the significance of Israel in the Tu B'Shevat story – that we wouldn't have this chag without the land and the history to which we are connected.



Tu B'Shevat Songs

ERETZ YISRAEL SHELI

Eretz Yisrael sheli yafah vegam porachat
mi banah umi nata?
Kulanu beyachad!

Ani baniti bayit be'erezt yisrael
az yesh lanu eretz
ve'yesh lanu bayitz be'erezt yisrael.

Eretz Yisrael sheli yafah vegam porachat
mi banah umi nata?
Kulanu beyachad!

Ani nat'ati etz be'erezt yisrael -
az yesh lanu eretz,
ve'yesh lanu bayit
ve'yesh lanu etz be'erezt yisrael.

Eretz Yisrael sheli yafah vegam porachat
mi banah umi nata?
Kulanu beyachad!

Ani salalti k'vish be'erezt yisrael -
az yesh lanu eretz,
ve'yesh lanu bayit,
ve'yesh lanu etz,
ve'yesh lanu k'vish be'erezt yisrael.

Eretz Yisrael sheli yafah vegam porachat
mi banah umi nata?
Kulanu beyachad!

Ani baniti gesher be'erezt yisrael -
az yesh lanu eretz,
ve'yesh lanu bayit,
ve'yesh lanu etz,
ve'yesh lanu k'vish
ve'yesh lanu gesher be'erezt yisrael.

Eretz Yisrael sheli yafah vegam porachat
mi banah umi nata?
Kulanu beyachad!

Ani chibarti shir be'erezt yisrael -
az yesh lanu eretz,
ve'yesh lanu bayit,
ve'yesh lanu etz,
ve'yesh lanu k'vish,
ve'yesh lanu gesher,
ve'yesh lanu shir al eretz yisrael..

My land of Israel is beautiful and flourishing
Who built and who planted it?
We all did together!

I built a house in the land of Israel
So we have the land
And we have a home in Eretz Yisrael.

My land of Israel is beautiful and flourishing
Who built and who planted it?
We all did together!

I planted a tree in the land of Israel
So we have the land
And we have a house
and we have a tree in Eretz Yisrael.

My land of Israel is beautiful and flourishing
Who built and who planted it?
We all did together!

I paved a road in the land of Israel
So we have a land
And we have a house
And we have a tree
And we have a Road in Eretz Yisrael.

My land of Israel is beautiful and
flourishing
Who built and who planted it?
We all did together!

I built a bridge in the land of Israel
So we have a land
And we have a house
And we have a tree
And we have a Road
And we have a bridge in Eretz Yisrael.

My land of Israel is beautiful and
flourishing
Who built and who planted it?
We all did together!

I wrote a song about the land of Israel
So we have a land
And we have a house
And we have a tree
And we have a Road
And we have a bridge
And we have a Song about Eretz Yisrael.

HaShkediya Porachat - The Almond Tree is Blooming!

Hashkediya porachat
V'shemesh paz zorachat;
Tziporim merosh kol gag,
M'vasrot et bo hechag.

השְׁקֵדִיָּה פּוֹרַחַת,
וְשֶׁמֶשׁ פָּז זוֹרַחַת.
צִפּוֹרִים מֵרֹאשׁ כָּל גַּג
מִבְּשֻׁרוֹת אֶת בּוֹא הַחָג:

Tu bishevat higiya Chag Ha'Ilanot
Tu bishevat higiya Chag ha'Ilanot

ט"ו בְּשֶׁבֶט הִגִּיעַ – חַג הָאֵילָנוֹת!
ט"ו בְּשֶׁבֶט הִגִּיעַ – חַג הָאֵילָנוֹת.

The almond tree is growing,
A golden sun is glowing;
Birds sing out in joyous glee
From every roof and every tree.
Tu B'shevat is here, Holiday of the Trees
Tu B'shevat is here, Holiday of the Trees

Tastes of Israel for Tu B'Shevat™

The tastes of Israel are perfect ingredients for celebrating Tu B'Shevat! Here are just a few suggestions of some delicious dishes you can make for your Tu B'Shevat Tasting Table!

Honey Wheat Bread..... 40

Tu B'Shevat Salad 41

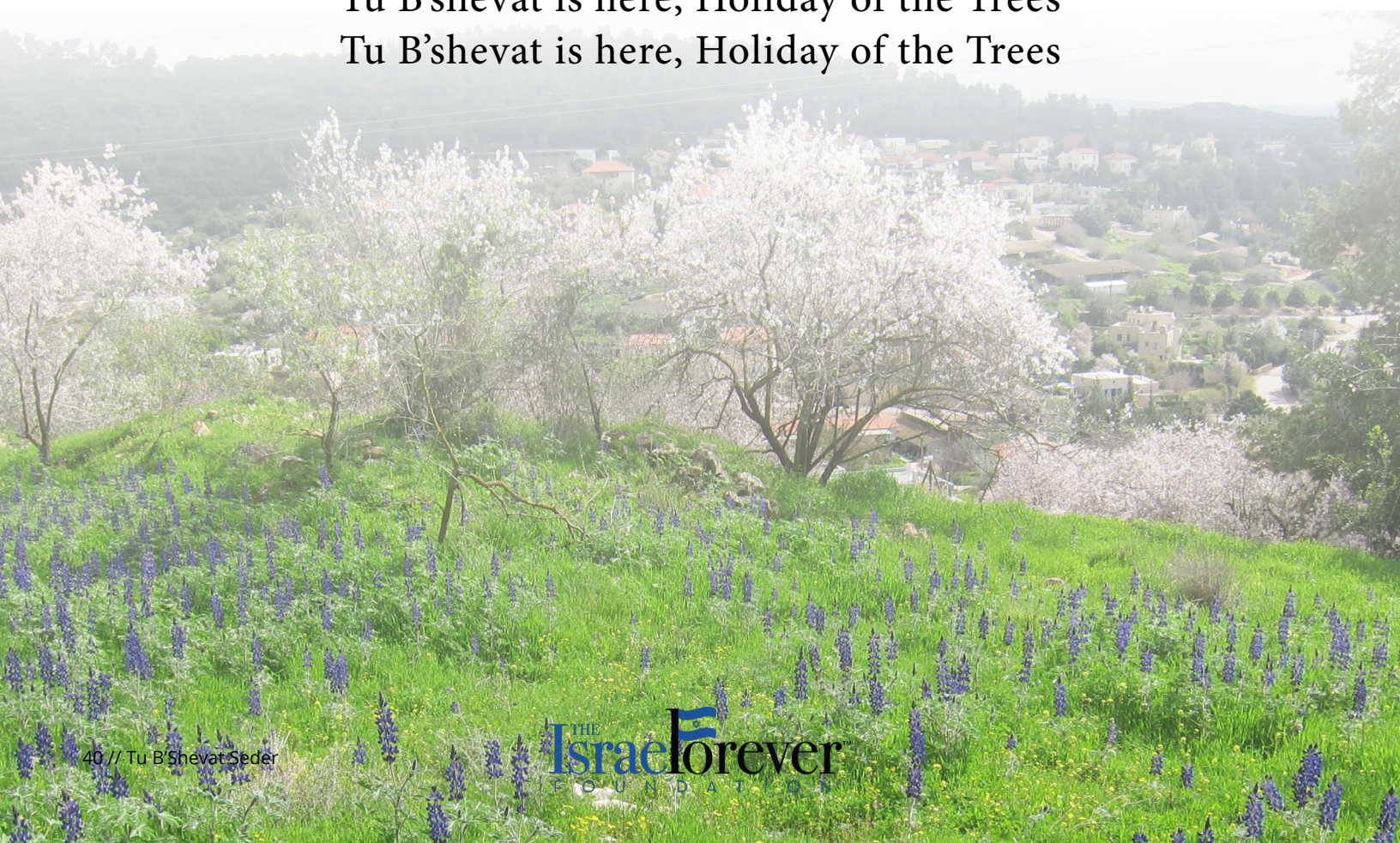
Fresh and Fun Barley Salad 42

Olive-Crusted Lemon Garlic Chicken 43

Couscous with Dried Fruits and Nuts..... 44

Almond Fruit Cake 45

Candied Stuffed Dates 46





Honey Olive Oil Wheat Bread – *like the ancient Israelites ate!*

- 1 cup warm water
- 2 Tablespoons yeast
- 2 Tablespoons sugar
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 c. honey or date honey
- 1 c. white flour
- 2 c. whole wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 tsp. thinly sliced almonds (optional)

In a mixing bowl, combine the water, yeast and sugar. Let sit for about 10 minutes or until the mixture becomes bubbly and frothy. Add in oil and honey. Slowly add in the flour, one cup at a time. Add in the salt. Knead by hand or with the paddle attachment of your electric mixer for about 15 minutes. In the same bowl, brush the dough with oil and let rise for 30 minutes or until doubled in size. Punch down, shape in loaf and place in a greased loaf pan. Brush with more oil and drizzle top with honey/date honey. Can sprinkle top with thinly sliced almonds. Preheat oven to 350°F. Slice the top with a sharp bread knife or any serrated knife. Bake for about 25-35 min minutes depending on your oven. If the top begins to brown early, lay a piece of aluminum foil over the top for the remaining time. Let cool before removing from pan.

Serve with date honey for guests to drizzle on top.



Tu B'Shevat Salad

- 2 heads Romaine Lettuce, roughly chopped or torn
- 6 to 8 figs, quartered
- 1 cup of seedless grapes, halved or quartered OR raisins
- 6 dates, quartered lengthwise or chopped
- 1 cup pomegranate seeds
- ½ cup walnuts, crushed
- 1 cup whole wheat croutons
- Optional:
- ½ -1 cup cooked Bulgur, Quinoa or Barley

Dressing:

- ½ cup Olive oil
- 4 Tablespoons Bee or date honey (or more, to taste)
- 4 Tablespoon balsamic vinegar or lemon juice
- 1 tsp oregano or thyme
- 1 tsp salt

In a bowl, combine dressing ingredients and shake or blend well until emulsified. Cut bread into bite-sized squares and place on a baking tray. Drizzle with ¼ of oil and herb mixture and mix well. Bake at 200°C to 225°C (400°F to 450°F) until crispy and lightly browned. Combine rest of ingredients in large bowl and mix with dressing. Add croutons last or serve on the side so they won't get soggy!



Fresh and Fun Barley Salad

6 to 8 servings

Salad:

- 1 cup barley, cooked
- 3 cups navel oranges or tangerines (5 medium), peeled and segmented
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1/2 cup red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup diced Black or Kalamata olives
- 1/4 cup toasted pine nuts or almonds
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh mint

Dressing:

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 teaspoon grated orange zest
- 1/4 cup fresh orange juice
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 2 to 3 tablespoons date honey
- 1 tablespoon rosemary
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon salt

Mix salad ingredients together in a bowl. Combine dressing ingredients together in a separate container, and pour over salad. Mix well and enjoy!



Olive-Crusted Lemon Garlic Chicken

There is no better ode to olives than this delicious chicken. And probably no more beautiful tree than the old, gnarled olive trees found throughout Israel.

8 pieces chicken, with or without bone as preferred.

- 1 cup olives, pitted and chopped finely
- 1 cup green olives, pitted and chopped finely
- 1-2 cloves garlic, crushed or very finely chopped
- 1 Tablespoon freshly chopped parsley
- 1 Tablespoon fresh thyme or rosemary
- 1 Tablespoon paprika
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 2 Tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 12 whole olives – black, green or kalamata
- 12 whole peeled garlic cloves

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a blender or food processor, combine all ingredients until it forms a thick paste. Smother chicken and place on baking sheet and scatter whole olives and garlic cloves around. Roast chicken for 30 minutes (no bone) or 55 minutes (bone in) - until chicken is cooked through but still juicy and tender.



Couscous with Dried Fruits and Nuts

6 to 8 servings

- 3 cups fine couscous (also fantastic with rice!)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1-2 Tablespoon olive oil
- 5 cups boiling water
- ½ cup date honey (or regular)
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 Tbsp butter or margarine, melted
- ½ cup raisins or dried cranberries
- ½ cup chopped pitted dates
- ½ cup chopped dried apricots
- 1/2 cup chopped blanched almonds
- 1/3 cup pine nuts
- ½ to 1 cup almond or coconut milk, as preferred

Coat couscous with salt and olive oil. Pour boiling water over couscous. Cover and let stand for 10 minutes. Fluff with fork (NOT a spoon!) Melt butter/margarine and stir in honey and cinnamon. Pour over mixed dried fruits, tossing to coat. Add to couscous and mix well. Gradually add enough of the almond/coconut milk to couscous to desired texture. Delicious both moistened or soaked.



Almond Fruit Cake

- 1 1/2 cups whole wheat pastry flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 2 eggs, room temperature
- 1 cup of fruit, whatever kind or combination you like, pitted and sliced
- 1/2 cup ground almond
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 tsp. almond extract
- 1 cup almond slivers to sprinkle on top

Preheat to 350°F. Butter a pie dish. Using either a hand-held or stand mixer, beat together the butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla. Sprinkle the flour, baking powder and salt over the batter, and mix in thoroughly. Scrape batter into the buttered pie dish and spread evenly. Scatter the fruit slices evenly over top, and press gently into the batter using your fingertips – you should have enough fruit so that the slices are crowded quite close together. Bake until the top is golden and the edges pull away from the pan, 50 to 60 minutes. Cool at least 30 minutes before serving.

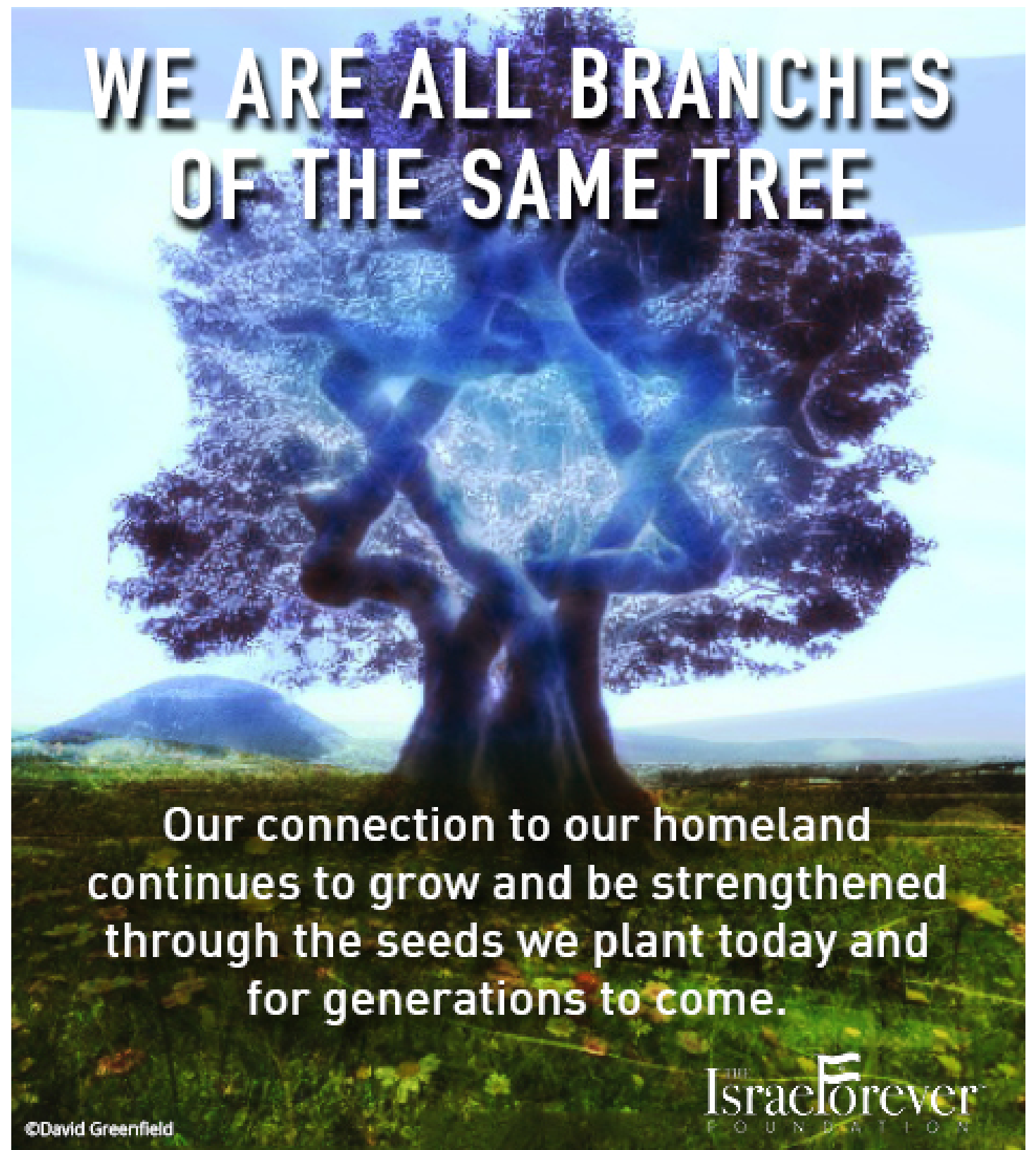


Candied Stuffed Dates

Makes 12

- 12 large medjool dates
- ½ cup almond paste
- ¼ cup date honey
- 12 toasted almonds, roughly chopped

Preheat oven to 425. Soften almond paste over low heat and add date honey,, leaving 2 Tablespoons of honey for drizzling at the end. Cut a slit in the side of each date and remove the pit. Stuff with the almond paste and date honey mixture and top with a teaspoon of almond pieces. Place into small baking dish and drizzle with date honey. For something different, sprinkle the top with a bit of coarse kosher salt! Bake for 10-15 minutes until warm and gooey – careful not to burn!



After thousands of years of living in exile, of praying for the return to Tzion, we should be continuously reminded and should remind each other of the value of Israel and her meaningfulness in our lives every chance we get - as family, friends, as a community, bound together by our common connection to Israel.

Just as we strive to establish meaningful connections through our personal reflection and observance, this day of significance in the Jewish tradition should remind us of our origins as a people and our shared heritage in spite of being scattered across the four corners of the earth.



Don't let the media overpower your relationship with our ancient home and the society and culture that are now thriving there.

Don't let politics divide you from the rest of Am Yisrael.

Don't let the distorted representations of the conflict or demonized versions of Israeli perspectives sway you against the one and only Jewish State in the world. Wherever you may be in the world, there is a connection that is just right for you. It is our obligation as Jews to delve deeper and seek it out. Let us all strive to be inspired and to Inspire Israel in others!!!



