

# Tu B'Shvat: THE BIG IDEA

Tu B'Shvat is the "birthday of the trees." In the Talmud, this 15th day of the month of Shvat is identified as the "new year for the trees," for the purpose of tracking the trees' ages. It was simply a calendar date.

But later generations of Jews turned this into a minor holiday with different meanings: the 16th century Kabbalists in Tzfat (Israel) created a Seder which celebrates the produce of Israel; the early Zionists emphasized planting trees in Israel; and today's environmentalists highlight the Jewish tradition's emphasis for caring for our planet. In short, the day marks our connection to Eretz Yisrael and to the natural world, the particular and the universal.



## Hazzan Sandler's Two Shekels



One of my favorite Tu B'Shvat customs is to

strive to say as many blessings over food - and fruit specifically - as possible! We eat the seven species associated with the Land of Israel, outlined in Deuteronomy 8:8 "Wheat, barley, grapes, figs and pomegranates; a land of oil-yielding olives and [date] honey." Over wheat in the form of bread, we would recite "*HaMotzi Lechem Min HaAaretz*." Made into cakes, we might also say "*Borei Minei Mezonot*." Over the Tu B'Shvat Seder wine/grape juice, we recite "*Borei P'ri HaGafen*" and over the other fruits we recite "*Borei P'ri HaEtz*." That's already four blessings!

Many Jews have the custom of eating a fruit they've never had before - or yet that season - in order to say "*Shehecheyanu*" over the new experience. And after the meal there are a handful of blessings said as well. While eating is an everyday activity necessary for physical sustenance and survival, on Tu B'Shvat we acknowledge the spiritual aspect of our natural physical world. By reciting many blessings, we increase our gratitude and joy. Being more mindful of God in those moments in turn opens our hearts to truly celebrate the Earth, the land, and the trees. And we can continue to count our blessings well after Tu B'Shvat too!

TABLE  
TALK

## Food for Thought

### DISCUSSION WITH CHILDREN

What is your favorite fruit/vegetable/tree?

Why are trees important to our world?

What is one small thing kids can do to care for our planet?

### DISCUSSION WITH ADULTS

In what ways are trees similar to people?

How is Tu B'Shvat more than just "Jewish Earth Day"?

What is one small step your family can take to care for our planet?



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