

Sap Rising: Tu BiShvat 5782



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Four Cups: Awareness, Connection, Gratitude & Hope

In an era when we cannot easily congregate,
may we discover new ways to connect
with our communities, our friends and family,
and with our own hearts.

As we celebrate Tu Bshvat,
may we be present to
the brokenness of our world
the wholeness of our souls
and the power of our prayers.

As we celebrate the turning of the seasons
and drink four cups of wine,
and may we be inspired to plant seeds of unity
and to sow love, kindness and compassion.

The first cup of wine is for AWARENESS:

As we seek connection
to something greater than ourselves—
may we grow more aware of
the Infinite Source of Blessings
and deepen our ability to BE a blessing.

May each transcendent moment
increase our awareness
of the inherent connection
between all living beings,
and may that awareness
enhance and deepen
our connection to God.

The second cup of wine is for CONNECTION:

May we invite God
to dwell in our midst
and allow God to manifest
through the work of our hands
the love in our hearts
and our connection to one another.

May intentional spiritual practice,
heartfelt prayer and acts of loving kindness
strengthen our connection God
and to the Divine Spark
implanted within each of us.

The third cup of wine is for GRATITUDE:

May we strive to notice, appreciate
and express gratitude for
our abundant blessings:
the inherent beauty of nature
and the earth on which we live,
the air we breathe,
the water we drink,
the clothes we wear,
the places we live,
the food we eat.

May we celebrate the opportunity
to make a difference in the world;
to pursue meaningful work
and to accompany—and be accompanied by—
people we love.

May we bolster our ability
to be present in the moment,
and find a quiet moment each day
to pause, breathe, receive,
and to celebrate the wonder of being alive.

The fourth cup of wine is for HOPE:

May the hope that we can—
and must— make a difference
inspire us to protect
and care for our planet
and all its inhabitants
especially those who are not able
to protect and care for themselves.

May our hearts remain open to possibility,
and may we become conduits of
hope, healing and holiness.

Joanne Fink

A Prayer for Renewing Connections

(Inspired by R. Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Tefillot 2:11)

רבּונו שֶׁל עוֹלָם זָכְנוּ לְהִתְאוּשֵׁשׁ בְּהִתְבּוֹדְדוּת,
יחד מוֹשִׁיטִים יָדַיִם מִהַרְיֵק שֶׁל הַנִּפְרָדוּת,
מִתְחַבְּרִים בְּאַמְצָעוֹת זֶה כְּדֵי לְהִתְקַשֵּׁר בֵּין לֵב לֵב.

Master of the Universe, may we merit resilience in solitude,
Together reaching out from the empty void of separateness,
Connecting by zoom, linking heart to heart.

וְנִזְכֶּה לְהִיּוֹת רְגִיל לְצֵאת בְּכָל יוֹם לַשָּׂדֶה
בֵּין אֵילָנוֹת וְעֵשְׂבִים וְכָל שִׂיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה,
וְשֵׁם נִזְכִּיר לָנוּ שֶׁבְּאַמְת אֲנַחְנוּ אֵף פֶּעַם לֹא לְבַד.

May it be our custom to go outdoors each day
Among the trees and grass, among all living things,
And there be reminded that none of us is ever truly alone.

תְּחַדֵּשׁ אֶת יְדִיעַתְנוּ שֶׁאַתָּה קָרוֹב כְּמוֹ לֵב הַפּוֹעֵם,
שֶׁהִצִּירִיד הוּא קָרוֹבוֹת כְּמוֹ חֲלוֹן,
שֶׁהֵאָהוּבִיד הֵם קָרוֹבִים כְּמוֹ מְקַלְדֵּת.

Renew our knowing that You are close like a beating heart,
That Your creations are as near as a window,
That Your beloveds are as close as a keyboard.

תְּחַיֵּינוּ בְּאַמְצָעוֹת רֶשֶׁתוֹת הַחַיִּים הָעוֹלָמִיּוֹת
שֶׁיִּכְלְלוּ כָּלֵם, וְתַעִיר אוֹתָנוּ מִתְרַדְמוּתֵינוּ
הַשְּׂמִיטָה שֶׁל הַחוּרָף הַמְּגֻפָּה הַזֶּה.

Enliven us by the worldwide webs of life
That connect us all. Rouse us from our slumber –
The laying fallow of this pandemic winter.

תְּבִיא אֶת אָבִיב שֶׁל חַיִּים חֲדָשִׁים בְּשִׁפְעַ,
תְּכַנְנֵנוּ לְרֵאוֹת בְּרֵאֵה פְּנִימִית אֶת הַשָּׂרָף מוֹכֵן לְעֹלוֹת.
תְּחַדֵּשׁ הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְהַגּוּף, לָנוּ וּלְכָל הַחַיִּים. אָמֵן.

Bring forth a spring of abundant new life:
Prepare us to see, with inner vision, the sap ready to rise.
Renew spirit and body, for us and for all life. *Amen.*

R. David Evan Markus

Four Cups / Four Worlds: From Isolation to Connection



In the classical Tu BiShvat seder, four cups of juice or wine are paired with three tree fruits to symbolize a journey through the Four Worlds and the four seasons. This variation on that tradition uses garments in lieu of tree fruits, so there is no carbon footprint, and shipping / climate scarcities won't get in the way.

- **First Cup / Assiyah.** We begin the seder by donning an extra hat, an extra scarf, and a mask. These additional outer garments symbolize apartness and disconnection. We remove our masks, bless grape juice or wine, and drink from the first cup.
- **Second Cup / Yetzirah.** We remove the extra hat, revealing our bare heads or our kippot or usual head coverings, opening *keter* / the crown. We open to awe and to divine flow. We bless grape juice or wine, and drink from the second cup.
- **Third Cup / Briyah.** We remove the extra scarf so that we may breathe more freely. *Neshamah* means both soul and breath; as we breathe, we reaffirm our souls' innate holiness. We bless grape juice or wine, and drink from the third cup.
- **Fourth Cup / Atzilut.** Now we are wearing no extra layers. We have symbolically removed the barriers between us and each other, between us and creation, between us and our Source. We bless grape juice or wine, and drink from the fourth cup.

R. Rachel Barenblat

Tree of Life

Of every Torah we say,
“She is a tree of life.”
There are some who say
“Every tree is a Torah too”
meant to be read.
We pass one by,
stop, kiss, and chant
each portion of Her
a week at a time –
ring by ring,
a year at a time
and then begin again.

And when we’re done
each week we sing
“Return us to
as-it-once-was
and-will-be,”
to a place
in the East
where the ancient future
of Kedem
greet us now.
Of every Torah we say,
“She is a tree of life,
and some say
every tree is a Torah too.”

R. David Zaslow

Note: After reading from the Torah scroll we return it to the ark and chant a line from Lamentations that says “Return us to you Holy One, and we will be turned. Renew our days as in former times.” The word translated as “former times” is *kedem*, one of those wonderful Hebrew words pointing to the mystery in the way we sense time and space. *Kedem* literally has opposite meanings: beginning, before, ancient, in front, and East. So the poetic, interpretive translation of “ancient future” is reasonably true to the way our ancestors might have understood this word.

Four Cups - Four Ways to Action

Blessed Holy Wholeness

**We drink four cups in honor of the actions
That we might do, that we can do
That we should do, that we must do
For our trees and our planet
In honor of the possibilities of God.**

First Cup - Live Small

You have to be rich to live small.
It ain't cheap to shop local,
Do the poor eat organic?
But bravo to those of us who can manage it
And no shame to those of us who cannot.

But if you are able:

Use public transportation
Shop locally
Don't use plastic
Plant a tree
Vote

And drink that first cup

Second Cup - Act Small

You have to be caring to act small,
Like dripping water slowly eroding a boulder.
Maybe you don't have time or energy or leisure
To do everything that's needed
But you can do something.

So, if you are able:

Write letters
Make phone calls
Show up at a rally
Send a little money
Vote

And drink that second cup

Third Cup - Live Big

You have to be committed to live big.
Most of us don't do it because
These choices are, well, big.
They will change your life
And maybe change others.

Then, if you're able:

Get rid of your car
Move into a tiny home
Install solar energy
Become a vegetarian
Vote
And drink that third cup.

Fourth Cup - Act Big

You have to be patient to act big.
This is where systemic change occurs,
Much slower than we'd like,
But the earth is desperate and we must persist,
We have no choice.

So make yourself able and get it done:

Enact a Green New Deal
Organize for voting rights
End the use of fossil fuels
End environmental racism
Vote

And drink that fourth cup (you're gonna need it)

Blessed Holy Wholeness

**We give thanks for the possibilities of
What we could, can, should, and must do
For our trees and for ourselves,
Taking action for the possibilities of God.
Amen.**

Trisha Arlin

Where We Are

We used to seek out tree fruits from afar:
pomegranate arils plentiful as mitzvot,
carob a reminder to plant for generations,
figs evoking Torah, juicy and sweet.
In northern climes where snow falls now
we savored citrus, mango, coconut—
the tastes of far-off tropics on our lips.

This year cargo ships clog coastlines, unable
to unload. Medical testing vials can't get
to hospitals. Furnace parts don't arrive.
There aren't enough containers, or cranes,
or truckers to drive. Bananas rot offshore.
Meanwhile wildfires impact almonds drying.
Peach trees suffocate in waterlogged soil.

We need to learn to work with what we have.
Make meaning with what's native where we're planted.
Hold a twig, a pinecone, and feel the flow
that sustained that tree. Tu BiShvat's a journey
from roots to crown, separate to connected:
we don't need produce from around the globe
to take that trip and feel ourselves transformed.

This year let's try tree pose, even seated
in our chairs. Let's breathe together,
remembering that trees breathe out
what we breathe in. Unlock the abundance
stored in a simple wooden bowl or spoon:
feel holiness bestowed by years of use.
In being where we are, we find our roots.

Pomegranate arils. Pomegranates are said to have 613 seeds, evoking the mitzvot. *Carob.* See the story of [Honi planting a carob tree](#). *Figs evoking Torah.* Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba taught, “Just as one constantly finds figs when approaching the tree (since they do not all ripen at the same time), so too will one always find a new taste in the Torah one is studying.” *Wildfires impact almonds.* See [smoke, not heat, biggest wildfire threat to nut crops](#). *From roots to crown.* For our mystics, Tu BiShvat is a journey up the divine Tree of Life, from its “roots” in creation to its “crown” in unknowable *ein-sof* / transcendence without end. *Tree pose, even seated.* The yoga pose known as “tree pose” can be [practiced while sitting](#). *That trees breathe out what we breathe in.* An insight from R. Arthur Waskow.

R. Rachel Barenblat

Four Cups, Four Species, Four Worlds, Right in Front of Me

*In a traditional Tu B'Shvat seder, four cups of juice or wine are paired with tree fruits to symbolize a journey through the Four Worlds of Divine creation and the four seasons. Often we do our best to include fruits that the land of Israel is known for: **grapes, olives, dates, figs and pomegranates** (see Deuteronomy 8:8). This year I honour what grows around me, in the (currently snowy) National Capital Region around Ottawa, ON, and western Quebec.*

Assiyah: The first cup is that of Assiyah, the world of being and action, earth and body. Here we need protection, a hard shell. I stare out to the winter wonderland surrounding me. Spruce trees abound, the [most common tree](#) here in Canada. Sharp needles - protective, not too friendly at first - can hurt, but make a healing tea. Spruce's springtime buds can be a fresh treat too (lemony and healthy - high in [vitamin C, potassium, and magnesium](#)), and spruce resin is one of the most natural chewing gums you can chew (takes some work though to get the consistency right!).

Yetzirah: The second cup is that of Yetzirah, of formation, feeling, connection. No more shell, but protected inside. I grew up on McIntosh apples, red with some green, crisp and sweet and tart all together. Every year we go pick Macs, the "[national tree of Canada](#)," our kids climbing trees and sampling from the branches, until our bags are so full we can barely carry them, enough to give us months of snacks and apples and honey and apple squash soup and pie and more.

Beriyah: The third cup is that of Beriyah, of meaning, openness, abundance. I have a faint memory of walking in a field with my grandmother on a warm summer's day by their cottage off Trout Lake (Lac à la truite) in Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts, picking wild blueberries in two bowls we carried, my little pudgy fingers squishing the small sweet dark blue pearls, unlike the bigger blueberries they sold at the supermarket. Pure purply-blue goodness, [indigenous and at home, never modified, never hybridized](#), wild in their serene surrounds. We made pie and jam, I wish I had the recipes.

Atzilut: The fourth cup is that of Atzilut, of wholeness and soul. Tu B'Shvat signals the midpoint between fall and spring, when under the snow the sap begins to rise to feed future buds and leaves. When the days start warming above the freezing mark, before dropping back down again at night, sugaring off season begins. Sugar shacks are magical places, collecting sap from tapped maple trees in buckets and superhighways of tubing, and boiling it down to its sublime essence. Maple syrup embodies wholeness - cold and warmth, the life force of a tree. And we can [collect our own](#)! Our daughter especially loves pouring the fresh hot maple syrup over snow and collecting it back on a wooden stick, a divine maple popsicle.

R. Dara Lithwick

Our Tallis Trees

Our home shul in Brooklyn meets in a church.
We don't have a yard or a roof or air conditioning
So for many years during the summer we have met in Prospect Park
Under two large trees that overlook the ball fields.
There used to be three trees but one fell down after Hurricane Sandy.

These two big trees have trunks that have become our bimah.
We place our camp chairs and blankets around them
And we are shaded by their joined canopies
Which we have come to feel is like
Being covered by a giant green *tallis*.
The many leaves are the fringes and
Everything inside is *kodosh*, holy,
In Shabbat time and space,
And everything outside is *khol*, mundane,
Prospect Park on a Saturday morning.
Inside are study, prayers, songs, meditations, poems, potluck, community and words of Torah.
Outside are ball games, the Dog Pond, bicycles and the guy who sells ice cream from a cart
between the 9th Street entrance and the Long Meadow.
It would be perfect if only there was a bathroom.

That summer before Covid we planted a sapling in place of the lost third tree
In honor of our beloved retiring founding rabbi,
Bless her.
That same day we acknowledged our summer Beit Kneset
When our Hazzan surreptitiously placed a wooden mezuzah in the crook of the biggest of the
two trees.
We sang and said a blessing.
We didn't have permission from the Park for this
But our cantor did check with an arborist who said it wouldn't hurt the tree.
This small outlaw act made us giggle and kvell and cry
For our founding rabbi
For the future
For our clever hidden mezuzah
And for our sheltering Tallis Trees.

Many of us liked to visit this sacred space when it wasn't Shabbat
To touch the mezuzah and say a private prayer.
But last year the mezuzah disappeared.
Our Hazzan asked a Park guy about it
(He knew her, because of the tree we planted).
He said he'd seen it almost immediately and decided to ignore it,

Bless him,
But that one day it had disappeared.
What happened to the mezuzah?
Was it brought low by a bad storm?
Did a bird make a nest with it?
Was it taken down by a passing Jew with a strict interpretation of where a mezuzah should be?
Maybe it fell into the earth below
And our holy words were broken down into their smallest component parts,
Becoming Holy Mulch,
Feeding the Tallis Tree.

HaShleimut, Blessed Totality,
We give thanks to the Tallis Trees
For their shelter and their beauty.
We give thanks for having this special outside sanctuary
During the years of Covid.
We give thanks to the deep rest
That comes when we are in Shabbat with nature.
We give thanks to the staff of Prospect Park
For their vigilant maintenance of the green spaces.
And we ask for the clarity, endurance and skills needed
To keep our trees safe and flourishing.

Because all trees are Tallis Trees.
Bless them.
Amen

Trisha Arlin

Rising

The sap is rising, even if we can't see it.
Is our hope rising? What if we can't feel it?
Can we trust in the coming of spring?
If we open our feet, will hope flow through?

Anxiety rises, new horrors in the news!
Fires, floods, drought, tornadoes,
Variants both viral and political.
Sometimes it's more than we can bear.

Yet bear we do. Sometimes despite ourselves,
We find the resilience to get up in the morning,
Feel our life force, our human sap rising:
Nature's way is always, always to renew.

Like wildfires, we burn to sprout afresh.
Like fields, we lie fallow to bear new fruits.
Like every hero on a sacred journey,
We go where we must: we're transformed

With every seed that dares to grow,
With every root that seeks in thirst,
With every leaf unfurled in hope.
Even now, or especially now.

[Like Jacob, dream of a ladder on earth
with its top in heaven.](#) The ladder is a tree
and the angels are its sap flowing up and down
each Spring and Fall. Today the angels chant "rise up!"

Ensemble

About Us

Co-created by members of Bayit's Liturgical Arts Working Group, 2021.

Bayit is building a soulful, inclusive and meaningful Jewish life for all ages and stages. Our visionary teams of clergy, liturgists, artists, educators and other thought leaders across and beyond denominational life develop, test, refine and distribute tools for a Jewish future always under construction.

Find our collaborations here: [Liturgical Arts Working Group](#)

And our bios here: [Builder Biographies](#).

Coming soon in print:

[From Narrow Places: Liturgy, Poetry, and Art of the Pandemic Era](#)

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