



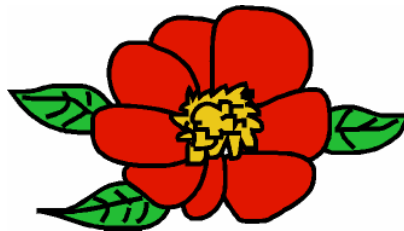
The Richmond Jewish Day School

A Family Guide for Tu Bishvat



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TU BISHVAT ט"ו בשבט

The 15th day of the month of Shvat marks the beginning of the “new year” for the trees. Tu B'Shvat is the new year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing. It was once merely the last date of the tax year for the produce of the tree. Any fruit ripening after Tu Bishvat was to be assessed for tithing only for the following tax season. The Torah states that fruits from trees, which were grown in the land of Israel may be eaten during the first three years: The fourth Year fruits are for G-d, and after that, the fruits can be eaten. Today Tu Bishvat is celebrated as the Birthday of the trees with a symbolic eating of fruits and with active redemption of barren land by planting trees. There are a variety of customs regarding eating fruits on Tu Bishvat. Some have the custom to eat the fruits that grow in the land of Israel, while others have the custom to eat fifteen different types of fruits. These customs, emphasize, our appreciation to the environment and trees. This recognition let us to teach the blessing “Bore pri haetz” that we say before and after we eat fruits. By saying the blessing, we thank G-d for the gift of fruits from trees whole-heartedly. By celebrating this holiday we develop sensitivity to our environment and appreciation for our planet. We express our ecological concerns and our desire to reconnect ourselves to nature.



Major Customs of the Festival

Eating fruits

One of the most important customs of this festival is to eat those fruits for which ancient Israel was famed, as in the verse:

"For the Lord G-d will lead you into the good land, a land flowing with waters... A land of wheat and barley and vine, of fig and pomegranate, the land of the olive and honey". Dvarim 8; 7-8.

The first fruits of these species were once brought as an offering to the priests in the Temple. Below are the seven species which became the symbol of the land of Israel:

wheat, barley, a cluster of grapes, figs, the pomegranate, the olive tree and date palm.

For this reason, an effort is made to acquire the fruits of these seven trees for the table, but other fruits are also eaten associated with the land and its produce, particularly: almonds, citrus fruits, apples - whether fresh or dry.



Planting trees

"And when you enter this land, you shall plant fruit-bearing trees..." Vayikra 19.23

"The Holy One, blessed be He, occupied Himself with planting immediately after Creation of the world. For it is specifically written: "And the Lord G-d planted a garden in Eden". So shall you also, when you enter the land of Israel, first of all occupy yourself in planting." Vayikra Rabba 25

The planting of trees is a labor which has a symbolic meaning over and beyond its literal interpretation.



A Midrash on the social responsibility of each individual

"Once, Honi HaMa'agal was walking along a road and saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, "How many years will it take till the tree bears fruit?"

"Seventy years", came the reply.

So he asked, "Are you sure that you will be alive in seventy years' time to enjoy the fruits of this tree?"

Came the reply, "When I arrived in this world, I found a carob tree, planted for me by my fathers, as I plant this one for my children."

Honi sat down by the way to eat, became drowsy and fell asleep. A great rock covered him and hid him from the eyes of others. He slept for seventy years. When he awoke, he saw a man picking the fruit from this tree.

*He asked him, "Who planted this tree?"
"My father," came the reply.*

Then he said to himself, "I must have slept for seventy years." He saw that his she-ass had brought many offspring into the world. He went home.

There he asked, "Where is the son of Honi Hama'agal?"

Came the reply, "His son is no longer alive, but his grandson is".

He said, "I am Honi HaMa'agal", but no-one believed him.

He went to the Talmudic college and heard the sages say, "This issue is as clear to us today as it was in the days of Honi HaMa'agal, who, when he came into the college, would elucidate to the sages all the difficulties in comprehension."

He said to them, "I am Honi HaMa'agal", but no-one believed him and no-one accorded him the respect he deserved. He became dispirited, prayed with all his heart for mercy and died.

Rabba said, of this instance, it is said, "Either there is communication or there is death".

Tractate Ta'anit, 23

