

Tu B'Sh'vat

How To Hug A Tree

What's it all about?

Tu B'Sh'vat, the New Year of the Trees, is one of the few Jewish holidays that isn't connected to a historical event. But a holiday can do more than honour the past, it can also celebrate our hopes. Tu B'Sh'vat celebrates our hope and intention to make the world more green and healthy. As we learn more about how important it is to take care of the natural world so that nature can take care of us, maybe Tu B'Sh'vat will become as popular as Passover and Hanukkah.

When is it?

Tu B'Sh'vat, which means the fifteenth day of Shevat, falls in the middle of the month of Shevat, under a full moon in midwinter. The ancient farmers believed that on that day the sap begins to rise in the fruit trees in Israel and the land starts to awaken from winter. In the Gregorian calendar, the holiday falls between the end of January and the middle of February.

Get out there!

This is a holiday to be celebrated not at home or in the synagogue, but out-doors, where trees live. It's a time to eat fruit, plant new trees and to notice how much trees, which can be huge or small, quiet and still, bring beauty, nourishment and shelter to our lives. In Israel Tu B'Sh'vat has special meaning. When immigrants to Israel settled the land about a hundred years ago, the country was mostly swamp and desert, with very few trees. The people began to build forests in Israel by encouraging Jews from all over the world to "plant" trees; Jews in the diaspora (outside of Israel) contributed a small sum of money to have a tree planted in their name in Israel. By planting a tree in Israel, Jews living far away could feel that they were part of the land. Millions of saplings were planted, and now there are over 165 million trees in Israel. Sometimes, when people who planted trees visit Israel for the first time, they want to find 'their' tree.

Some Jewish families follow the ancient custom of planting a cedar tree when a boy is born and a cypress when a girl is born. The trees are planted on Tu B'Sh'vat. When the children grow up and marry, the branches from their trees are cut to make a marriage canopy.

Five hundred years ago in Israel, the Cabalists created a Tu B'Shvat seder. A dinner with special foods and a ceremony for Tu B'Sh'vat, to celebrate the connection of all living things to the earth. As in the Passover seder, the number four is important, because it represents the four seasons, the four elements that the world is made of, and the four corners of the earth. With blessings, special fruit, and wine, the Seder is divided into four parts.

CELEBRATE A TU B'SHVAT SEDER

It is a really easy seder to follow.

Young people can join in and enjoy this celebration together at club. Explain each stage and its symbolism to your group. We have included readings and blessings which you may want to read along with each section of the seder.

The seder is generally celebrated at nightfall with lots of candles, flowers, and fragrant greenery. Make your room feel special by lighting candles and putting flowers in vases on the tables. You might choose to make the candles *and* the vases in the time leading up to your Tu B'Shvat seder. You might also decide to decorate the table with a beautiful cloth (you could decorate banqueting roll with crayons, pens or prints).

The First Section – Earth and Winter

The symbolism for this is that life begins in the darkness of the womb, the first part of the seder begins with readings about earth and winter.

In this first section, we eat fruit that is hard on the outside and soft on the inside, such as a pomegranate, walnut, or coconut. You might like to add this creative symbolic idea as to why we drink white wine. We have heard the idea that we drink white wine because white is the colour of a snowy winter.

Here are some readings about the earth. You may choose others or want to encourage chanichim to write their own thoughts and poems to be read at the seder.

It is forbidden to live in a town which has no garden or greenery.
Kiddushin 4:12

***I thank you G-d for most this amazing day
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes
e. e. cummings***

And G-d said:
Let the earth put forth grass herb yielding seed
And fruit trees bearing fruit after its own kind

Wherein is the seed thereof upon the earth.

Genesis 1:11

TWO MEN WERE FIGHTING OVER A PIECE OF LAND. EACH CLAIMED OWNERSHIP AND BOLSTERED HIS CLAIM WITH APPARENT PROOF. TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE, THEY WENT TO THE RABBI. THE RABBI LISTENED BUT COULDN'T COME TO A DECISION - THEY EACH SEEMED TO BE RIGHT. FINALLY HE SAID, "SINCE I CANNOT DECIDE TO WHOM THIS LAND BELONGS, LET US ASK THE LAND." HE PUT HIS CAR TO THE GROUND, AND AFTER A MOMENT STRAIGHTENED UP. "GENTLEMEN, THE LAND SAYS THAT IT BELONGS TO NEITHER OF YOU - BUT THAT YOU BELONG TO ITSELF."

TALMUD

Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song and bringing forth a secret of the divine mystery of the creation.

Rav Kook

The Second Section – Water and Spring

The second section of the seder celebrates water and the awakening of spring. The food for this part is soft outside and hard inside, such as a cherry, an olive, or an avocado. A little red wine is mixed with the white for the second blessing over the wine.

Water

The Mole thought his happiness was complete when, as he meandered aimlessly along, suddenly he stood by the edge of a fully-fed river. Never in his life had he seen a river before - this sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them with a laugh, to fling itself on fresh playmates that shook themselves free, and were caught and held again. All was a-shake and a-shiver. Glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter, and bubble. The Mole was bewitched, entranced, fascinated. By the side of the river he trotted as one trots, when very small. By the side of a man who holds one spellbound by exciting stories; and when tired at last, he sat on the bank, while the river still chattered on to him, a babbling procession of the best stories in the world, sent from the heart of the earth to be told at last to the insatiable sea.

Kenneth Grahame The Wind in the Willows

The Third Section – Air and Summer

The third section concentrates on air and summer. The fruit eaten is soft throughout, such as berries, figs, and grapes. Now the wine is more red than white, because red is both hot and strong, like the hot summer sun. The earth is awakening.

**And G-d said, "Let there be light."
And there was light.
*Genesis 1:3***

Then the Lord G-d formed the human of the dust of the ground, and breathed into the nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living soul.

Genesis 1:17

The fourth section – fire and autumn

The fourth and final part celebrates fire and autumn. We drink pure red wine, which represents the spark inside each of us that connects us to G-d.

WHEN YOU WALK ACROSS THE FIELDS WITH YOUR MIND PURE AND HOLY, THEN FROM ALL THE STONES AND ALL GROWING THINGS, AND ALL ANIMALS, THE SPARKS OF THEIR SOULS COME OUT AND CLING TO YOU, AND THEN THEY ARE PURIFIED AND BECOME A HOLY FIRE IN YOU.

HASIDIC SAYING

*Master of the universe
Grant me the ability to be alone;
May it be my custom to go outdoors each day
Among the trees and grasses,
Among all growing things
And there may I be alone,
And enter into prayer
To talk with the one
That I belong to.*

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Fruit and nuts

Some people try to eat at least fifteen different kinds of fruit to celebrate Tu B'Sh'vat. Certain fruits have special meanings related to events or sayings in the Jewish sources. Apples are often eaten as a representative of the fruit found on the tree of knowledge.

Nuts represent the Jewish people, because they can be hard, medium, or soft, like the three, different characteristics of people.

Figs represent peace, and the carob, which tastes a little bit like chocolate, represents humility, because it is the food of the poor.

Honi and the carob tree

Adapted from the Midrash

Honi was a man of great power who prayed with all his heart. He had only one fault. He said anything that popped into his head, and sometimes he regretted it.

One day he was taking a walk in his neighborhood in Jerusalem. There he saw an old man digging in the earth. The man looked ancient, and very slowly the man dug a hole, taking up just a little earth with each scoop of the shovel.

"What are you doing, grandfather?" Honi called to the man.

Without stopping, the old man answered,

"I am planting a carob tree." Honi burst out laughing.

"How crazy, old man! To spend how little time you have left doing that! You won't live long enough to eat of the fruit of that tree. Nor will you ever sit under its shade."

"True, young man," answered the tree planter, "but trees are beautiful things to have. My children will eat the fruit, and my grandchildren will enjoy the shade. I ate the fruit from trees my father planted, and I sat under the shade from trees my grandfather planted. Now I will prepare for those who come after me."

Honi shook his head.

"If I were you, I'd plant fast-growing tree, like an olive tree or a fig, so you might live to eat its fruit and get something for your hard work."

The old man smiled and went on digging. Honi yawned. It was warm in the middle of the day, and suddenly he felt so sleepy that he could barely move. Shoving aside a few small rocks, he lay down where he stood and stretched out to sleep.

He dreamed the rocks around him grew bigger and bigger until they hid him from view. When he awoke, it was morning.

"Oh, I must have slept here all night,' he thought.

He began to get up and found his body stiff and creaky.

Finally he tottered to his feet. He looked at his hands, then at his clothes. He shivered with fear. His clothes were in shreds, and his cheeks and chin were hidden by a long, white beard.

"I'm old!" he exclaimed out loud. "How long have I slept?" he wondered.

He looked around and found himself in the middle of a fruit orchard. A tall, full carob tree heavy with sweet pods hung low. Honi picked one and hungrily chewed it, savouring its rich taste. Just then a little boy passed by.

"Stop!" Honi shouted to the boy. "Who are you?"

"I am Moshe ben Shimon Halevi," the boy replied.

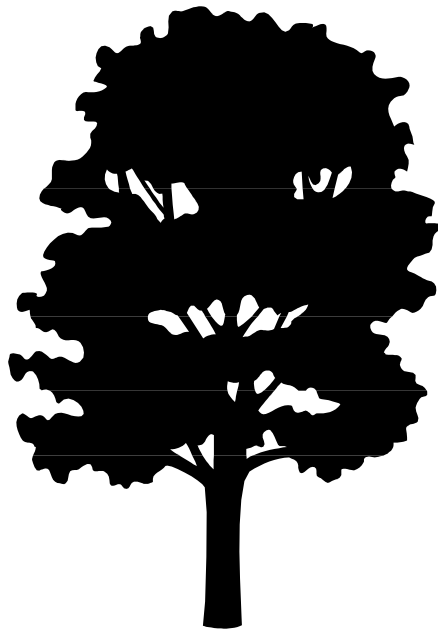
"No! Moshe ben Shimon Halevi!" repeated Honi. "Why, he is an old man!"

"You must mean my great-grandfather," the boy said, chewing a carob pod.

"He died many years ago. I was named for him. This is the tree he planted in the last years of his life. About seventy years ago.'

Seventy years! Honi had slept a long time, but at last he understood the old man's wisdom.

Tu B'Shvat Art Ideas



How does art help social skills?

Many of the following ideas can be made individually by chanichim and then displayed or taken home. Equally important to remember is that art can also be a group activity where each person in the group makes a small section which is then combined and made into a huge display.

Art work can therefore help young people to learn how to work and play together since each part of the display is created by someone else. It helps

each chanich/a to see their contribution to the group as a whole. The finished product gives each person a sense of satisfaction when it is admired. When young people are working together on something creative, there is often negative criticism which is banded about where one child might say to another

'Your drawing is rubbish, you're just scribbling like a baby... etc'

Be aware of that when working with a group since it offers the madrichim a potentially powerful time for teaching young people about social interaction and positive reinforcement of kind words. A relaxed art session may well act as a springboard for teaching about feelings, being sensitive, speaking kindly which is part of the vital work on social skills done in youth settings.

Tu B'Shvat Art Ideas

#MakeIt #PaintIt #DrawIt #SketchIt

Make a tree

Crumple old newspaper into a trunk shape. Tape around it and add branches by crumpling more newspaper and taping it together. These can be painted brown and decorated with green painted newspaper leaves.

Paper flowers

Fold tissue paper into halves, then quarters. Wrap one layer of tissue paper into another and keep folding. Using pipe cleaners as stems, tie the flower together and bend the stem. You might want to add a pipe cleaner leaf too, just twist it onto the stem.

Kitchen roll trees

Paint or crayon bark markings onto the kitchen rolls. Push some green painted rolled up newspaper up through the trunk (kitchen roll) and out of the top, to extend out about 8 inches. Cut the newspaper into strips. This will make the tree look like a palm tree, add some green crepe paper for extra leaves in desired.



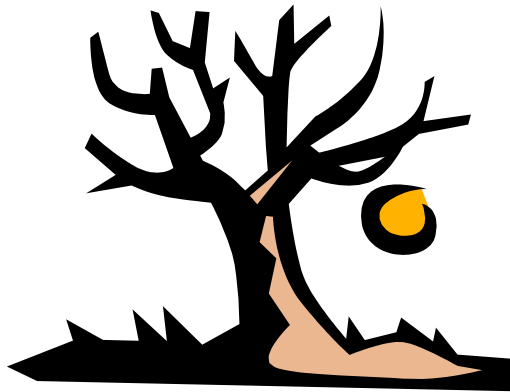
Clay trees

Trees can be moulded out of a solid lump of clay. Decorate the clay by scoring lines around it. Mould branches and twigs, decorate them and attach to the trunk with water. Leave to dry and paint – multi-coloured trees make a gorgeous forest!

Clay Tree Vase

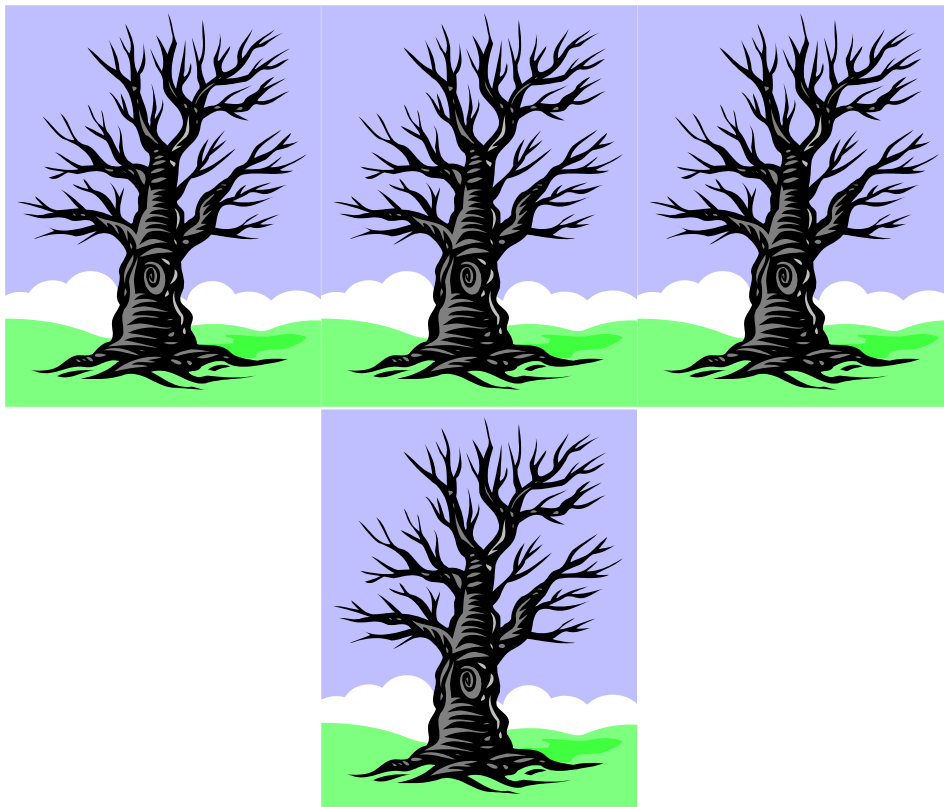
Use clay which will be waterproof when dry. Polymer clay that is oven baked is a great option. Flatten out some clay with a rolling pin so it is about 1 cm thick. Peel it off the rolling pin and then form the clay into a trunk by making it into a tube of clay, with a flattened base. Put a piece of clay under the base and join that together securely, so it won't leak. The top part of the tree remains open, so you can put flowers into it. This is the main part of the vase. Score lines down the tube to make a bark effect into the clay. Add some small clay pieces onto the trunk and make the top and base uneven and tree-like. Finally, push some holes into the top part of the trunk (make them quite high up). These will be additional holes where other flowers can poke through, giving the effect of branches. Put clay around the outside of each hole so it looks like a branch might have broken off there when the vase is empty.

You might want to paint the clay, add a few touches of green with a sponge, which will make the tree look like it has moss growing on it. When the vase is dry, fill with water, and add flowers of your choice.



Log Trees

Buy some logs from a DIY shop (or go looking in the woods...) Using a chisel and a hammer, cut with the grain so you end up with some smaller pieces of log. Decorate the wooden pieces with green paper leaves or buds, stick them onto the wood with glue. Take some clay, or plasticine, and put the small log pieces into the clay/plasticine base. Create a small forest for Tu B'Shvat and have a seder in it!



Twig trees

Go out on a nature walk and collect fallen twigs. Tie them into small bundles (use thick twine or string) to make a thick and tall trunk. Add some twigs as branches which are growing out from the main trunk. To display these trees, either put them into a clay/plasticine base OR glue them onto card (corrugated card would be best) and hang on to make a wall display.

Paper mache trees

Use artist (or florist) wire to build a base for the tree. Add roots which should be part of the base for the tree to stand on. Make up some paper mache mix. Use PVA glue mixed with water. Dip strips of newspaper into it and then mould it over the wire frame. Build it up in layers. Leave to dry (for a few days) and then paint.



Tree of Life

*(all of its supporters are
HAPPY!)*

Make a large card tree which can be hung on a wall. Make sure it has many branches and twigs. Decorate it with paints or crayons. Hang it up on a prominent wall.

Ask each chanich/a to write a wish for themselves, the Jewish people, Israel, their own community (etc) onto a leaf and then decorate the leaf in their own way. Tack all the leaves onto the tree. The tree of life should end up being a real part of your community, expressing your wishes for yourselves and others.

People Forest

This art activity is very physical. Be sensitive to the fact that some young people may not want to be drawn around by someone of the opposite sex. The physical nature of this art is, of course, what

the reason why it is a lot of fun for many chanichim. Take huge sheets of paper to make life-sized people trees. Draw around each chanich/a – with their legs close together and their arms out-stretched. Move the chanich/a down the paper and draw around arms or legs to make other branches come out of the main tree trunk (body). Don't draw around the head, just the body of the person and add additional arms and legs as branches. Colour the body, arms and legs in pens or crayons to look like a tree. Put up your tree people all around the room to make a people forest.

Painting and Planting

Buy small inexpensive terracotta pots from a garden centre. Decorate the pots with acrylic paints or felt tip pens. Put soil into each pot and plant a flowering plant or a fresh smelling herb into the pots. Very simple, very effective growing artwork which can be taken home or can decorate your building. Decorating the pots prior to planting is of course a fantastic addition to this activity.

Silver & Copper Trees

Cut out leaf shapes from silver foil or from copper sheeting, which can be bought from art shops. Decorate each leaf by pushing a design into the leaf with a knitting needle or you can use a biro with a lid on. This will make indentation marks which will create the design on the leaf. You might choose to write a message on the leaf instead of drawing a design.

Make a tree trunk and branches out of card and then stick the silver foil or copper sheeting onto the card with glue. Using the knitting needle again, draw lines and knots onto the tree to look like bark. Stick the leaves onto the tree. You could make the tree out of copper sheeting & the leaves from silver foil. Either way, a bright tree which can look wonderful on a wall. This can be made

as one large piece of art as a piece of group work or made into smaller individual trees by each chanich/a.

Pencil Sharpen Bits Tree

This is a lovely re-cycling activity. Draw the outline of your tree on card. Cover the trunk and branches in thick glue. Press the pencil sharpenings into the glue for a funky wood effect tree. Add tissue paper greenery for a spring-time look.

you may want to plant a tree, plant some bulbs or begin any of the activities in this choveret.

You might want to go on a Tu Bishvat walk through the park, or local woods (if you're lucky enough to be near some beautiful greenery...)

In your youth setting, you might want to have discussions on any of the following topics, related to Tu Bishvat

Ecology
Recycling
Water as a world resource
Ben Gurion's vision of the Negev blooming
Tikkun Olam (repairing the world)

You might want to take part in a piece of social action and plant a tree, shrub or bush at a local hospital, old age home or day care centre. Even pot plants outside or inside the club can bring a little bit more greenery to your environment this Tu Bishvat.

As always, for any programme support, please contact Shelley at Reshet shelley@reshetnet.com

Have a wonderful Tu Bishvat!