



LOVE YOUR TREE – TU B'SHVAT AND BODY POSITIVITY

Many people know Tu B'Shvat as the “birthday” or “new year of the trees.”

אַרְבָּעָה רָאשֵׁי שָׁנִים הֵם...רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְאֵילָן...בֵּית הַלֵּל אוֹמְרִים, בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר
(בְּשֻׁבַּט) בּוֹ

Four days in the Hebrew calendar year serve as a new year, each for a different purpose. According to **Beit Hillel**, the new year for trees is **on the fifteenth of** Shvat. (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1)

Though it is cold in North America and Europe at this time of year, in Israel it is a time to plan, plant and harvest. Tu B'Shvat offers an opportunity to connect with nature and focus on personal growth and gratitude for life's many blessings.

The two most common ways to observe this holiday are planting/interacting with trees and participating in a Tu B'Shvat seder. We learn about trees and the many strengths and gifts they bring, focusing particularly on the Seven Species.



The month of February is [Eating Disorders and Body Image Awareness Month](#). During this time, we call attention to people who are struggling with eating and body image-related challenges and celebrate people of all shapes and forms.



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These topics are surprisingly related within Jewish tradition. The Torah states: “For man is a tree of the field” (Deuteronomy 20:19). Much has been written on this seemingly ambiguous comparison.

"The Torah compares humans to trees, because "like humans, trees have the power to grow. And as humans have children, so trees bear fruit. And when a human is hurt, cries of pain are heard throughout the world. So when a tree is chopped down, its cries are heard throughout the world." – Rabbi Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi



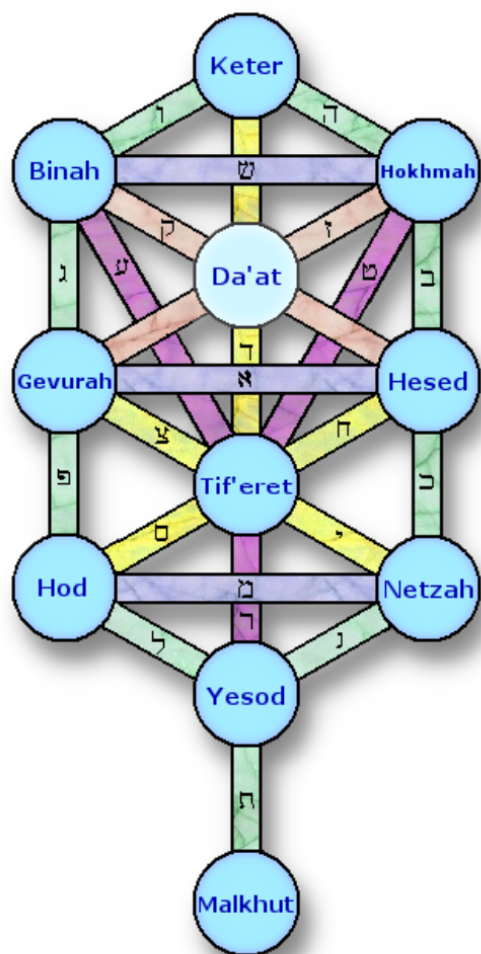
"Man, too, has roots, possesses a trunk and body and produces fruit. In many aspects there is a remarkable degree of similarity between man's development – even his spiritual development – and that of a tree." – Based on the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson



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Like trees, our bodies come in countless shapes and sizes. We all have different strengths, have deep “roots,” produce different “fruits,” can adapt to our environment and are incredibly resilient. And, like trees, we must show our gratitude for them. Together, let us give thanks both for the special “Seven Species” of grains listed in the Torah that are celebrated on the holiday as well as seven aspects of our diverse and miraculous bodies.

During the seder, we reflect on the unique attributes of each plant species, how they nourish us and the spiritual strengths and gifts associated with them.



You may complete this Seven Species activity by yourself as a journal, or you may discuss it in a group.

In the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition, each of these species corresponds to seven of the ten sefirot — a mystical framework used to think about the divine qualities of God and creation. As we meditate on these species and their corresponding divine qualities and give thanks for the Seven Species, find a way to also give thanks and celebrate your body for the gifts it gives to you and to the world — as well as the divine qualities within your body. Complete these questions as they make the most sense to you:



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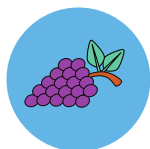
Wheat represents *chesed* (kindness, reaching out).

It is an abundant source of energy and is incredibly versatile. How is your body able to sustain energy? How can you use it to connect with others?



Barley is the embodiment of *gevura* (boundary).

The barley grain has a thick, strong hull that keeps it whole and intact when used to make other foods. In what ways is your body strong? How can you celebrate and grow that strength?



Grapes signify *tiferet* (beauty).

They come in different colors and lovely vines that decorate the land where they grow. How are you and your body beautiful? Can you identify something about your appearance you love and that makes you unique?



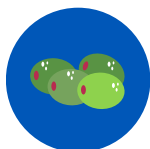
Figs represent *netzach* (endurance).

It takes a long time for a fig to grow and ripen, but the reward is well worth the wait. Endurance is a special kind of strength that carries us through the toughest of challenges. What kind of endurance does your body have? When have you been able to carry on and keep going, despite your doubts that you could persevere?



Pomegranates symbolize *hod* (majesty or glory).

Pomegranates have a beautiful crown shape. As humans, we were created in the glorious image of God. How do YOU embody that glory? Find a way to celebrate what makes you amazing.



Olive oil represents *yesod* (foundation).

Olives and olive oil have formed the foundation of our diet for thousands of years. Olive trees have deep roots and can live for a very long time. What do you feel “roots” you, physically and spiritually?



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Dates denote *malchut* (kingdom).

The date has sweetness as well as benefits for the body. The date palm tree also has many uses; each part of the tree can be used for something important, and nothing goes to waste. Take some time to think about the different things you can **do** with your body. Are there things you have wanted to try? Challenge yourself to find a new way to use or move your body that would be meaningful and joyful to you.

Below are some other ideas for ways to celebrate our bodies this season:

- Create a piece of art that celebrates you, your body and all the things it can do.
- Complete affirmation cards from the above journaling activity and use them in the following ways:
 - Exchange them with peers.
 - Add them as “leaves” on a community tree.
 - Write on biodegradable paper (or seed paper), and plant it with a tree as a way of strengthening the tree’s roots.

Being a farmer requires trust. When a farmer plants a seed, they must have faith it will survive the winter — just as we all must trust we will survive darker days, and spring and joy will return.





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