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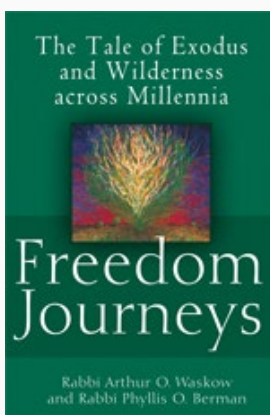
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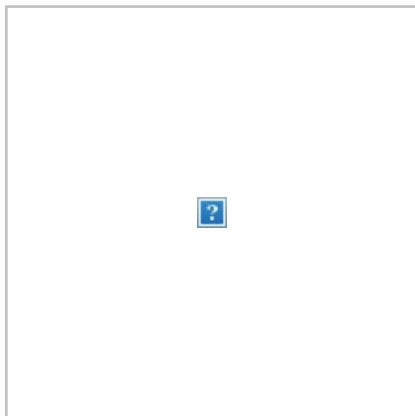
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## Tu B'Shvat/ YAH B'Shvat: 4 Teachings, 4 Worlds, ONE Tree

Submitted by Rabbi Arthur Waskow on 1/18/2018



### ***Trees' ReBirthDay: Reforesting the Trees of Life***



The Jewish festival of Tu B'Shvat celebrates the ReBirthDay of earthly trees and of the sacred and supernal Tree of Life. It is celebrated with a Seder in which the menu is the fruits and nuts that are given birth by trees.

The festival comes on the Full Moon of the midwinter lunar month, when in the Land of Israel the sap begins to rise in almond trees, and in Vermont it begins to rise in sugar maples. In ancient times, that day was counted as the end and beginning of the fiscal year for tithing fruit, so that the poor could eat. This year Tu B'Shvat falls on Tuesday

mystical exegesis, Waskow and Berman reflect upon Exodus not only as an event that happened “then” and “there”, but a paradigm of movement that is happening here and in the now, for all of us, Jew and Muslim, Black and White, male and female.  
—Omid Safi, professor of Islamic studies, University of North Carolina.

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evening January 30/ Wednesday January 31.  
In our generation, rapacious corporations have deforested huge areas of the Earth. Since trees breathe in CO2 and hold it out of the atmosphere, deforestation has contributed a great deal to the climate crisis. And then such climate-caused disasters as the California wildfires and Superstorm Sandy kill still more trees, and the feedback loop of global scorching worsens.

Many religious festivals can be authentically focused to address one or another aspect of the climate crisis -- conserving oil and energy at Hanukkah, resisting the Carbon Pharaohs that bring Plagues upon the Earth at Passover, mourning the destruction of Temple Earth at Tisha B'Av. **For Tu B'Shvat, the most authentic focus would be reforestation.**

So for Tu B'Shvat this year, as a special aspect of our climate-crisis work, The Shalom Center invites you to join in creating a special Trees of Life Fund for reforestation in the US, You can contribute by clicking here  
**<<https://theshalomcenter.org/civicrm/contribute/transact?reset=1&id=1>>**  
**and writing "Trees" in the "Honor of" box. -**





<https://theshalomcenter.org/content/tu-bshvat-yah-bshvat-4-teachings-4-worlds-one-tree>[7/9/2020 11:24:40 AM]

By gathering individual contributions into a larger fund, we can make a bigger impact on growing forests to heal our Mother Earth.

This is a practical step with spiritual roots and a spiritual meaning.

One of the Sacred Names of God, YHWH, with no vowels, can only be "pronounced" by breathing --- YyyyHhhhWwwwHhhh, the Interbreath of Life that we now know comes from interbreathing Oxygen and CO2. That Interbreath is in danger because forests are being destroyed and burning carbon fuels pours scorching amounts of CO2 into the air.

So restoring forests helps renew the Interbreathing Name of God.

The Kabbalistic mystics of 16th Century Tzfat (Safed) and the climate scientists of today join hands.

Those Kabbalists marked the Four Worlds of reality -- Physical Actuality, Emotional and Ethical Relationship, Intellectual Creativity, and Being/ Spirit -- by shaping a Tu B'Shvat Seder with four courses of different sorts of fruit, nuts, and wine, .

In that way, Tu B'Shvat expresses the belief of Jewish mystics that the earthiness of trees, of food, and of making sure the poor get to eat were aspects of the Tree of Life -- God's own Self. Mysticism and spirituality were not divorced from care for the Earth and eco-social justice: they were indeed interwoven in The One. The mystics taught that to eat without sharing was to rob God.

In our own era, Tu B'Shvat has been celebrated as a challenge to the US government's use of Agent Orange to destroy the forests of Vitetnam, and as a challenge to corporate desecrations of ancient Redwoods and of the Everglades for the pursuit of corporate profit. This year, as we watch the Environmental Protection Agency turned into the Earth Poisoning Atrocity, we might focus Tu B'Shvat on some aspect of healing our wounded Mother Earth from global scorching.

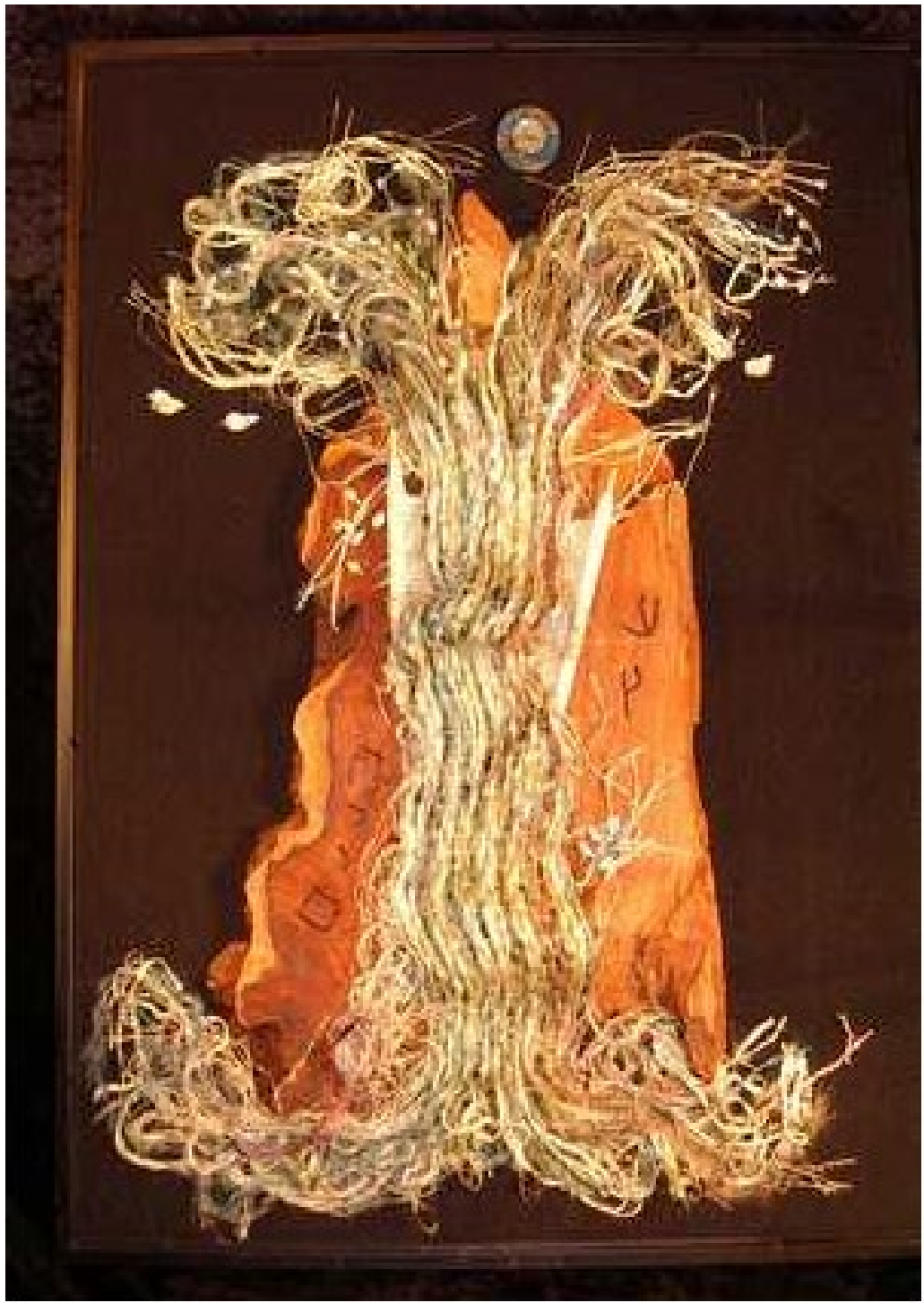
In an anthology I co-edited for the Jewish Publication Society, ***Trees Earth and Torah***, there is a rich gathering of Jewish wisdom about trees and an overview of the changing ways in which Tu B'Shvat has been celebrated and observed for the last two thousand years, with many original texts and sources. You can purchase it by clicking here:

<<https://jps.org/books/trees-earth-and-torah/>>



Here are some additional thoughts to insert during the four courses of fruit and wine that evoke the Four Worlds of Reality.

1. **Asiyah, Physical Actuality (earth):** The foods of the Tu B'Shvat Seder are nuts and fruit, the rebirthing aspects of a plant's life-cycle. They are the only foods whose eating requires no death, not even the death of a plant (like the radish or the Bitter Herb in the Pesach Seder). Our living trees send forth their fruit and seeds in such profusion that they overflow beyond the needs of the next generation. This is the sacred meal of Eden, the Garden of Delight. The sacred meal of Mashiach-zeit, the Messianic Age.



*(The "Tree of Life," by Wendy Rabinowitz, a Judaic weaver/ mixed-media artist, eco-feminist & peace activist. She returned to Judaism through 'hiddur mitzvah', creating beauty in the world to reflect G-d's oneness with & within us. Wendy works out of her studio, LIVING THREADS Judaica. See her website at <<http://www.livingthreadsjudaica1.com/page/page/3184669.htm>>)*

2. **Yetzirah, Relationship (water):** The four cups of wine for the Tu B'Shvat Seder are white; white with a drop of red to become pink; red with a drop of white to become rose; red. Red and white were in

ancient tradition seen as the colors of generativity. To mix them was to mix the blood and semen that to the ancients connoted procreation. The Seder celebrates rebirth in all its forms throughout the world.

3. **Briyyah, Creative Intellect (air):** In two separate epiphanies, Rabbi Phyllis Berman and Ari Elon pointed out that the conventional name for the festival of the Trees' ReBirthDay names it in a constricted, fearful way. The festival comes on the 15th day (the Full Moon) of the midwinter lunar "moonth" of Shvat, and "Tu" is made up of two Hebrew letters, Tet and Vav, that numerically are "9+6," making 15. But this way of counting is an anomaly. Normally with numbers in the teens we say the letters for "10+x," not "'9+y." That would mean "Yod-Aleph" for 11, "Yod-Bet" for 12, and so "Yod-Hei" for 15. But "Yod-Hei" is "Yah," one of the Names of God (as in Hallelu-YAH.).

So out of fear and reluctance to say God's Name when we name the festival, we use "9+6," "Tu," instead.

But – "What might happen if we joyfully proclaim God's full Presence on that day of God's Rebirth, YAH B'Shvat, and on every Full Moon of each month?" said both Phyllis and Ari.

4. **Atzilut, Spirit (fire).** At a Tu B'Shvat Seder held in a grove of ancient and majestic redwoods to protest the logging of such redwoods for corporate profit, then rabbinical student Naomi Mara Hyman (now a rabbi) gestured at the tall-reaching trees around us — the tallest living beings on the planet — and said, "These are eytzim ["trees"], yes? And the wooden poles that hold a Torah scroll, we also call them eytzim, yes? Imagine a Torah Scroll so majestic that these redwoods were its eytzim! In that Torah, each of us would be just large enough to be one letter in that Torah!" **And that is what we are: each a letter making up together the words, the wisdom, of that Great Torah that is indeed the Tree of Life.**

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**And please help The Shalom Center continue to bring the "spiritual" and the "political" together in one sacred process by**

**helping reforest our Earth -- by contributing to the Trees of Life Fund. You can do this by making a special contribution through the maroon "Contribute" button in the left margin on this page, and writing "Trees" in the "Honor of" box. .**

Thanks! And just as you take steps of healing, may you find healing from your own wounds and hurts -- with shalom, salaam, paz, peace for you, for Mother Earth, and for all her myriad earthlings -- Arthur

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Tu B'Shvat

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### How I enjoy your writing

Submitted by Tinkie on 1/23/2018

<p><span style="font-size: medium;">Thank you for the Shalom Center. I get inspired every time I read one of your articles. Blessings to you.</span></p>

[Reply](#)

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### Yes! And thank you, Arthur

Submitted by Judith McCullough on 1/24/2018

Yes! And thank you, Arthur Waskow, for being a spark of light in the world, who helps me, for one, see many more sparks, and gives me hope.

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