

SPECIAL EDITION



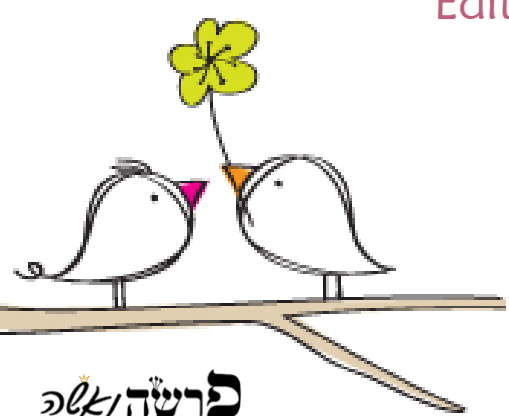
Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi

Taste and See!

Suggested "Tu Bishvat Seder" Protocol

Following the Customs of the
Kabbalists (and Kabbalistses[👑])

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Go Out to the Marketplace – the Fruits Are Calling You!

Since the invention of the cellular phone my house has been a zoo of chargers and cords. You could knit a sweater with all the cords. Ever since the world filled with that power, we've become women constantly searching for a source of power. If we only understood how that electric power, femininity, of Mother Earth (that's us) takes form during Shvat. Tu Bishvat is here — the *chag* (festival) of mateni-tree, for all women, because we *are* Mother Earth. Tu Bishvat is the ground's charger, according to the holy Ari. We'll try to get as much as possible out of Tu Bishvat, because this day charges us up with vitality.

I'm wary of turning Tu Bishvat into some pagan holiday; while the pioneers adored planting ("A song in my heart and a spade in my hand!") and the Greens adore the holiness of the land and planet, this is actually a subtle day of judgment. You are judged on your growth, on your fruits (i.e., your children), and your fertility. You're judged on how much shade you've provided to others this year, how much you learn, grow, and bloom. On Tu Bishvat we don't say *Tachanun* and we refrain from practices of mourning, and we inject some joy. It's a day of delicate balance, a day of mutual nourishing — we nourish Nature with our *brachot* and it nurtures us with its blessings, the *brachot* of heaven and Earth.

Real ecology involves peace and love among people. Rabbi Chaim Palagi writes:

בחודש שבט, יתאמץ יותר להיות אוהב שלום ורודף שלום,
ומְשִׁים שלום בין אדם לחברו ובין איש לאשתו
יותר מכל השנה,
וייזהר ביותר לכבד ללומד תורה
ולהחזיק ברכיים כושלות.
ושלא להיות הולך רכיל
ומנע רגליך לרוץ לרעה בחודש הזה בזהירות,
יותר משאר ימות השנה.

**During the month of Shvat,
one should try harder to be a lover and pursuer of peace,
one who causes peace to occur between people,
between husbands and wives,
more than the rest of the year;
he should take extra care
to honor those who learn Torah
and to help strengthen the weak-kneed.**

**One must not be a gossiper;
restrain your feet from running after bad pursuits
this month,
with extra care,
more than the rest of the year.¹**

Shvat determines the health of your marriage and your growth for the whole year. Pay attention. Watch your speech and how you handle the dignity of others; concentrate your efforts specifically in those realms, because Tu Bishvat, as one of the four New Years, is a powerful, auspicious day.

The *geula* (salvation) is taking shape right now. Don't say, "I don't see anything." The salvation of Shvat is that the sap is starting to rise within the trees. It's an internal act of revitalization. It's happening inside you, too — you can't see anything from outside, but something in your potential for growth is waking up.

Since the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash we haven't had an altar to help us atone or to convey our gratitude to Hashem. What's the replacement for the Altar? You'd be surprised — it's your kitchen table. The table where you eat is the channel for incredible communication between us and the Master of the world. It's the most active arena of your home. Anyone who's ever been in a *frum* house knows that the center of the home isn't some plasma screen, but a big dining room table. The table is the source of blessing for the house, as it says in *Birkat Hamazon*:

הרחמן הוא יברך את השולחן הזה שאכלנו עליו
ויסדר בו כל מעדני עולם.
כל רעב - ממנו יאכל, וכל צמא - ממנו ישתה
ולא יחסר ממנו כל טוב לעד ולעולמי עולמים.

**May the Merciful One bless this table at which we ate,
and arrange upon it all the delicacies of the world.
Anyone hungry should come eat of it
and anyone thirsty may drink from it.
May nothing good be lacking from it for all eternity.²**

Not by coincidence is the Jewish legal code called the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Set Table. When we fulfill mitzvot the reward

1 Rabbi Chaim Palagi, *Moed L'chol Chai* 30b.

2 *Birkat Hamazon*, Sephardic rite.





in abundance and blessing reaches the home via the table and what is on it. Tu Bishvat is a day of tremendous blessing, and those *brachot* come through the table. When you set the table you access great *brachah*: marriage, a living, fertility, rootedness, how much you give to others, how independent you will be, and how well you will dispense good advice from within.

That's why, as the Tu Bishvat Seder approaches, go out and equip yourself with fruits. Go to the marketplace — it's a place of *brachah*, abundance, happiness, and plenty. Before you choose which fruit to buy, be aware of a sweet, mystical fact: according to the holy Ari, you don't choose the fruit; it chooses you. The fact that you stop in front of a particular pomelo and get excited — it comes from the fruit. When you recite the words **ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם (Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the Universe)**, you understand: He moved that banana through the world just so it could reach my mouth. It grew in Nigeria, reached the Haifa coast, from Haifa to Yerushalayim, and within Yerushalayim, found its way to the Machaneh Yehudah market. When I walked into the *shuk* it called me: "Ruti! Here I am!"

And why did it call you? Because it has something to give you. That banana carries a letter for you from the Creator of the world. In the *brachah* of *Borei Nefashot* you say the words **בורא נפשות רבות וחסרונן (He Who creates many souls and provides what they lack)** — meaning, according to Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, that there are many people in the world, and each one was created with a lack: this one has no joy; that one needs health; where can I find what my soul lacks?

The holy Ari says that with each fruit you choose, or that chooses you, something is made whole within you, some void within you is filled. It says **וַיֵּין יִשְׂמַח לֵבב אָנוּשׁ, לְהַצְהִיל פְּנִים מִשְׁמֶן, וְלֶחֶם לֵבַב אָנוּשׁ יִסְעֵד (And wine will gladden a person's heart, will make his face shine more than oil; and bread will nurse a man's heart)**³ — foods that contain oil make the face shine with joy. Bread heals the heart and wine gladdens it. It turns out that your digestive system isn't the only part of you involved in the meal. As much as it rescues the body, eating rescues the soul.

3 Tehillim 104:15.

A Crash Course in Jewish Eating – the Brachah that Brings Growth

How do you rouse the potential for growth? Through *brachah*. A *brachah* upgrades all of reality, particularly your own personal reality. Knowing how to give *brachah* means knowing how to add a dimension to reality.

When you hold an apple and eat it without a *brachah*, what have you eaten? An apple. It has vitamin C, vitamin A, and some other stuff — you've eaten an apple and that's it.

But when you hold an apple and say **ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ (Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the world, who creates the fruit of the tree)**, you've put in your body an apple, *joie de vivre*, health, charm, success — and not just in your own body, but your children, too, because *brachah* enhances your entire environment. That why *brachot* over food are called *brachot of* (plural) benefit,

says Rabbi Wolbe⁴ — everyone benefits from your *brachah*. And the *Mesilat Yeshtarim* writes that when a person recites a *brachah* his entire surroundings within a certain radius are enhanced and elevated with him.⁵

In other words, you recite *Birkat Hamazon* at home, and suddenly your son at school gets an answer right on a test. Suddenly your husband feels a breath of fresh air at his dull office. Suddenly your daughter has an amazing realization at school. The *brachah* you made drew toward you and yours some of the good in the world, enhanced it, and added to it. As Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin writes: *Baruch* does not denote, as many think, a request, but rather addition and enhancement.⁶

4 Rabbi Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, part 2.

5 Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, *Mesilat Yeshtarim*, ch.1.

6 Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, *Nefesh Hachayim*.





How to Make a Brachah

The main avenue for blessing during Shvat is the fruits of Eretz Yisrael, a timeless land: אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר [...] עֵינַי (A land upon which the eyes of Hashem your G-d are from the beginning of the year until the end of the year).⁷ When you eat the fruits of Eretz Yisrael you put into yourself a piece of personal Divine guidance, a good look from Hashem.

How do you recite the brachah?

Hold the fruit in your right hand.

Look at it when you say the brachah.

Inject this intention into the brachah: "I hereby intend to increase the joy with which people look at one another!"

Why?

Rabbi Wolbe says: כל הסתר הפנים בעולם, בא מחמת חסרון - **All concealment of Hashem's Face results from a lack of brachah.** So when you say, "Baruch are You," the word "You" gives presence to Hashem, causing Him to be more present in the place where you are, giving Him thanks. And then, instead of Divine concealment, you will feel the light of Hashem's face and His blessing for you.

Then you eat it and gain everything! As *Birkat Hamazon* says, Hashem nourishes you, בחן, בחסד, - **with grace, with kindness, with plenty, with mercy,** with vitamins ...

Vitamin A — אהבה — Amore; love, of course.

Vitamin B — בטחון — Be confident

Vitamin C — סימן טוב ומזל טוב — Constellations — mazal — siman tov u'mazal tov

Vitamin D — דיבורי ברכה ושפע, ישועה וחיידוש — Declarations of brachah and abundance, salvation, and renewal.

When do we ask for joy? When reciting the brachah "שהכל נהיה בדבורי" "*Shehakol nihyeh bidvaro*," because that brachah is about hakol — everything. We're all familiar with having everything but joy. There are plenty of married but miserable women. With children. And

not happy. Making a living. But not happy. Healthy. But not happy. So what's everything worth?

Shehakol — it really is everything. Have this in mind: "Creator of the world, I want to be happy with what I have, and happy with what I don't."

Poem-prayer for Tu Bishvat

Composed by Rabbi Yosef Chaim, the Ben Ish Chai (printed in *Leshon Chachamim* 60:36).

אָנָּא ה', הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא! הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְאֵילָן הוּא רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה.
אָנָּא ה', הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא! הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְאֵילָן הוּא רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה.
אָנָּא ה', הַרְוִיחָה נָּא! הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְאֵילָן הוּא רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה.
אָנָּא ה', הִיטִיבָה נָּא! הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְאֵילָן הוּא רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה.
אָנָּא ה', בְּרַךְ נָּא - הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְאֵילָן הוּא רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה.
א-ל נָּא פְּצָה [פְּדֵה] שָׁנָה זוֹ מִשְׁמִיר וְשִׂית,

וּבְרַךְ עֵץ שָׁמֶן וְזֵית.
א-ל נָּא בְּמִטֵּר רוּחַ חַרְבוּנֵי יְשִׁימוֹן
וּבְרַךְ גִּפְן וְתֵאנָה וְרִימוֹן.
א-ל נָּא רוּמֵם עֲצָרֵת עוֹלָלֵי טְפוּחִים
וּבְרַךְ אֶגְזוֹ וְתַמָּר וְתַפּוּחִים.
א-ל נָּא צְדָקָה מַעֲמֶדָּה בַּל יִפְסֵק,
וּבְרַךְ חֲרוֹב וְקָרוֹסֶטְמֶל וְאַפְרִסֶק.
א-ל נָּא חֶלֶץ קֵהֶלֶת אֲשֶׁר אֵלֶיךָ תַעֲרוֹג,
וּבְרַךְ הַתּוֹת וְהָאֶגְזוֹ וְהָאֶתְרוֹג.

Please, Hashem, Save, please! For today is Rosh Hashanah for the trees.

Please, Hashem, give success, please! For today is Rosh Hashanah for the trees.

Please, Hashem, grant plenty, please! For today is Rosh Hashanah for the trees.

Please, Hashem, grant goodness, please! For today is Rosh Hashanah for the trees.

O G-d, rescue this year from worm and parasite, And bless the tree of olive oil's light.

O G-d, sate the dry desert wilderness with rain, And bless vine, fig, and pomegranate again.

O G-d, exalt the gathering of children supple, And bless the nut, date, and apple.

O G-d, cease not right from your people, we beseech, And bless the carob, plum, and the peach.

O G-d, rescue the community that for You pants, And bless the berry, nut, and etrog plants.

7 Devarim 11:12.





Chewing is Jewish

Every act of eating has four parts — two from Hashem and two from you. Hashem extends the fruit to you, placing it in your hand; פותח את ידיך (**You open Your hand**). He sends flowing into you the vitamins and all the rest: ומשביע לכל חי רצון (**and satisfies the desire of all living things**). When you hold in your right hand the fruit over which you're about to say a *brachah*, you've basically received a gift from Hashem. He opened His hand to you. Not only that, He made sure that all the good things within that fruit will be absorbed by your body and gladden your soul, enabling you to have another day of desire and will! Run with it!

What this means is that bringing you the food and causing it to give you health is Hashem's domain.

And your job?

1. The first action — say the *brachah*: ברוך אתה ה' — אלוקינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ — **Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.**
2. The second action — chew.

Girls, *brachah* is not exclusively a Jewish act. The *goyim* know how to sit around their table and say, "Thank You, Lord, for your beautiful spaghetti. Amen." Prayer and *brachah* are not a private Jewish institution. They are a fundamental requirement of being human.

But there is a mitzvah for Jews only, and it's called "chewing" or "tasting." In Hebrew, *ta'am*, the word for "taste," also means "reason." We'll explain.

The people of Israel received manna in the wilderness: טעמו כטעם לֶשֶׁד הַשֶּׁמֶן — **its taste was like the taste of an oil cake.** Rashi explains that the word there, *l'shad*, refers to the *shad*, the breast, from which the infant suckles and receives the taste he desires; the same happened with the manna when it was chewed.⁸ What taste does an infant receive when it nurses? As you know, babies don't only eat when they're hungry. The taste a baby gets from nursing is called "Ima loves me."

8 Bamidbar 11:8 and Rashi ad loc.

The taste Hashem wants you to get when you chew your food is, "Wow, Hashem loves me so much." That's the realization food is supposed to give you. It's the taste — the *reason* — for food, for life: Hashem's love for you. And when do you realize it? Only when you chew and chew.

Rabbi Chaim Vital says we don't actually eat with our mouth at all; we eat with our heart. Our 32 teeth — the *gematriyah* of לב (*lev*), heart. Sure, some hearts have blockages or stents, and some people are totally heartless, but the idea is that your heart gets the taste of life when you chew with your teeth.

I see how so many people look for taste — meaning — outside their home: they can't stand their wives, or job. Why are you looking for new tastes? You're not chewing, so you don't realize how much beauty Hashem has given you. When my children complain about the food I make for Shabbat I realize they see it as pretty well chewed by now. I've been making the same thing for 24 years, but it's a new effort every week.

Pregnancy works that way, too — the eighth or ninth child is not like the second. It only looks similar but it requires a completely new effort, a much greater one. Don't think for a moment that this pregnancy is a breeze, been there, done that.

When a woman renews herself for her husband — going to the *mikveh* twenty years into their marriage, that's not already-been-chewed. Each time it's a new woman, with new desires and new effort.

Hashem says: טעמו וראו! — **Taste and see!** What should you see? כִּי טוֹב ה' — **That Hashem is good!**⁹ Real appreciation of good, real gratitude, real positive interpretation of events, is only possible through chewing. On Tu Bishvat, one day a year, you recite the *brachah* with fervor, chew the food thoroughly, and feel it: I have so much. Hashem loves me so much.

That chewing is the realization of what you have.

Only then do I allow you to swallow.

I talked about this in one of my classes and all of a sudden one of my students stood up — a real mountain of a person, a huge woman — who seemed

9 Tehillim 34:9.



to lose half her weight from one class to the next. I asked her, “What’s your trick? Did you have your stomach clamped? A killer diet?”

“No,” she said. “My dietician basically told me that I have to chew every bite I take for 30 seconds on the right side of my mouth and 30 on the left. At that rate I eat maybe two slices of bread per month and feel satiated.”

Chew — you’re a Jew. Chewing is Jewish. A Jew, a *Yehudi*, looks for the *hed*, the resonance, and eating resonates with the full flavor and meaning. It gives meaning to life, as well as satiety. Each time you chew your food, chew over your life from every direction, applying new effort each time, and see how much abundance you have in your life.

A Final Word about Brachot

The *Peleh Yo’eitz* writes:

יחרד האיש מליטן דבר לתוך פיו בלי ברכה,
שאם גוזל את המלך, אחת דתו להמית,
אחת כמה וכמה

שגוזל ממלך מלכי המלכים בלי ברכה,
והמאכל והמשקה הם מזון הגוף
והברכות הם מזון הנפש,
שגורם שישרה שפע על האכילה ועל המשקה,
כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם,
כי הכל מוצא פי ה' - על הברכה.

A person must tremble lest he put anything in his mouth without a brachah, for if one steals from a king his sentence would surely be death — all the more so one who steals from the King of kings — i.e., by not making a brachah. Food and drink nourish the body, while the brachah nourishes the soul; it causes abundance in food and drink, for on bread alone man cannot live — rather, on all that emerges from Hashem’s Mouth — that is, brachah.

In other words, it is brachah that gives you life and health, not eating! And truly, those who eat and drink with no brachah, if we cannot give them the benefit of the doubt and attribute it to habit becoming second nature, they would surely be liable for a great punishment — for how much trouble is it, really, and what does it cost?!

What effort need be expended to recite a *brachah*? Stingy little miser, you. What does it take? A few words? A sentence? Say a *brachah*.

Tu Bishvat Seder. May Your Fruits Be Sweet

Tu Bishvat is here — a festival for the trees! This is the trees’ New Year, one of the Days of Judgment in our yearly cycle. What exactly does that mean, “a judgment day for trees”? Does Hashem go up to a tree and say, “Pomelo. You didn’t give Me such satisfaction this year. That means I won’t be granting you a good year...” What does the tree care? In fact it doesn’t. It’s really a day of judgment for *us*, **כִּי הָאָדָם** — **עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה** — **For a man is a tree of the field.**¹⁰

The day before Tu Bishvat is auspicious for finding a husband. For fertility. You are judged on how rooted you will become, how like a tree planted alongside adjoining rivers you will be. How successful you’ll be

in whatever you do, and how much you will avoid being like, as the first chapter of *Tehillim* puts it, “chaff that the wind buffets.” And of course, how much welcoming shade you will provide for all those around you.

Not everyone makes a big deal out of Tu Bishvat, and that’s just fine. Aside from the *brachot*, there’s very little *halachah* that governs a Tu Bishvat Seder — it’s all *minhag*, a custom that carries with it an abundance of *segulot*. The *minhagim* of Tu Bishvat draw that plenty your way, so of course we recommend engaging in them. And while it’s true that it’s not a *halachically* mandated practice, what we do flows from love and volition.



10 Devarim 20:19.



As we know, when we show our love for the Land of Israel and her fruits, when we recite the *brachot* on her fruits, then the Land and fruits reflect that love back at us.

The Ashkenazic custom is to place fifteen kinds of fruit on the table, and for each one you eat, say one of the *Shir Hamaalot* chapters of *Tehillim* (*Tehillim* 120–134).

The kabbalists' (and kabbalistses' — that's us) *minhag* is a lot more intricate, and that's what we're going to discuss. The following was collated, very concisely, from the book *Pri Eitz Hadar*, reedited by the late Rabbi Mordechai Tzemach Eliyahu.

The kabbalists set four different platters:

Plate one — the Seven Species.

Plates two, three, and four — up to ten kinds of fruit

(a least four kinds), so that there are at least twelve fruits on the table, but no more than thirty overall. This may include dried fruit.

Note: The kabbalists' custom is to fill the table with fresh fruit of all kinds and colors. The Chozeh of Lublin speaks of the *segulot* specifically of dried fruit and their potential to inspire in one who sees them the desire to revitalize and be renewed. As he says: anyone who feels dry and totally desiccated inside, G-d forbid, and hopeless, should specifically buy dried fruit for Tu Bishvat. He should hold them and say, "Behold, I am a withered tree, but I certainly retain some sweet flavor, like this fruit. May I be like a tree planted alongside rivers."

The First Plate

Fruit of which we eat both the inside and outside

Examples: grapes, figs, apples (little seeds we can consider part of the fruit flesh), *etrog* jelly, lemons (little lemons or lemon jelly), pears, berries, carob, quinces, guava, persimmons, etc.

Over these kinds of fruit, the Kabbalists would ask: "May it be Your will that I, my children, and spouse be beautiful both inside and out; that we be authentic."

Some people perform many *mitzvot*, but hair covering or skirt length is a challenge for them. On the other hand there are women who look *frummer* than *frum*, but that's not how they feel inside. Over the plates in this platter it's proper to ask that our interior and exterior meet and not contradict.

The Second Plate

Fruits with a pit inside (large relative to the size of the fruit) that we do not eat.

Examples: olives, dates, cherries, apricots, peaches, plums, blueberries, litchi, Surinam cherries, mango, etc.

What should you request? "Master of the world, may we succeed in removing from within all those things we do not need: hate, jealousy, sadness, competitiveness, resentment, animosity. May it be Your will that all that remains is the tasty fruit. May we get rid of books that are of no benefit to our *neshamah*, the extraneous DVDs and CDs, the not-so-nice friends of our children, and the bad habits that have taken root in our lives."

The Third Plate

Fruits whose insides are eaten, with an inedible peel or rind.

Examples: pineapple, chestnuts, pomegranate, nuts, pine nuts, pomelos, grapefruit, kiwi, coconut, cardamom, etc.

Ask: "Master of the world, may people see the good in me, even if outwardly I'm covered with firmness. May it be Your will that I also see the sweetness in every person, including myself, and to judge everyone favorably instead of looking specifically at and for their outer shells."



The Fourth Plate: the Seven Species

You don't have to eat them, writes the Ben Ish Chai. You can simply gaze at them. Each kind has its own *segulah*. It's enough to look at them with a particular intention (especially this year, when so many kinds of dried fruit are worm-infested 😊).



חיטה Wheat — cereal/snacks, cookies, and bread

Wheat is a *segulah* for success in learning, for intelligence and wisdom. "Hashem, I want knowledge; for my children to have knowledge; for my husband to learn well." Also ask for a plentiful livelihood, and peace. According to the Gemara,

הרואה חטים בחלום - ראה שלום,
שנאמר: "השם גבולך שלום חלב חטים ישיביעך"

One who sees wheat in his dream will see peace, as it says, "Who makes your border peaceful; He will satiate you with the cream of wheat."¹

1 Brachot 57a and Tehillim 147:13.



שעורה Barley — beer and pearled barley

The *segulah* of barley is a tranquil marriage. During Temple times, when a woman was suspected of infidelity by her husband, she would bring an offering that contained barley and be cleansed of all suspicion. She would later conceive a son. With the barley, ask for *shalom bayit* (and if you're single, ask that it characterize your relationship with your future husband). In the Gemara it says הרואה שערות בחלום, סרו עוונותיו — **One who sees barley in a dream has had his sins removed.**¹

1 Brachot, ibid.



גפן Grapes — wine, grape juice, raisins, stuffed grape leaves

The *segulot* of grapes are related to marriage and fertility. The Sages say ענבי הגפן בענבי הגפן [...] דבר נאה ומתקבל — **grapes of the vine mixed with grapes of the vine ... are a fitting, welcome thing.**¹ Ask that "just as I am good and my family is good, send me a mate from a good family. I want to marry someone good. Someone with pedigree — i.e., someone rooted in compassion."

Ask for matches for your children, and those of your friends. The grapevine is a symbol of fertility; אשתך כגפן פריה — **your wife is a fruitful vine.**² "May I become a vine that produces fruit."

1 Yalkut Shimoni on Yitro, 268.

2 Tehillim 128:3.



תאנה Figs — look at it and request patience

What's the connection? The Sages explain: There is no specific season for the fig harvest. Olives all ripen at once, as do grapes — a single period of several weeks when all the fruit of that plant become ready, or the grain is ready for reaping. Figs, however, are ready for picking only a few at a time, and that demands patience.

Ask: "Hashem, give me patience, even though my salvation comes in dribs and drabs. Help me become more patient." Figs are also a *segulah* for memory, for long-term, patient learning of Torah.

הרואה תאנה בחלום - תורתו משתמרת בקרבו,
שנאמר "ניצר תאנה יאכל פריה"

One who sees a fig tree in his dream will have his Torah kept within him, as it says, "One who guards the fig tree will eat its fruit."¹

1 Brachot, ibid., Mishlei 27:18.



ר י מ ו נ Pomegranate

— it helps you refrain from speaking *lashon hara* and other negative speech.

כחוט השני שפתתיך ומדבריהך נאווה
כפלה הרמון רקתך מבעד לצמתך
— **Like a strand of scarlet are your lips and your mouth is comely, like a piece of pomegranate is your cheeks, amid your tresses.**¹

The pomegranate has the color of lips. "May only sweet things come from my lips, regal speech, like the pomegranate's crown."

1 Shir Hashirim 4:3.



זית Olives — olive oil and olives

The olive has many *segulot*:

It's a *segulah* for righteous children — “Master of the world, just as olive leaves are never shed, may it be Your will that my sons and daughters remain close to the tree and not distance themselves in the wrong direction.”

A *segulah* for a good reputation — ask for your children to have a good name (טוב שם משמן טוב — **A good name is better than fine oil**¹). Just as oil floats on water, may they not mix with the wrong crowd.

Another intention of the olive: “Just as the olive produces fine oil when it is crushed, shredded, and pressed, may it be Your will that all my afflictions produce only good things.”

The olive is a *segulah* for memory — the Gemara in *Horayot* lists five things that cause forgetfulness: eating the leftovers of what a cat ate; eating animal hearts; rubbing your soles together while bathing; sleeping with possessions under your bed; and eating a large quantity of olives. Olives can cause forgetting, according to the Gemara, but olive *oil* is helpful for remembering. And the Sages say:

הרואה זית בחלום - שם טוב יוצא לו.
הרואה שמן זית בחלום - יצפה למאור תורה,
שנאמר "ויקחו אליה שמן זית זה כתיבת למאור
להעלת נר תמיד".

One who sees an olive tree in a dream should expect illumination in Torah, as it says, “And they should take for you pure virgin olive oil for lighting, to burn an everlasting lamp.”²

1 *Koheles* 7:1.
2 *Brachot*, *ibid.*, *Shemot* 27:20.

It's so good during Shvat to ask for children and for success in raising them. On each day this month say the first chapter of *Tehillim*. This chapter sheds light on the definitions of happiness and success, but how? In horticultural terms!

The commonly accepted “wisdom” around the world is that Man evolved from the same line as apes — and apes are known as imitators, doing what everyone else is doing. Whereas in Judaism, האדם עץ השדה — **man is a tree of the field**. A tree is independence, liber-tree, a completely free creature. While the



תמר Dates — greatness and success

You need success in your studies, at work, in some project you're working on. מה תמר **Just as the date-pal lifts its heart toward the heavens**, its “arms” open to Hashem, I, too, ask, “O Master of the world, help me to stand tall like a palm tree: to be big, to be tall, to succeed.”

Among the date's *segulot* are healing and health. It says in the Gemara, מי שאחזו בולמוס — **One seized by a seizure** should be fed a date. “Get up!”¹ they say to the patient, giving him strength when he's weak.

One who sees a date palm in his dream knows **that his sins have ended**.² When you see a date palm in your dream, or dates, know that your biggest sins have been erased.

And how could we forget Tamar (“date”, in Hebrew) from the book of *Bereishit*, who knew how to remind Yehudah of the truth at the right moment and in the right way, earning the praise צדקה ממני! — **She is more righteous than I!**³ May it be His will that we also reach that clarity of Tamar, for her nobility, for righteous children as she had (the Messianic line, no less) — and that your husband always say to us, “My dear wife, you were right.”

1 *Yoma* 83b.
2 *Brachot*, *ibid.*
3 *Bereishit* 38:26.

monkey says, “Yes, yes,” to everyone, King David makes happiness contingent on saying, “No” to evil: **Happy is the man who has not walked, not sat ...**

This is how we pray for our descendants. Let this child not jump at the command of any man; neither bend nor bow to anyone, Hashem. **May he be כעץ, שתול על פלגי מים, like a tree planted alongside rivers, giving its fruit at the right time** — may my daughter give birth on time! — **ועלהו לא — and let its leaves not wither** — don't let her be late — **ונכל אשר יעשה - יצליח — and succeed in whatever he does.**





A person who is disconnected, uprooted, wild, unstable, and doubtful will be hard-pressed to see blessing in his actions: **לֹא כֵן הַרְשָׁעִים: כִּי אִם כַּמּוֹץ, אֲשֶׁר תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ — not so the wicked, for they are like chaff driven by the wind.** We have to ask that our children not pursue every passing wind and fad; that they never be without good advice or good choices.

Al *brachah* is revealed when you are planted, rooted. A rooted person knows happiness, will produce fruit, and know success. It's no coincidence that King David opens the book in which he embedded his prayers, *Tehillim*, with these words.

אֲשֶׁר־י האִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים
וּבְדַרְךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד,
וּבְמוֹשֵׁב לְצִיָּם, לֹא יֵשֵׁב.
כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת הַשֵּׁם חִפְצוֹ;
וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יִהְיֶה, יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵה.
וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ, שְׁתוּל עַל פְּלָגֵי מַיִם
אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלְהוּ לֹא יִבּוֹל;
וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ.
לֹא כֵן הַרְשָׁעִים: כִּי אִם כַּמּוֹץ, אֲשֶׁר תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ.
עַל כֵּן, לֹא יִקְמוּ רָשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט;
וְחַטָּאִים, בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים.
כִּי יוֹדֵעַ הַשֵּׁם דַּרְךְ צְדִיקִים;
וְדַרְךְ רָשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד.

**Happy is the man who has not walked after the counsel of the wicked;
Nor has stood on the path of the sinners;
Nor has sat among scoffers.
Rather, he has made his desire the Torah of Hashem,
And studies His Torah day and night.
And he shall be like a tree planted alongside rivers
That will give its fruit at the right time, and its leaves will not wither;
And everything it does will succeed.
Not so the wicked, for they shall be like chaff driven by the wind.
Therefore the wicked shall not stand up in judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For Hashem knows the path of the righteous,
And the path of the wicked shall be destroyed.**

Psalm 1

The Order of *Brachot*, in Brief

(The following is not meant to replace the laws as explained the Shulchan Aruch or other halachic works, but to give some direction regarding the *brachot*. For deeper treatment please refer to those works).

First make a *brachah* on the more important item: a fruit of the Seven Species is more important than one that is not.

A whole fruit takes precedence over cut pieces.

If you don't want to eat everything, don't force it; make a *brachah* only on what you want. These are *brachot* of enjoyment, not of suffering 😊.

Here is the order:

1. Bread
2. *Mezonot* (other grain products)
3. Wine
4. Olives
5. Dates
6. Grapes and raisins
7. Figs
8. Pomegranate
9. Other tree fruit (*etrog*, cherries, etc.)
10. Vegetables
11. Shehakol
12. *Brachot* over aroma — *borei atzei besamim, borei isvei besamim, borei minei besamim*





- When reciting the *brachah*, hold the nicest of that kind of fruit in your hand, and don't cut it; keep it whole.
- If you made the *brachah* over the olive you don't need to recite it again for the dates, because *borei pri ha'eitz* covers them both, as well as the figs, pomegranates, and other tree fruit.
- The fruits of Eretz Yisrael (i.e., the Seven Species) take precedence over those from abroad.
- Say all of the requests ("Yehi ratzon") before the *brachah*.
- When reciting the *brachah*, hold the fruit in your right hand and look at it.
- Again, the Tu Bishvat Seder is not a halachic requirement. It is not obligatory, but it is of tremendous value. Rabbi Mordechai Tzemach Eliyahu of blessed memory used to say that one who recites a *brachah* for the Creator and eats on Tu Bishvat can shower himself with *brachot* and salvation.

May it be Hashem's will:

That this year that we bloom and grow
 With open, joyous eyes that glow
 Cut away the parts that stray
 And overlook what flaws we may
 So into dance we break (ballet? 😊)
 May we all be blessed - and right away!

With love,
 Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
 Yerushalayim

** For the complete healing (*refua sheleima*) of Jack Yaakov – Jacob ben Helen **



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