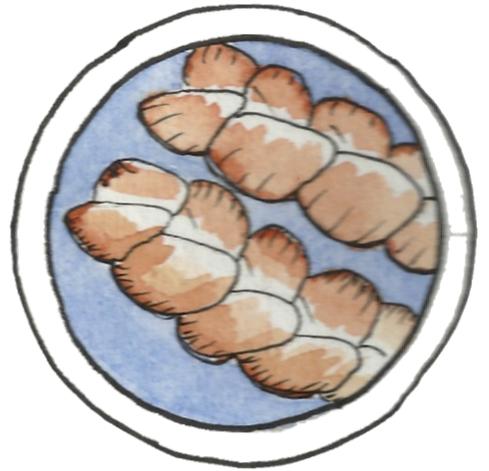
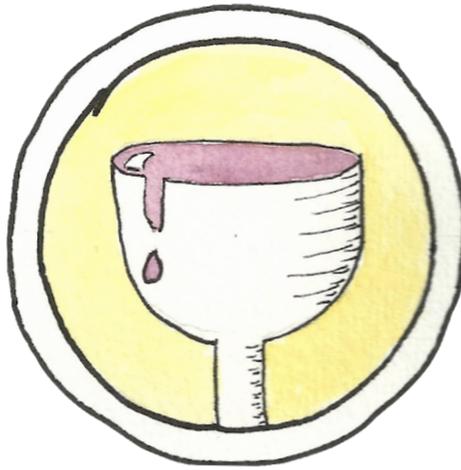


Congregation Beth Israel



Shabbat

companion

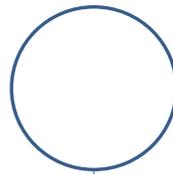
One whose wisdom is greater than their deeds, to what are they compared? To a tree with many branches and few roots; comes a storm and uproots it, and turns it on its head...But one whose deeds are greater than their wisdom, to what are they compared? To a tree with many roots and few branches, whom all the storms in the world cannot budge from its place.

– Pirkei Avot/Ethics of the Sages 3:17

Woods

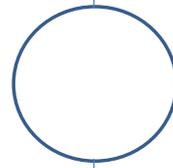
I part the out thrusting branches
and come in beneath
the blessed and the blessing trees.
Though I am silent
there is singing around me.
Though I am dark
there is vision around me.
Though I am heavy
there is flight around me.

--Wendell Berry

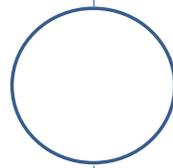


*How can I feel Spirit within
and all around me?*

*When do I feel completely
connected and open?*



*What hard place inside me stops
me from opening up to those I
love?*



The Pine

Here I will not hear the voice of the cuckoo.
Here the tree will not wear a cape of snow.
But it is here in the shade of these pines
my whole childhood reawakens.

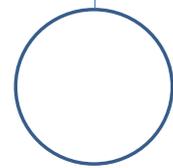
The chime of the needles: Once upon a time
I called the snow-space homeland,
and the green ice at the river's edge -
was the poem's grammar in a foreign place.

Perhaps only migrating birds know -
suspended between earth and sky -
the heartache of two homelands.

With you I was transplanted twice,
with you, pine trees, I grew -
roots in two disparate landscapes.

--Leah Goldberg

*What barriers separate me
from my highest self?*



Be gentle with yourself. Be persevering. Though it may not be apparent to you, there is a great transformation taking place. Like fruit ripening on a tree. As the sun shines on it, the fruit ripens, although from one day to the next, the process may be imperceptible. In the same way, the changes and ripening in our minds are also going on.

--Joseph Goldstein, "The Experience of Insight"

When the Plum Trees Blossom by Hope Alper

One of the most beautiful times of the year in the Bay Area is the late winter when the plum trees blossom. If we are lucky and have a rainy winter, the blossoms burst out when the skies are gray, and the air is misty, the flowers popping out from the bare trees like little puffs of pink cotton candy. If you have been fortunate to spend this time of year in Israel, the almond trees there are doing exactly the same thing, only in white.

As soon as I see the first blossom, I recite the *Birkat Ha'Ilanot* which is only said once a year:

ברוך אתה יהוה, אלהינו מלך העולם, שלא חסר בעולמו כלום, וכרא בו בריות טובות ואילנות טובות, להנות בהם בני אדם

Blessed are you Hashem, our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has withheld nothing from this world and has created beautiful creatures and beautiful trees in it, so that we may delight in them.



This time of year also brings the holiday of Tu B'Shvat, the new year of the trees. Each year, the Israelites were expected to bring one-tenth (a "tithe") of their fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem, where they were offered to God and also helped sustain the priestly class and the poor. Since fruit from one year could not be used to tithe for another, the Rabbis had to determine when a crop year would begin and end. They chose the month of Sh'vat as the cut-off date, for this is

when, in Israel, the sap begins to run and the trees start to awaken from their winter slumber, before beginning to bear fruit.

There is also a Kabbalistic custom to hold a Tu B'Shvat Seder. I had never heard of this holiday or the seder in 1986 when I began working at the East Bay JCC (then called the Berkeley-Richmond JCC). My officemate invited me to her home for a seder, and that is when I became hooked. We talked about trees, ate many different fruits representing the seven species and new fruits, and sang many songs about trees. Over the years, the B'nai Sherot at CBI have held wonderful Tu B'Shvat seders at the shul.

There are many versions of the modern Tu B'Shvat seder. One version is to drink four cups of wine, starting with white and ending with red, representing the seasons in order from winter to fall. Each cup is paired with a Kabbalistic level of creation: *assiyah* (action), *yetzirah* (emotion), *briyah* (thought), and *atzilut* (spirit) and a certain type of fruit. First, fruits that have a hard outer shell, but the inner fruit is soft, like an almond. The second category is fruit with no outer shell, but an inedible pit, like a date. The third category is fruits that are edible inside and outside, like figs. The last category is wine alone, representing the world of pure spirit and faith.

I encourage you to embrace this tradition, and there are many online resources to help plan and hold a Tu B'Shvat seder. Sing a few songs, eat a new fruit, and enjoy the beginning of a new season that we hope will bring us all together again soon.

Special thanks to Sheva Locke, who introduced me to the Tu B'Shvat seder, and Claire Sherman, whose women's seders at the JCC were an inspiration.

אֵז יִרְנָן

רבינו יוסף חיים (הבן איש חי)

Then the Trees will Erupt into Song

By R. Yosef Chaim (the Ben Ish Chai)

Translated by R. Yonatan Cohen

Then the tree of the forest will erupt into song, before the Lord of lords,
the mightiest of all

Awakening with melodies and hymns – A new song, I shall sing
Praise the living God – our Rock! – and let His Name be sanctified

Blessed be God, in the wilderness He dwells,
abundant creatures He creates

Maker of good trees – A new song, I shall sing
Praise the living God – our Rock! – and let His Name be sanctified

Exalted is God in the heavenly spheres,
blessed be the One who blesses each season of the year
Cultivating the fruit of the vine – A new song, I shall sing
Praise the living God – our Rock! – and let His Name be sanctified

Honor God with festal lights,
Maker of the fruit of the vine
Creator of olives and dates – A new song, I shall sing
Praise the living God – our Rock! – and let His Name be sanctified

Blessed be the Living One, dwelling on high,
Grower of the fruit of the fig
We will thank Him with song and hymn – A new song, I shall sing
Praise the living God – our Rock! – and let His Name be sanctified

Exalt the Living God with songs,
He who brings growth on the river's shores
Pomegranates and fruit galore – A new song, I shall sing
Praise the living God – our Rock! – and let His Name be sanctified

Draw strength wayward hearts,
Children and parents rejoice
May long life be our reward – A new song, I shall sing
Praise the living God – our Rock! – and let His Name be sanctified

אֵז יִרְנָן עַז הַיַּעֲרִים לְפָנַי אֶ-ל
אֲדִיר אֲדִירִים
יַעֲרֵר זְמִירוֹת וְשִׁירִים אֲשִׁיר
שִׁיר קֹדֶשׁ
יִתְפָּאֵר אֶ-ל חַי צוֹרְנוֹ וְשִׁמּוֹ
יִתְקַדָּשׁ

בְּרוּךְ אֶ-ל שׁוֹכֵן עֲרֵבוֹת
הַבוֹרָא נְפֹשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת
וּבְרָא אֵילָנוֹת טוֹבוֹת אֲשִׁיר שִׁיר
קֹדֶשׁ
יִתְפָּאֵר אֶ-ל חַי צוֹרְנוֹ וְשִׁמּוֹ
יִתְקַדָּשׁ

גַּם אֶ-ל בְּשִׁמֵי מְעוֹנִים בְּרוּךְ
מְבַרֵךְ הַשָּׁמַיִם
מְצַמֵּחַ עֲנָבֵי גְפְנִים אֲשִׁיר שִׁיר
קֹדֶשׁ
יִתְפָּאֵר אֶ-ל חַי צוֹרְנוֹ וְשִׁמּוֹ
יִתְקַדָּשׁ

דְּבָרוֹ אֶ-ל בְּאוּרִים הַגְּדִיל
עֲנָפִים וְזִמְרִים
וּבְרָא זֵיתִים וְתַמָּרִים אֲשִׁיר שִׁיר
קֹדֶשׁ
יִתְפָּאֵר אֶ-ל חַי צוֹרְנוֹ וְשִׁמּוֹ
יִתְקַדָּשׁ

הַתְּבַרֵךְ חַי דָּר מְעוֹנָה מְצַמֵּחַ פְּרֵי
תְּאֵנָה
נֹדֶה לוֹ בְּשִׁיר וּרְנָנָה אֲשִׁיר
שִׁיר קֹדֶשׁ

יִתְפָּאֵר אֱ-לֹהֵי צוּרֵנוּ וְשִׁמוּ
יִתְקַדָּשׁ

וְהַלְלוּ אֱ-לֹהֵי בְזִמְיֹרוֹת
הַמְגִדִּיל עַל מֵי נְהָרוֹת
רְמוֹנִים וּמִיַּי פְּרוֹת אֲשִׁיר שִׁיר
קָדָשׁ
יִתְפָּאֵר אֱ-לֹהֵי צוּרֵנוּ וְשִׁמוּ
יִתְקַדָּשׁ

וְזָקֵן וְלִבְבוֹת שׁוֹבְבוֹת שְׁמָחוּ
בְּנֵימ עִם הָאֲבוֹת
כִּי נִזְכָּה לְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת אֲשִׁיר
שִׁיר קָדָשׁ
יִתְפָּאֵר אֱ-לֹהֵי צוּרֵנוּ וְשִׁמוּ
יִתְקַדָּשׁ

Thoughts About Love & Friendship on Dalet Shvat By Stephanie Green

Dedicated to my Father, Chaim Tzvi Hirsch ben Ephraim

I've been thinking. About love in general, and friendship in particular. Today is my father's yahrzeit, and he had strong views about friendship and loyalty. He was endlessly curious about people. So, I will dedicate this to him. Those age-old maxims about friendship come to mind:

Birds of a feather flock together

Two's company, three's a crowd

Like-minded

Unconditional love

The more, the merrier

But are they true?

If my friends were together in a room, I don't think they would like each other much, the rag-tag collection of humanity that they are.

I often ponder the meaning of living in the same era as others that I brush up against in crowded trains, see day after day on their neighborhood walk, fall in love with, have conflicts with...the combinations and possibilities are endless, and for some reason, we are all here now. HERE can change, but NOW is now, and the sum total of that mixture creates our reality.

Back to my group of disparate friends.

They are religious and atheists, liberal democrats, conservative republicans, 7th day adventists, musicians, jugglers, addicts, professors, cashiers, and pre-school teachers. They are bakers, old, young, fat, thin, mentally ill, rich, homeless, homemakers, weavers, business-people, gay, straight, beautiful, malformed, english-speaking, speakers of other languages, autistic, opinionated, shy...

My descriptions of them are endless, and no, we are not like-minded. We are not birds of a feather, more isn't always merrier, but it can be better.

Like-minded is boring. I already know what my mind is like. I know what my kind is like. I crave to know about other minds and other kinds.

My friends are people made up of all spare parts. They are quirky and messy. Some are conventional and reserved. Why do I love them all? Is it their crooked tooth, or the way they say oil, with a southern twang? The look on their face when they are sitting alone with no one watching? Their idea of what to pack for a picnic?

The answer is, I don't know. I just do.

And why do they love me? one reports that she loves me because my lips are greasy when eating chinese food, another says my voice calms her.

But the real answer is, they don't know. they just do.

This is my prayer to God, for my friends:

Please Gd, don't let me have one kind of friend

Please let me have friendships that are not dependent on anything open my heart, my mind, my arms, my ears, and shut my mouth. watch over them and keep them healthy and safe

I don't know why i love them, and it doesn't matter.

I just do.

Amen.

Signs with us Every Day

By Ruchama Burrell

We have had a long and discontented winter. Sometimes it feels that the world is on a dark path with little hope of peace and quiet, much less joy. It can be hard to find or believe in HaShem's loving Presence. Shevat invites us to stop and reflect on the ordinary *signs* of Hashem's Presence that are with us every day in Nature.

(The Hebrew word "nun samech" is often translated as miracle, as in the Amidah, when we thank Hashem for the signs/miracles that are every day with us. Miracle implies extraordinary occurrences that are contrary to nature. "Signs," I feel is the better translation in the context of "every day.")

Primitive peoples told stories about fell creatures, inhabiting nature. Beginning roughly during the 17th Century "Enlightenment," scientists began to promulgate stories of a mechanistic universe in which natural phenomena could be dissected and analyzed and thereby understood. Some times these approaches seem to lead to a greater appreciation of the beauty and complexity of the natural world. But when you cut a flower or a frog into pieces you know only the pieces; you do not know the living frog or flower.

As Michael Pollan points out, in *The Botany of Desire*, we make a grave mistake when we consider ourselves the subject and the plant as an object. Using apples, tulips, marijuana and potatoes as examples, he describes how stationery plants have evolved in ways that discourage enemies and encourage not only insects and animals, but also human beings to promote the plants' interests in propagation. His insights can help us appreciate nature, but something is still lacking. That something is the joy we can feel when we experience ourselves as part of, not separate from the natural world and when we experience natural phenomena as *signs* of the Presence.

It turns out that poets, especially religious poets are our best guides to knowing ourselves and nature as part of the One. Here are a few suggestions to start: Psalm 104; *Perek Shirah* (Translated and elucidating in *Nature's Song*, by Nosson Slifkin); William Wordsworth, especially *The world is Too Much With Us*, and *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*; and my personal favorite, the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, especially, *Pied Beauty*.

Here's a taste:

Glory be to God for dappled things—

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim; Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim; He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise Him.

Keshet Nature Walk - Can you find these?
By Iris Green

Tu B'Shvat, February 2020

Keshet Nature Walk: Can you find these?



Big Leaf



Small Leaf



Round Leaf



Long Narrow Leaf



Flower



Thick Hard Leaf

Food Stories

By Bella Barany

Before the weather turned to freezing temperatures in December 1944, my brother Jan(11) and I (8) dug for plant roots in the meadow behind our house, where people in the past had been growing vegetables, such as potatoes, carrots, spinach, endive, fava beans, cabbage, beets, radishes, watercress, etc. Jan had a spade and I had a chisel with a sharp point with which we scraped the ground, but then December came with frost and snow. We looked in garbage cans instead for potato peels.

Sometimes we were lucky and found some. But one day we were not lucky at all. We could not find any. I was tired and hungry and started to cry. My brother said: "Niet Huilen. (Don't cry), I know a place" and he took me there. There were MANY garbage cans in a row behind barbed wire. Jan put his finger on his lips, meaning: "Be VERY quiet". Suddenly I realised where we were.....at the Nazi soldiers' barracks on Sarphati straat !.....

First he lifted the wire and I made a trench in the snow while I crawled under it; on the other side I lifted the wire and he slid underneath it through the narrow trench I had made. Very quietly we walked towards the garbage cans in a row; Jan lifted the lid of the first one carefully and.....WOW.....it was halfway filled with potato peels!! WHAT A MIRACLE !!!! With both hands we grabbed into the peels, wiped the sand off with the snow and stuffed them in our mouths, chewed, swallowed and stuffed in some more. We stuffed all our pockets, then we sneaked back to the wire, taking turns holding it up and crawling under it. We had to be careful not to poke ourselves, because these pokers were so sharp! We felt so happy, we found so many potato peels!

I had a raggedy Ann doll named Lisa; I had cut her belly open, to be able to put the pieces of raw onions, that I did not want to eat; I did not like onions and raw onions tasted the WORST.

Here is the menu of the last 5 months of the Hunger winter 1944/ '45 per person:

Breakfast:

1/2 slice of bread covered with a lick of margarine;
1 glass of 2 oz of milk, filled to the brim with water

Lunch:

1 whole slice of bread, nothing on it; totally dry.
1 glass of water with a SMALL cloud of milk
Maybe a carrot or piece of sugarbeet from greengrocer. Maybe we found something in the gutter or garbage can.

Once I found a pink squirming worm in a muddy gutter, cleaned it off and swallowed it whole, but I vomited it out, because it crawled around so much in my stomach.

NO MORE WORMS FOR ME.

Dinner:

Choices were cut-up pieces cooked sugar beets, roasted or raw (when there was no heat in the kitchen furnace)

Tulip bulbs and onions.

When there was heat in the stove, we ate stinging nettles, which my oldest sister Sonja picked with gloves on her hands.

We were lucky, my father worked with the longshore men in the harbor in the center of Amsterdam. Sometimes there were ships from the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) which brought copra, (= dried pieces of coconut) which came available less and less, because Japan invaded that country in 1941 and allied with Nazi-Germany; also in Amsterdam the Nazis emptied out stores and stole whatever they could; they were losing the war.

Sometimes we only had cut-up raw onions; my father insisted I ate 5 pieces of onion, otherwise I became too weak to play, he said. I HATED onions, so I pretended putting pieces in my mouth, took them out again right away and dropped them in my lap in Lisa's open belly.

After eating I took the doll outside, shook her out and made her ready for the next onion meal. I kept her under my bed, where I hid during other scary times.

My 8 th. birthday present on October 17, 1944. Since the Normandy Invasion, June 1944, squadrons of airplanes flew most nights from South England over The North Sea, over The Netherlands, including Amsterdam to Western Germany Territories and cities, such as Essen in the heavy war industrial Ruhr Gebiet (Area) passed the cities of Bremen and Hamburg and Territories towards Berlin to bomb the war factories. Around Amsterdam there were Nazi anti aircraft weaponry pointing to the sky trying to shoot down the Allied airplanes. I heard the droning sound of many airplanes flying together coming over, after the air raid sirens and I started screaming. I "knew" that all these overflying airplanes were going to be shot down right over our house; all the burning plane pieces were going to fall on our roof All 6 of us slept in the attic right under that roof!!

Inside my head I had already "decided", that all those plane pieces were going to fall through our roof on top of our beds !! We were going to die any way, no matter how much my 3 older siblings explained to me: "those are the Allied's planes from England, they are flying over Amsterdam to Germany to bomb all the war factories, where the Nazis are making THEIR weapons!!" Because I did not stop screaming, my father put cut-up handkerchief pieces in my ears and told me to sleep against his back with my fingers in my ears in the big bed every night. My mother slept in my bed.

The early morning of the 17 th. of October, it was still dark, my father woke me up, whispering to me: "Today you are 8 years old and tonight after dark I will bring you a birthday present!". My

father often left the house in the dark and came back home after dark, because Nazi-soldiers were kidnapping men and tall boys from the streets, sending them to their battle fronts, because they were running out of soldiers. That night he came home after dark with the BEST birthday present EVER! A large round greenish, yellowish apple, called.....GOUD REIGNET...=Golden Queen APPLE !! We took turns taking bites until the last pit in the apple core. YUMMIE, WAS THAT GOOD !!

P.S.He must have paid one hundred guilders for that ONE apple, equivalent to 25 dollars, on the black market.

TuB'Shvat at Gan Shalom

By Emma Schnur

I asked the children how we would celebrate Tu B'shevat, and here are some of their answers:

5 year old: "By not cutting trees!"

4 year old: "By drinking different kinds of grape juice!"

5 year old: "I dranked one of those different grape juices and it was so yucky. It tasted like rotten fruit!"

2 year old: "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!"

Me: "Oh, we celebrate Tu B'shevat by shouting happy birthday"

2 year old: "Yes and lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of chocolate"

5 year old: "I'm going to save the world by throwing garbage away"

another 5 year old: "Yes! We are superheroes!"

Me: "I'm looking outside and noticing the leaves on the trees are moving. There must be a lot of wind..."

3 year old: "No, no, no, no, the trees are DANCING! They are so beautiful!"