

Program Help

ט"ו בשבט

Tu B'Shvat



Compiled by
Rabbi Rachmiel Tobesman

Baltimore Area Council Jewish Committee on Scouting

The Holiday in Brief

On the 15th day of the Hebrew month Shvat, the Jewish celebrate, חמשה-עשר בשבט (Chamishah Asar B'Shvat) which is more commonly known as (Tu B'Shvat) ט"ו בשבט this holiday marks Jewish Arbor Day. This holiday represents the beginning of springtime in Israel; since ancient times, rabbinic literature has referred to it as the New Year for the Trees (Rosh Hashanah La-ilanot) ראש השנה לאילנות. Trees have always been regarded by Jewish tradition as special gifts of God, which must be nourished and protected.

This holiday marks the end of Winter and the beginning of Spring. The almond tree with its beautiful blossoms and the appearance of wild flowers in Israel are a sign of the holiday. Tu B'Shvat has been celebrated by the Jewish people for countless years to show their love of trees, flowers and plants.

The day is observed in the Diaspora by eating fruits especially associated with Israel and by appeals on behalf of the Jewish National Fund, the agency responsible for the widespread purchase of land and the reforestation of Israel.

Background Information

Tu B'Shvat is a 1-day holiday which occurs in January or February on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shvat. "Tu" stands for two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, ט (tet) and ו (vav) which add up to 15. Tet represents 9 and vav is 6.

Although it is still winter in Europe and in America, it is tree-planting time in Israel. The sap is beginning to rise again in Israel's trees, and many trees are starting to show their blossoms. The almond tree, in particular, gets much attention since it is the first to bloom. Its rose-white blossoms are messengers of spring.

The holiday reminds us that spring has come again to Israel; that our people in Israel are reforesting the land and we must help them; that the land of Israel occupies a central place in the Jewish way of life; and that trees are very important to human beings and nature, and we have a responsibility to take proper care of the earth. Arabs used to call the eucalyptus tree the "Jewish tree" because Jewish pioneers introduced it into the land to dry the swamps.

A very beautiful custom practiced in ancient times was the planting of a cedar tree when a boy was born, and a Cyprus tree upon the birth of a girl. As the children grew, so did their special trees. When they were married, branches of these trees were used as part of the wedding canopy. Some parents in Israel still plant a tree every time a baby is born to them.

In Israel, children all over the country plant trees on this day — in the woods and forests, along the streets, and in backyards. They go on hikes and picnics and planting trips. Tu B'Shvat is a "field day" in Israel. It is the Jewish Arbor Day.

The main custom outside of Israel is eating fruits of the kind that grow in Israel, such as figs, dates, oranges, grapes, nuts, raisins, and especially carob (also called bokser or St. John's bread). Israeli songs are sung, and money is donated to plant trees and parks in Israel. Many children and adults "buy" trees for Israel from the Jewish National Fund as gifts for relatives and friends. Another practice is to provide *ma'ot pei-rot* (money for fruit) for the poor so that they, too, may observe Tu B'Shvat.

A ceremony introduced many years ago, but observed by some Jewish people, is to hold a seder (similar to the Passover Seder) on the evening of Tu B'Shvat.

The table is covered with a white cloth and decked with fragrant flowers and leaves. People drink four cups of wine or grape juice and recite blessings over different kinds of fruit grown in Israel. Some like to have 15 varieties of fruit, as a reminder that it is the 15th day of Shvat.

Games

Tree Hunt

Divide the group into pairs or threesomes. Ask each team to list all the items they can think of that come from a tree. See which team can enumerate the most tree products in a given period of time.

Trees and Fruit

Divide the group into two teams, assigning fruit to one and trees to the other. The first is to compile a list of all the fruits that come to mind; the other, a list of trees. The team that records the longer list within ten minutes is the winner.

Trees to Plant

The first player starts the game by saying, "I visited Israel and I planted an orange tree." The second player says, "I visited Israel and I planted an orange tree and a eucalyptus tree." Each succeeding player repeats what has already been said and adds another tree that can grow in Israel. A participant who fails to repeat the names of the trees in the original order, or who cannot add a new one, is out of the game. The game continues until one player is left.

Pretend

Members of the group pretend they are botanists. Each member must invent an original fruit for Tu B'Shvat, give it a name and describe how it would taste, feel and look.

Whirling Trees

Each player is given the name of a tree in Israel (cedar, oak, fig, palm, orange, almond, walnut, apple, pear, peach, apricot, carob, lemon, lime, banana, olive, cypress, myrtle, eucalyptus, acacia, etc.). The leader tells a story of how a group of people wanted to go to

a tree-planting festival, referring constantly to the trees of Israel. Whenever a specific tree is mentioned, the player to whom that tree has been assigned must stand and whirl. Failure to respond to the name of his tree eliminates the player from the game. The story should be planned so that each player is called upon frequently.

Pomegranate Game

The group is divided into two teams. A cord is stretched to divide the room into two sides. A large red balloon, representing a pomegranate, is tossed to the ceiling in the center of the room. As it comes down, the players blow at it, trying to make it touch either an opponent or the floor of the opposite side.

Climbing Mount Carmel

In the center of the room, several books are placed in a pile on the floor. Two smooth boards are placed on either side of the pile of books, with one end resting on the books and the other on the floor. The players form a line as for a relay race. The first player in each line is given a pencil and a nut, and at a signal each tries to push the nut up the board, as if trying to climb a mountain. When a player succeeds in guiding the nut up the board, he quickly returns to his line and the player behind him tries his skill. If the nut falls off the board, the player must begin again at the bottom. The team whose members climb Mount Carmel first wins.

Fruits of Israel

Two pieces of carob are passed around as the players sit in a circle. They must be passed quickly in order to have them catch up with one another. If a player is discovered holding both pieces, he is out of the game. He is also out if he drops one. When the leader says "orange," the fruit is passed to the left. When the leader says "lemon," it is passed to the right.

Activities

Discussion/Debate

Hold a discussion or debate on one or more of the following topics:

Why is the planting of trees especially important in Israel?

What does the Torah and Jewish teachings say about trees?

Why should Tu B'Shvat mean so much to Scouts?

Think of the different names given to Tu B'Shvat. Can you suggest other names (in English or Hebrew) for this holiday that would also fit?

Why should Jewish people everywhere celebrate Tu B'Shvat?

Torah Flora and Fauna Hike

Tu B'Shvat falls at a time of the year when hikes are not unusual. An outing can be arranged to a spot where a tree, sapling, or small plant may be planted in a colorful ceremony.

Jewish environmental education is a natural extension of any scout, religious school, youth group or adult outdoor activity. Many basic concepts of ecology can be found in the Torah and other Jewish religious writings. The use of Jewish texts and stories adds a new dimension to the generic hike

Jewish environmental education inspires participants to learn by listening, experimenting, discussing, playing, and doing! Jewish Environmental Education teaches Jewish texts and customs that promote an understanding of human interaction with nature and advances understanding of ecology and Judaism together.

For a complete copy of this program please contact BAC JCoS at jewishscouts@aol.com

Tu B'Shvat Party

A lively party can be held featuring fruits and products of Israel. Serve Israeli fruit, play some of the games described above, and sing appropriate songs. Conduct a planting ceremony, with each Scout planting a bulb, a small plant, fruit seeds, a sweet potato, an onion, parsley, an over-ripe pea, etc., in an individual flower pot or box. (Each Scout can later tend his own plant either in the meeting room or at home.) The room should be decorated with reminders of Israel, e.g., posters, flags, Stars of David, etc. A film or filmstrip might be shown.

Show and Tell

Have each Scout bring something that is either grown in Israel or made from something grown in Israel, and talk about it.

Give Tzedakah

It is an old practice to give toward helping the poor on Tu B'Shvat in units of 91 cents, since that is the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word *lan*, which means tree. Take up a collection and turn over the proceeds to an organization that feeds the hungry, to the local Meals on Wheels, a home for the aging, or any other charitable institution of the group's choosing. Another procedure is to do a fundraiser, such as a car wash or a bake sale.

Stamp Collection

Encourage the group to start an Israeli stamp collection. Some of the Scouts may have access to Israeli stamps through their parents, friends of their parents, or relatives. Stamps

also may be obtained from the Jewish National Fund, Israel organizations, stamp collectors, and others. At the end of the year, the group can decide how to handle the stamps that have been gathered.

Exhibit or Sale

Have the Scouts obtain actual imports from Israel and arrange for a display or a sale.

Plant Seeds, Roots, and Tops

Have the Scouts bring in seeds (avocado, grapefruit, etc.) roots, vegetable tops (such as carrots), and sweet potatoes. These can be placed in jars of water, wet cotton, etc., and observed as they grow in the weeks ahead.

Dance the Hora

Learn to dance the Hora. A local rabbi, Jewish educator or JCC worker probably can teach it.

Crafts

Mural

The group might construct a mural depicting the planting of trees in Israel, or various uses of trees (furniture, houses, paper, etc.)

Almond Trees

“Almond trees” can be made out of cotton balls. Each Scout first draws a simple outline of a tree and then paints or colors the trunk brown. Pink or white cotton balls can then be glued on.

Map of Israel

Maps of Israel can be made in the form of cartographs. They are copied from a regular map, and appropriate pictures are added. The pictures can show cities, kibbutzim, industries, vegetation, birds and animals, places of special interest, etc. The maps will be colorful wall decorations when hung around the meeting room.

Model of a Kibbutz

This is a group project. A simple kibbutz can be made by using boxes of wood or cardboard to represent houses, paper trees (described below), sand, pebbles, small plants, animal figures, etc.

Collage

A Tu B'Shvat collage can be made using beans, cereals, dry seeds, etc., as part of the design. Across the top, the words TU B'SHVAT can be printed, with the letters filled in with seeds. Under this heading, write NEW YEAR FOR TREES. At the bottom, put an original slogan appropriate for this holiday. Cut out pictures of trees and fruit from magazines and make a collage.

Leaf Mobile

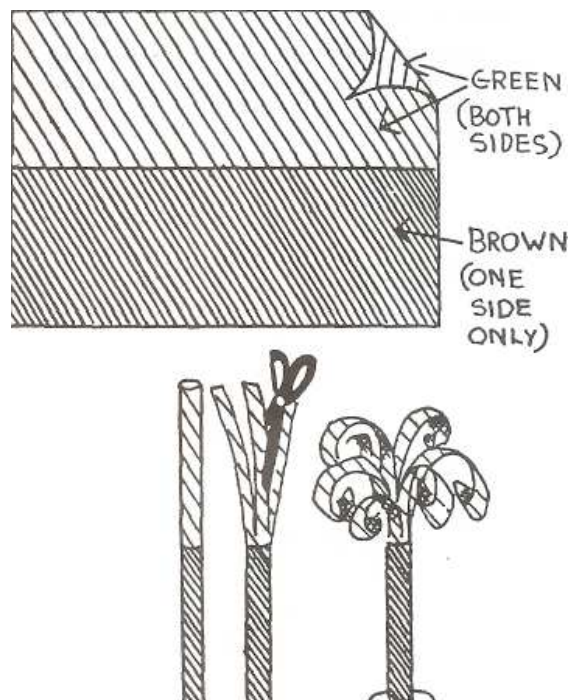
Different kinds of leaves are collected and pressed flat with an iron. Two squares of contact paper are cut larger than the leaves. Peel the backing off one square and place the leaf face down so it sticks securely to the paper. Peel the backing off the other square and place it over the leaf and paper. Smooth it out. Trim the excess paper, leaving about 1 inch of margin around the leaf. Punch a hole in each leaf. Thread varying lengths of colored yarn or string through the holes. Tie them to a wire hanger.

Making a Soap or Clay Tile

Decide on an appropriate design or subject. This should be drawn first on a piece of paper about the same size as the soap or clay slab. Then take the clay or the large-size bar of soap and mold it into a smooth bar of the desired shape and $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thick. Trace the design on the tile and then go over it to sharpen the impression. Scoop out the background of the design. Punch a hole through the top so the tile can be hung. After the tile has dried (if clay is used), it should be finished with sandpaper and painted.

Paper Palm Trees

A paper palm tree is made as follows: A plain piece of white paper is ruled in half. The lower half is colored brown on one side; the upper half, green on both sides. The paper is then rolled up, with the brown on the out-side and the uncolored part inside. The tube is pasted together on the bottom (brown) half only. Straight cuts are made vertically through the green all around the tube, ending at the point where the brown begins. Then with the blade of the scissors the strips from the top are curled under. The tree can be made to stand by cutting the bottom and bending, or by attaching it to a small flat piece of clay or wood.



Stories

There are few stories and story books for this age level on the subject of Tu B'Shvat. A number of items, however, are available on the related topics of Israel and the Jewish National Fund. Good resources can be found in the bibliography. Story material also may be obtained from the Jewish National Fund, the American Zionist Youth Foundation, the JWB, and the New York Board of Jewish Education. Especially commended is the *bibTu B'Shvat Manual* (Eckstein).

Special Foods

Israel Fruit Soup

For the winter months.
Makes 12 portions.

1 can pitted sour cherries	4 apples
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried apricots	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried peaches
1 cup dried prunes	2- $\frac{1}{2}$ quarts water
3 eggs	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

Dice all the fruit except the cherries. Cook all fruit until soft. Add sugar and salt according to taste. Beat the eggs, adding a tablespoon of water. Pour the hot soup over the beaten eggs *very* slowly, stirring constantly. Serve warm or cold with a spoonful of sour cream for garnish.

Bags of Fruit

Fill small paper bags with an assortment of the kinds of fruit grown in Israel. Distribute to children or adults in local hospitals and other institutions. Also distribute at a Scout meeting.

Baked Apples

Use Rome Beauty or similar tart apples, cinnamon, half a lemon or 3 drops of concentrated lemon juice, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sugar. Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees. Core the apples, sprinkle some cinnamon in each empty core, and add lemon and sugar. Place the apples in a muffin tin or baking tin with sides. Bake for an hour, or until you can easily pierce the sides of the apples with a fork. Serve slightly warm with vanilla ice cream, whipped cream, or sweet cream.

Baked Seeds

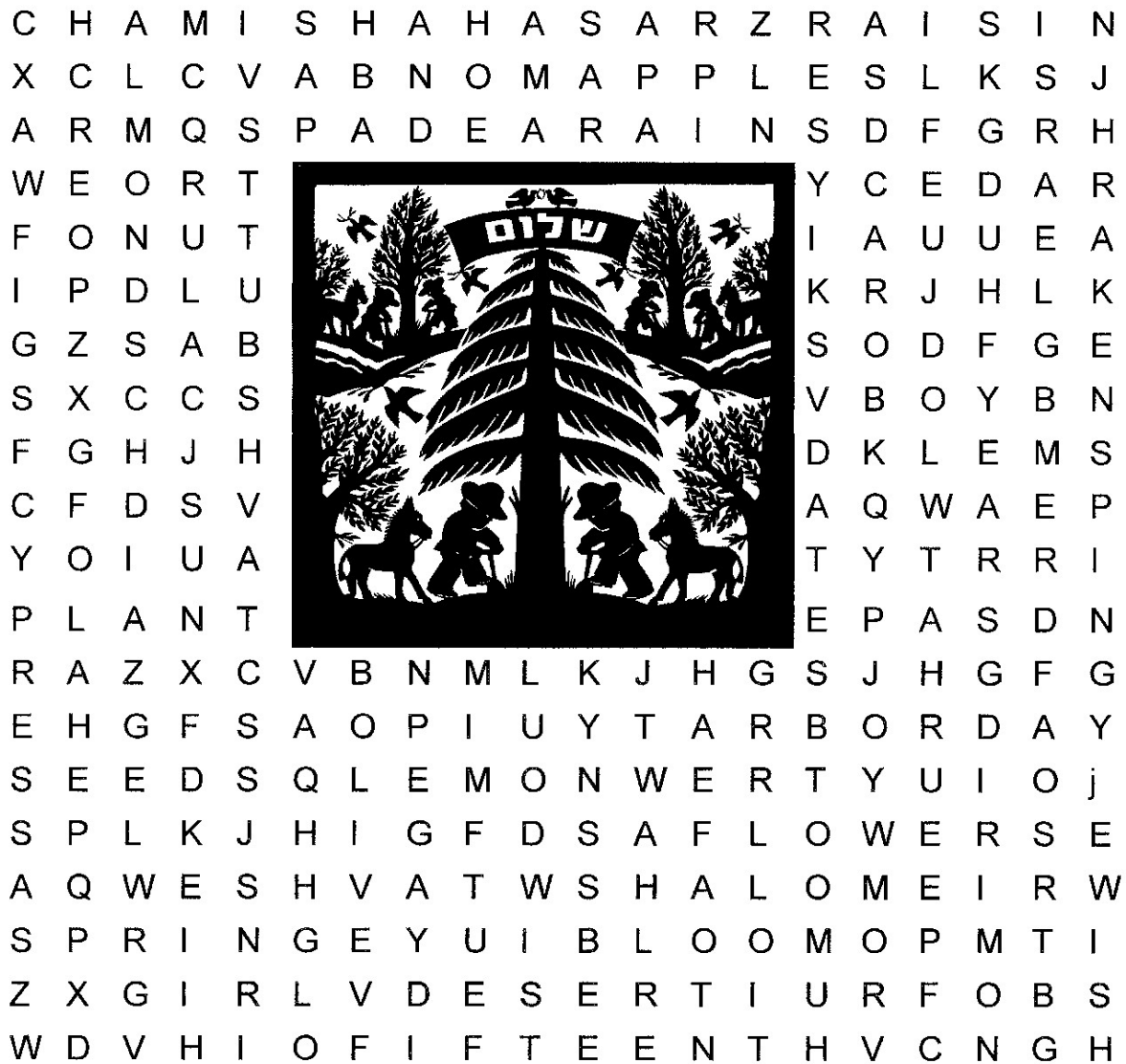
Scoop the seeds out of a pumpkin or large winter squash (preferably banana squash). Wash the stringy material off the seeds and blot them dry in a towel. Arrange the seeds in

a layer on a cookie sheet. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, or seasoned salt, or onion or garlic powder. Bake at 300 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes, until the seeds are golden in color. Remove from oven and cool. (These will keep up to 2 weeks in an airtight jar.)

Posters

Likely sources of materials are the Education Department of the Jewish National Fund, the New York Board of Jewish Education, Neot Kedumim, and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel. Write to them well in advance, allowing plenty of time for responses and shipment. Other possible resources are the various Israeli government tourist offices (currently located in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and New York), the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and the Jewish Agency in New York. For listings of appropriate materials, try the Jewish Media Service.

Tu B'Shvat Word Search



Can you find the Tu B'Shvat Words:

- | | | | | |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Chamishah Asar | Apples | Carob | Olive | Figs |
| Fifteenth | Dates | Raisin | Rain | Boy |
| Shvat | Flowers | Jewish | Almonds | Israel |
| Year | Spade | Bloom | Desert | Arm |
| Tu B'Shvat | Cedar | Cypress | Nut | Rimon |
| Arbor Day | Shalom | Hoe | Rake | Plant |
| Seeds | Girl | Spring | Fruit | Lemon |