

A renewal explanation of the Kabbalistic Seder, P'ri Eitz Hadar

Under the influence of 16th century Kabbalah, Tu BiShvat became a day that marked the renewal of divine energies through the tree that embodies a link between heaven and earth. The holiday came to be celebrated with a ritual meal modeled after the Passover seder. The earliest seder for Tu BiShvat is P'ri Eitz Hadar, a 17th century mystical text. All contemporary seders for the holiday have their roots in this anonymous work.

P'ri Eitz Hadar divides all fruits and nuts into three categories, those without hard seeds or shells, those with hard seeds, and those with outer shells.

The fruits of the first category are associated with the "World of Creation," a realm that is so close to the divine source of reality that it requires no protection from the corruptive forces of the material world. These fruits and nuts are called "completely good."

The second category is associated with the "World of Formation," an intermediate realm between the divine world and the world of material reality. The hard seeds within these fruits are a token of the internal hardness required to survive in such a reality.

The last category is of the "World of Making." P'ri Eitz Hadar explains that we eat the inside and throw away the outside of these fruits and nuts because their outer shells are the barrier between the profound mystical pleasures of the divine world and the dangers inherent in our worldly reality which is filled with harmful urges and destructive temptations.

P'ri Eitz Hadar says that, "There is nothing below that does not correspond to something above." The trees of this world and their fruit are more than they appear. They are the mirror image of the supernal tree that links the worlds between the material world and the divine. The purpose of the seder, from the perspective of the Kabbalists, is for us to eat the fruits and nuts with the intention of reuniting them with their root in each realm. On this special day of the year, our ritual eating of fruits causes divine energy to flow through the tree, like sap rising in a sugar maple.

This is what Jewish mysticism refers to as a "tikkun." It is not just "repairing the world" in the secular sense. Today, "tikkun olam" is used as a Jewish catch-phrase for anything that helps clean the environment or improve public policies. While those are worthy goals, the tikkun of Tu BiShvat is something different. We are meant to be actors in the cosmic drama of linking heaven and earth. We are meant to see our lives—complete with the personal shortcomings of our hard inner pits and our tough outer shells—as part of the drama that brings God's presence (Shechinah) into the world.

Today is a day for knowing and feeling yourself to be a deeply meaningful and necessary part of the cosmos. Your intentions and your actions help to gladden the godhead and bring divine light and energy into the world. What an awesome thing to achieve by eating some apples, dates, figs and almonds!

On this Tu BiShvat, I wish for you the blessing found in P'ri Eitz Hadar:

May it be Your will Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, that through the sacred power of our eating fruit, which we are now eating and blessing, while reflecting on the secret of their supernal roots upon which they depend, that divine flowing energy, favor, blessing, and bounty be bestowed upon them. May the angels appointed over them also be filled by the powerful divine flowing energy of their glory, may it return and cause them to grow a second time, from the beginning of the year and until its end, for bounty and blessing, for good life and peace. (Translation by Miles Krassen)