

Congregation B'nai Harim

TU B'SHVAT SEDER

The New Year of the Trees

Featuring:

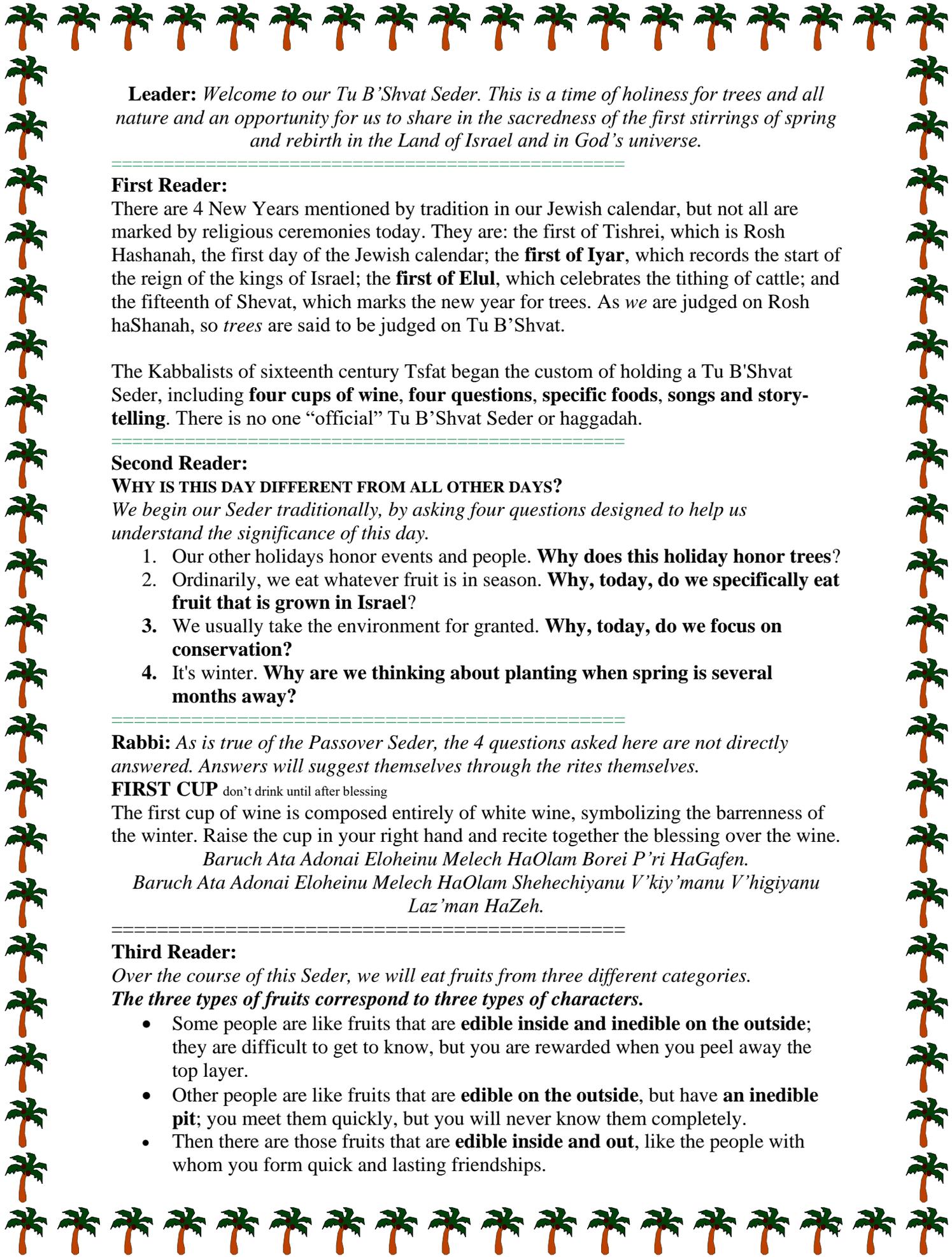
Fruits of Israel

Wines of the Year

Blessings, Songs, Questions, & Readings

for

THE JEWISH ARBOR DAY



Leader: *Welcome to our Tu B'Shvat Seder. This is a time of holiness for trees and all nature and an opportunity for us to share in the sacredness of the first stirrings of spring and rebirth in the Land of Israel and in God's universe.*

First Reader:

There are 4 New Years mentioned by tradition in our Jewish calendar, but not all are marked by religious ceremonies today. They are: the first of Tishrei, which is Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the Jewish calendar; the **first of Iyar**, which records the start of the reign of the kings of Israel; the **first of Elul**, which celebrates the tithing of cattle; and the fifteenth of Shevat, which marks the new year for trees. As *we* are judged on Rosh haShanah, so *trees* are said to be judged on Tu B'Shvat.

The Kabbalists of sixteenth century Tsfat began the custom of holding a Tu B'Shvat Seder, including **four cups of wine, four questions, specific foods, songs and storytelling**. There is no one "official" Tu B'Shvat Seder or haggadah.

Second Reader:

WHY IS THIS DAY DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER DAYS?

We begin our Seder traditionally, by asking four questions designed to help us understand the significance of this day.

1. Our other holidays honor events and people. **Why does this holiday honor trees?**
 2. Ordinarily, we eat whatever fruit is in season. **Why, today, do we specifically eat fruit that is grown in Israel?**
 3. We usually take the environment for granted. **Why, today, do we focus on conservation?**
 4. It's winter. **Why are we thinking about planting when spring is several months away?**
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Rabbi: *As is true of the Passover Seder, the 4 questions asked here are not directly answered. Answers will suggest themselves through the rites themselves.*

FIRST CUP don't drink until after blessing

The first cup of wine is composed entirely of white wine, symbolizing the barrenness of the winter. Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine.

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Borei P'ri HaGafen.

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Shehechyanu V'kiy'manu V'higyanu Laz'man HaZeh.

Third Reader:

Over the course of this Seder, we will eat fruits from three different categories.

The three types of fruits correspond to three types of characters.

- Some people are like fruits that are **edible inside and inedible on the outside**; they are difficult to get to know, but you are rewarded when you peel away the top layer.
- Other people are like fruits that are **edible on the outside**, but have an **inedible pit**; you meet them quickly, but you will never know them completely.
- Then there are those fruits that are **edible inside and out**, like the people with whom you form quick and lasting friendships.

Rabbi: *The Kabbalists imagined Creation to exist on several different planes. On Tu B'Shvat, it is appropriate to relate these planes to types of fruits and the corresponding types of people they represent. The substratum closest to our world, the layer of Creation, is the plane of action (asiyah).*

Fourth Reader:

We do not discard fruits because of an inedible peel or pit; **likewise, all kinds of people are worth knowing.**

1. The first fruits we eat today are fruits with inedible peels: **pomegranates, almonds, tangerines, kiwis, walnuts, and pistachios.** They are like people difficult to get to know, but you are rewarded when you peel away the top layer.

Rabbi: *The fruit of the tree represents the good deeds performed by individuals in their desire to benefit Creation. These are acts of loving-kindness (hesed) suffused with the innate Divine flavor of each person's soul.*

The mystics taught that saying blessings helps to release the divine sparks within the foods. Chewing is also a way to encourage power to flow: our 32 teeth correspond to the 32 times that God is mentioned in the story of Creation.

First we eat fruits of Israel. Lift up the pomegranate [or almonds] in your right hand and recite together the blessing: (if you are eating a fruit that you have not eaten in at least a year, recite the second blessing as well)

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Borei P'ri HaEitz.

**Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Shehechyanu V'kiy'manu
V'higyanu Laz'man HaZeh.**

We look now at the first question: Our other holidays honor events and people. **Why does this holiday honor trees?**

Fifth Reader:

In ancient times all-importance was attached to the first born, in the case of both humans and animals, and also to the first fruits in nature, including trees, wheat and barley (*remember the first offering: Abel's flock, Cain's fruits*). People saw in the **first fruits and first crops, God's gift** to humankind, and so they arrived at two conclusions: that the first born is more important than those who follow after, and that the first-born and the first fruits should be sacrificed to God in thanksgiving. They felt that it was by virtue of this sacrifice that God would bless both those who follow the first-born and the crops that grow after the first yield. An ancient custom preserves the connection between trees and people, first born or not!

Sixth Reader:

In ancient days, there was a custom of planting a tall, strong cedar tree for a baby boy, and a graceful, flourishing cypress tree for a baby girl. As the children grew, they tended the trees, and the trees grew along with the children. When they were to be married, they used the wood for the poles in their Chuppah. This carried the tradition of loving trees from generation to generation in a concrete and special way.

Rabbi: *We are about to pour, bless and drink the second cup and then bless and eat foods that represent another level of Creation, Y'tzirah, the capacity to be creative and strive for good.*

SECOND CUP

The second cup of wine/juice is mostly white with a touch of red wine/juice, symbolizing the approach of spring. The red signifies the emergence of color. Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine.

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Borei P'ri HaGafen.

We now take fruits from the second category. These fruits are edible on the outside, but have inedible pits: **olives, dates, peaches, apricots, plums, and cherries.** = *people you meet quickly, but will never know completely* Yetzirah, formation: olives, dates, cherries, persimmon, apricot, peach, plums, mangoes, guava

Once again, we eat first from the fruits of Israel. Lift up the fruit in your right hand and recite together the blessing: (if you are eating a fruit that you have not eaten in at least a year, recite the second blessing as well)

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Borei P'ri HaEitz.

**Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Shehechyanu V'kiy'manu
V'higyanu Laz'man HaZeh.**

The realm of Y'tzirah is represented by the branches of the tree and these represent people who serve God, Creation and fellow beings with respect and love. The force within the branches that enables them to produce fruit comes from their hidden soul-root that grows from the Divine substratum of reality.

Seventh Reader:

We turn now to the discussion of the second question: Ordinarily, we eat whatever fruit is in season. **Why, today, do we specifically eat fruit that is grown in Israel?**

The original purpose of Tu B'Shvat was to mark tithing responsibilities. Our ancestors would have given a portion of their yield for support of the religious leaders, the poor and the entire community. Ever since the loss of Temple and land, we who live in diaspora keep alive our connection with Eretz Yisrael. This holiday helps us internalize that connection. A contribution to the Jewish National Fund or to the B'nai Harim Landscape Fund is appropriate!

Rabbi: THIRD CUP

The third cup of wine is 1/4 white and 3/4 red, symbolizing the progression of spring. The ground has warmed to allow the seeds to take root and the plants have started to grow. Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine.

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Borei P'ri HaGafen.

- Now we take the fruit from the third category, those fruits that are completely edible: **grapes, figs, apples, and pears.** The Torah may be compared to the fruits

in this category. = *the people with whom you form quick and lasting friendships*. Beriah, creation: grapes, apples, figs, etrog, [lemon, orange, tangerine, grapefruit (!)] pear, berries, carob, quince,

Every part of these fruits is good to eat, and every part of the Torah is good to study and learn from. But some parts are a little harder to digest!

Once again, we eat first from the fruits of Israel. Lift up the fruit in your right hand and recite together the blessing: (if you are eating a fruit that you have not eaten in at least a year, recite the second blessing as well)

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Borei P'ri HaEitz.

**Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Shehechyanu V'kiy'manu
V'higyanu Laz'man HaZeh.**

This collection of fruits represents B'riah, a part of Creation that has no barriers to enjoyment. If we map this level onto the body of a tree, it is the trunk, the carrier of life's energy to the branches, leaves and fruits. The trunk of the tree also represents the wisdom of Torah as revealed to each generation. When one looks at the concentric rings of a tree's trunk, one is reminded of the rings of interpretation of Jewish wisdom.

Eighth Reader:

We turn now to the third question: We usually take the environment for granted. **Why, today, do we focus on conservation?**

Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai once said: **"If you have sapling in your hand, ready to plant, and the Messiah comes, plant the tree first and then go to greet the Messiah."** The Torah commands us to leave fruit trees standing if we attack a city in wartime. We are also commanded to observe the mitzvah of *Peah*, so that the poor may glean from the fields.

Moses Cordovero, who wrote a Haggadah to be used on Tu B'Shvat, said that **"the principle of wisdom is to extend acts of love toward everything, including plants and animals"** (*Tomer D'vorah* 3).

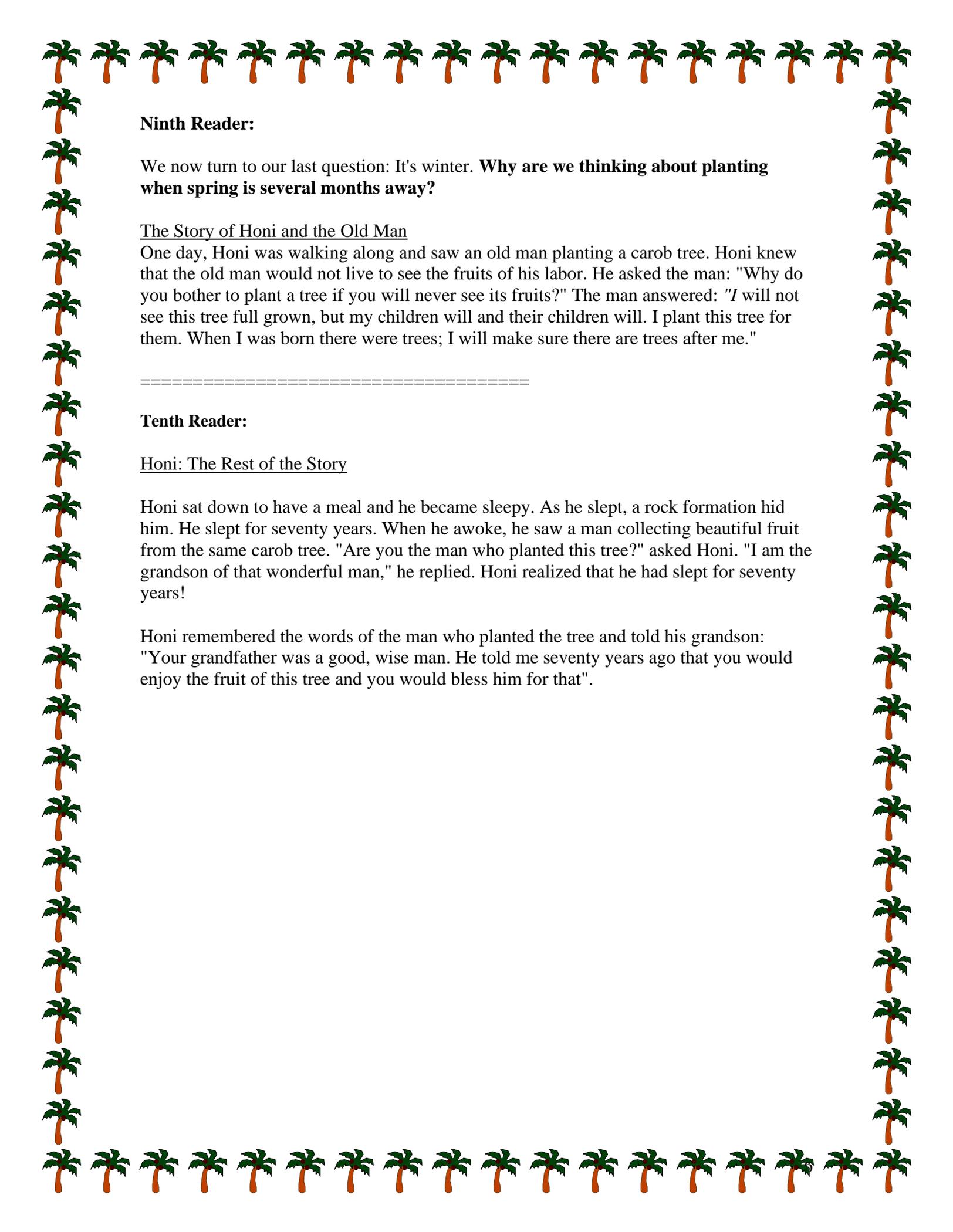
Rabbi: FOURTH CUP

The fourth cup of wine is all red, symbolizing the arrival of summer. The trees are in full bloom and filled with fruit. Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine.

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Borei P'ri HaGafen.

In this part of the ceremony, we think about a completed cycle not only of trees but of relationships. We envision a time when we may relate to our family and friends in love and understanding and we pray for a time when our relationship with God is marked by God's love, mercy, wisdom and understanding of us. What better way to symbolize this fulfillment than with a sweet cake that pulls all the goodness into one complete dish!

Supplementary: *The last realm, that of atzilut, has no real equivalent on earth. It may be thought of as the hidden power of the soul of things, the roots of the tree, the force of the Divine that is present but hidden and that makes all creation and regeneration possible.*



Ninth Reader:

We now turn to our last question: It's winter. **Why are we thinking about planting when spring is several months away?**

The Story of Honi and the Old Man

One day, Honi was walking along and saw an old man planting a carob tree. Honi knew that the old man would not live to see the fruits of his labor. He asked the man: "Why do you bother to plant a tree if you will never see its fruits?" The man answered: "*I* will not see this tree full grown, but my children will and their children will. I plant this tree for them. When I was born there were trees; I will make sure there are trees after me."

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Tenth Reader:

Honi: The Rest of the Story

Honi sat down to have a meal and he became sleepy. As he slept, a rock formation hid him. He slept for seventy years. When he awoke, he saw a man collecting beautiful fruit from the same carob tree. "Are you the man who planted this tree?" asked Honi. "I am the grandson of that wonderful man," he replied. Honi realized that he had slept for seventy years!

Honi remembered the words of the man who planted the tree and told his grandson: "Your grandfather was a good, wise man. He told me seventy years ago that you would enjoy the fruit of this tree and you would bless him for that".