

For the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.
– Proverbs 11:30

Trees of Reconciliation:

A Tu Bishvat Haggadah



2013

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Hinei Mah Tov / הִנֵּה מָה טוֹב

Hinei mah tov u'ma na'yim,

shevet achim gam yachad

Hinei mah tov u'ma na'yim,

shevet achiot gam yachad

הִנֵּה מָה טוֹב וַיְמָה נְעִים

שְׁבֵט אֲחִים גַּם יַחַד:

הִנֵּה מָה טוֹב וַיְמָה נְעִים

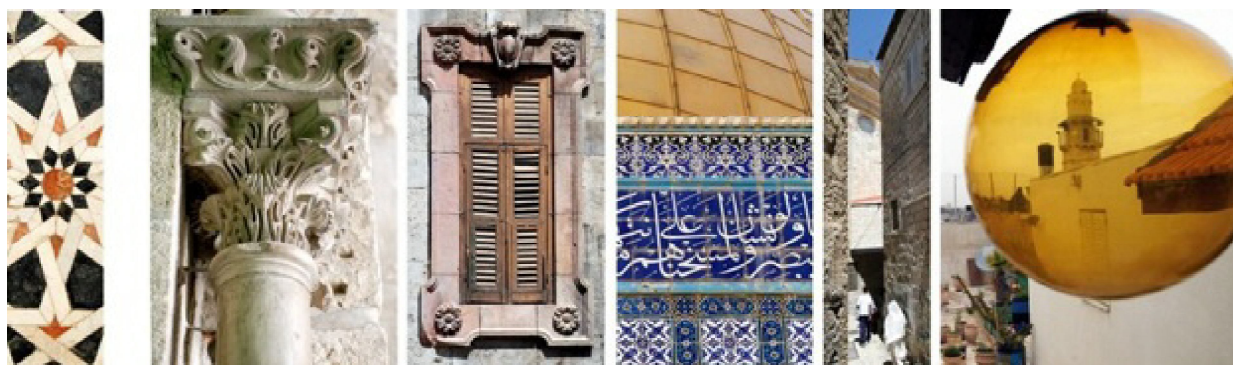
שְׁבֵט אֲחִיּוֹת גַּם יַחַד:

How good and how pleasant it is
for brothers and sisters to dwell together in harmony.

Tu Bishvat is called the "Birthday of the Trees." It has been celebrated in many different ways throughout Jewish history, changing to meet the needs of each generation. It has been an agricultural festival, a tax deadline, a communal feast day, a Kabbalistic mystic rite, and a nationalist holiday. Tonight, as people working for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine and throughout the world, we join in the Jewish tradition of remaking tradition to observe Tu Bishvat as an occasion of learning and reconciliation.

Our 21st century Tu Bishvat acknowledges the unity of all people and calls on us to listen, to reflect and to take action. Tonight we listen both to ancient calls from our Torah -- Tree of Life and Tree of Wisdom -- and to our own generation's understanding of environmental, political and social justice. We come prepared to take on the responsibility of *tikkun olam*, the work of repairing our broken world.

On this holiday, then, we have gathered to consider trees -- what trees have meant in Jewish history, what trees have meant in Zionist history, and what trees have meant and mean today in the land of Israel/Palestine. In this seder, we will taste the fruits and nuts and juices that come from trees. We will also be tasting of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Wisdom, which grow within us as we search for them and when we act for deep justice. And because all wisdom carries responsibility, we will be asked to take action while the flavors are still bitter and sweet in our mouths.



The Seed

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת עֵין הַחַיִּים מִצְמִיחַ כָּל עֵץ.

N'vareykh et eyn hakhayim, matzmi'akh kol eitz.

Let us bless the Source of Life which raises up each tree.

Trees were planted in the very beginning of our stories about ourselves as a people. The relationship of human beings to the earth -- *adam* to *adamah* -- is described by the Hebrew Scriptures as perhaps the central element in a sacred relationship to God, and trees played a central role in how we have told the story of the creation of the world and of people. This special place for trees has continued throughout Jewish history: our Torah is understood as the Tree of Life; special rules have always been set for trees; trees are understood to be necessary for life, and trees have often been used as a metaphor for humans. Listen to our voices:

1.

God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and from the ground God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad. (Genesis 2:8-9)

2.

I am like a green olive tree in the House of God; I trust in the love of God for ever and ever."
Psalms 52:10

3.

When in your war against a city you must besiege it a long time, you must not destroy its trees by forcing an ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down.
(Deut. 20:19-20)

4.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai used to say: If you are holding a sapling in your hands, and someone announces the Messiah's arrival, plant the sapling! After that, go meet the Messiah.
(From the Midrash, *Avot d'Rabbi Nathan* 2:31.)

5.

We are told that Reb Nachman was once traveling with his Hasidim by carriage, and as it grew dark they came to an inn, where they spent the night. During the night Reb Nachman began to cry out loudly in his sleep, waking everyone up in the inn, all of whom came running to see what happened. When he awoke, the first thing Reb Nachman did was to take out a book he had brought with him. Then he closed his eyes and opened the book and pointed to a passage. And there it was written, "Cutting down a tree before its time is like killing a soul." Then Reb Nachman asked the innkeeper if the walls of that inn had been built out of saplings cut down before their time. The innkeeper admitted that this was true, but how did the rabbi know? Reb Nachman said, "All night I dreamed I was surrounded by the bodies of those who had been murdered. I was very frightened. Now I know that it was the souls of the trees that cried out to me." (Reb Nachman of Bratslav, as retold by Howard Schwartz)

6.

And Israel sang the song of the Universe and of Nature, the song of heaven and earth and all their host, the song of the sea and the fullness thereof, the song of the hills and high places, the song of the trees and the grass, the song of the seas and the streams. Then did the people of Israel sit each under his vine or fig tree, the fig put forth her buds and the green hills cast their charm from afar. Those days were days of breadth and beauty. (Micah Berdichevski, 1903)

7.

When a tree that bears fruit is cut down, its moan goes from one end of the world to the other, yet no sound is heard. (Pirke de-R. Eliezer 34)

8.

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree, the myrtle, and the olive tree; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane tree and the larch together, that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together... (Isaiah 41:19-20)

9.

I recall from the teaching of the sages: Whoever walks by the way and interrupts his study to remark, How fine is that tree, how fine is that field – forfeits his life. But I assert that then alone will Judah and Israel be saved, when another teaching is given unto us, namely: Whoever walks by the way and sees a fine tree and a fine field and a fine sky and leaves them to think on other thoughts – that man is like one who forfeits his life! Give us back our fine trees and fine fields! Give us back the Universe! (Micah Berdichevski, 1903)

We celebrate the place that trees have held in our history and traditions. We eat nuts from trees in honor of the substance and strength that we harvest from the trees. We eat figs to celebrate the sweetness that trees provide in our lives and in our communities. And we drink the juice of fruit trees, in joyful expression of our dedication to the common project of discovering and acknowledging truth, as we say the blessing together:

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת עֵין הַחַיִּים בּוֹרֵי פְרֵי הָעֵץ.

N'vareykh et eyn hakhayim, borei p'ri ha-eytz.

Let us bless the Source of Life that creates the fruit of the tree.
Let us pull strength and wisdom from our traditions.



Sing:

עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא / Eitz Chayim Hi

עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ, וְתִמְכֶּיהָ מֵאֲשָׁר.
דְּרָכֶיהָ דְּרָכֵי נֹעַם, וְכָל נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שָׁלוֹם.

*Eitz chayim hi, l'machazikim bah, v'tom'cheha me'ushar.
D'racheha dar'chei no'am, v'kol n'tivoteha shalom.*

She is a tree of life to those who hold fast to her,
All who uphold her may be counted fortunate.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.

The Blossom

The trees planted in our tradition grew and blossomed, yet have been different for each generation. The study of this alone could take a lifetime. Tonight we focus on one such blossoming, the Jewish dream of returning to an ancient homeland. Yearning for this homeland is deeply ingrained in Jewish culture -- in liturgy, holidays, prayers, even the language itself. Early Zionists drew on the power of this longing to shape their political campaign to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Trees quickly became a symbol with which they hoped to persuade Jews across the world to share their views, and tree planting was promoted as a sacred activity that would lead to the redemption of the land -- *ge'ulat ha'aretz*. Tu Bishvat provided an ideal opportunity for a newly nationalist holiday, with songs, picnics, and public dedications. Early leaders of the Jewish National Fund, whose mission was to acquire land in Palestine for Jewish development, launched the tradition in which Jews donated money in "pushke" charity boxes -- the ubiquitous JNF "Blue Boxes" -- in order to "redeem the land and make the desert bloom" by planting trees in Eretz Yisrael.

We now know that this dream of planted trees and reforesting land in a Jewish state had consequences for the land and the peoples of the region that those who dropped their pennies into the JNF pushkes did not intend. And we know that the ways in which this dream was realized continue to have profound consequences for the entire region today. But before we explore that story, we pause to honor the generations of Jews who yearned for freedom and home, a yearning shared by all people in exile everywhere. For so many Jews throughout the 20th century, JNF Blue Boxes represented these hopes with such strength that the questions we ask tonight about the land and the trees were not asked for too many years.

1.

Zionism itself was a dream, a Utopia. The Holy Land -- which some of the older people among us can still remember as a place of desolation and ruin -- has responded to the toil of the pioneers as if to carry out the prophet's prediction: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom." (Isaiah 35:1). The renewal of the land, the act of making the desert blossom, is an inspiration to underdeveloped lands all over the world. (from Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, 1968)

2.

"The tree is the life-line of nature, of mother-earth . . . Those who have never planted a tree cannot feel the earth, and therefore will never know what homeland means." (from the first brochure of the Association of Jewish Foresters in Palestine, 1945)

3.

From its inception, the Jewish National Fund was charged with the task of fundraising in Jewish communities for the purpose of purchasing land in Eretz Yisrael to create a homeland for the Jewish people. In the spring of 1903, the JNF acquired its first parcel of land: 800 acres. . . . During its first 50 years, the JNF directed its efforts to developing the land, planting over 220 million trees. (Mel Salberg, "The Jewish National Fund")

4.

Every sixpence collected in the blue and white box of the Jewish National Fund merited another leaf. When the tree was throttled with foliage the whole box was sent off, and a sapling, we were promised, would be dug into the Galilean soil, with the name of our class stapled to one of its green twigs. All over London, paper trees burst into leaf to the sound of jingling sixpences, and the forests of Zion thickened in happy response. (Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 1995)

5.

The world of nature, which till then had been a dead and silent thing to me, opened and became alive and took me in. Neither the house nor the tent was my home, but the wild field and the stony hill. I found company in the flowers and rocks, in the trees and birds. . . . I began to feel the life every plant and tree. Oh darling brother Dov, it's a marvelous thing to feel oneself poured into nature, part of that firm harmony. It's good to live with the sun and moon, with the trees and flowers. (Letter of Rahel Zisle-Levkovich, in *The Plough Woman: Records of the Pioneer Women of Palestine*)

6.

We are engaged in a creative endeavor the like of which is not to be found in the whole history of mankind: the rebirth and rehabilitation of a people that has been uprooted and scattered to the winds. The center of our national work, the heart of our people, is here, in Palestine. Here something is beginning to flower which has greater human significance and far wider ramifications than our history-makers envisage, but it is growing in every dimension deep within, like a tree growing out of its own seed. Here, in Palestine, is the force attracting all the scattered cells of the people to unite into one living national organism. The more life in this seed, the greater its power of attraction. . . . We seek the rebirth of our national self, the manifestation of our loftiest spirit, and for that we must give our all. (A.D. Gordon, "Our Tasks Ahead," 1920)



7.

I stayed on at Petach Tikva. I loved the citrus groves whose soil I watered with my sweat. I planted saplings and saw them grow to maturity. I felt that I had played a part in their growth and was happy. I loved the almond plantations, where I worked sometimes, uprooting couch grass and harvesting the nuts; and the sandy paths of the vineyards. To work, and work hard, became a matter of great national economic importance for us. It was a way of expressing our Zionism. (Shmuel Dayan, *Pioneers in Israel*, 1961)

8.

My father was a Zionist. A self educated man who spoke five or six languages, he was born in Poland and lived in London before coming to America. In 1919, he worked directly with Chaim Weitzman at the Second Zionist Congress. It was always around the house. We sent money to plant trees in Palestine by dropping coins into the Jewish National Fund blue box." (quoted in Myrna Katz and Barry Frommer, *Zionism Yesterday*)

9.

From the age of about 12 on, I went out with the Jewish National Fund boxes into the Brooklyn subways to collect money for Israel. It seemed the riders on the West End line which ran from Borough Park didn't give much. The best subway was the Brighton Beach Line. Somehow Jews gave more money there. The technique was to get on a train with a box in each hand and stand in front of the doors. As soon as they closed, I would shout, "Open the doors!" Everyone would look up -- at which point I'd continue: "Open the doors of Israel to new immigrants!" It was a great attention getter. (quoted in Myrna Katz Frommer and Barry Frommer, *Zionism Yesterday*)

10.

My older brother had an old broken down car that he used to transport the JNF blue boxes from our local branch to the main office. One day he parked his car in a No Parking zone to deliver the money and got a parking ticket. The price of the ticket could have broken the back of the organization. Besides that my brother was very headstrong; fighting that ticket was a matter of principle. At the traffic court, everyone was "guilty, guilty," no matter what they said. When it was his turn, my brother said, "Well, I had these boxes to deliver and so I had to park." "What kind of boxes were they?" asked the judge. "Those were JNF boxes," my brother answered. "It's a good cause." "Not guilty!" said the judge. (Yitz Greenberg)



11.

Our settlers do not come here as do the colonists from the Occident to have natives do their work for them; they themselves set their shoulders to the plow and they spend their strength and their blood to make the land fruitful. But it is not only for ourselves that we desire its fertility. The Jewish farmers have begun to teach their brothers, the Arab farmers, to cultivate the land more intensively; we desire to teach them further: together with them we want to cultivate the land —to “serve it,” as the Hebrew has it. The more fertile this soil becomes, the more space there will be for us and for them. We have no desire to dispossess them: we want to live with them. (Martin Buber, *An Open Letter to Mahatma Gandhi* (1939))

12.

So what was the creed we were taught in Sunday school? It was not about God. It was about the Jews. A people who had given wonderful gifts to the world and whom the world had treated cruelly. A people who were persecuted. A people who had survived and triumphed. Despite the holocaust, we were not a nation of victims. No: there was Israel, a modern Jewish homeland, a beacon to the world. A shiny new state, with up-to-date people like us, Liberals, like us. Bearers of democracy and civilization, making the desert bloom. Israel was both our own cause, a Jewish cause, and a moral cause, a universal cause. A land without people for a people without land. (from Michael Marqusee, *If I Am Not For Myself*, 2009)

We honor the yearning for wholeness of all who planted trees to mark every birth, *b’nai mitzvah* and memorial for so many decades. We drink water even as we recall the thirst of Jews throughout history for safety and freedom. To acknowledge the steadfast strength of our ancestors who drew sustenance across the generations from the dream of redemption and homeland, we eat olives and taste the fruits of trees. And we honor the memory of those who dropped pennies into Blue Boxes, even as we gather tonight to ask new questions and seek new answers.

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת עֵין הַחַיִּים בּוֹרֵי פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

N’vareykh et eyn hakhayim, borei p’ri ha-eytz.

Let us bless the Source of Life that creates the fruit of the tree.

Let us be nourished by our convictions.



Sing:

Zum Gali Gali

Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,
Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,

Hechalutz lema'an avodah
avodah lema'an hechalutz
Hechalutz lema'an avodah
avodah lema'an hechalutz

Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,
Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,

Hechalutz lema'an avodah
avodah lema'an hechalutz
Hashalom lema'an ha'amin
Ha'amin lema'an hashalom

Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,
Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali.

Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,
Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,

Pioneers all work as one
Work as one all pioneers
Pioneers all work as one
Work as one all pioneers

Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,
Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,

Pioneers all work as one
Work as one all pioneers
Peace shall be for all the world
All the world shall be for peace

Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,
Zum, gali-gali-gali, Zum gali-gali,

The Fruit

We now know that the founding of Israel, and all the planting of trees before and after its founding, had terrible consequences for Palestinians and for the land itself. We know the land was not empty, nor was it barren desert, wasted or in need of redemption. And we know that the actual history of the land, and of the consequences of the Zionist dream, have not been part of the observance of Tu Bishvat or the story of the joyous tree planting in the Zionist movement. But in this seder, here tonight, we break this silence to reveal many more faces of a complicated and painful story.

1.

"We abroad are used to believing that *Eretz Israel* is now almost totally desolate, a desert that is not sowed, and that anyone who wishes to purchase land there may come and purchase as much as he desires. But in truth this is not the case. Throughout the country it is difficult to find fields that are not sowed. Only sand dunes and stony mountains that are not fit to grow anything but fruit trees -- and this only after hard labor and great expense of clearing and reclamation -- only these are not cultivated." (Ahad Ha-Am (Asher Ginzberg), 1891)

2.

Amongst ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country. After the Arabs are transferred, the country will be wide open for us; with the Arabs staying the country will remain narrow and restricted. . . . There are large Arab villages crowded in population and surrounded by cultivated land growing olives, grapes, figs, sesame, and maize fields. Would we be able to maintain scattered settlements among these existing villages that will always be larger than ours? And is there any possibility of buying their land? And once again, I hear the voice inside me: *evacuate this country*. (Yosef Weitz, director of Land Settlement for the Jewish National Fund, 1941, emphasis in original)

3.

Once there was an Arab village here. The clouds of Sasa floated high over other people one year ago. The fields we tend today were tended by others – one year ago. The men worked their plots and tended their flocks while women busied themselves baking their bread. The cries and tears of children of others were heard in Sasa one year ago. And when we came the desolation of their lives cried to us through the ruins they left behind. Cried to us and reached our hearts, colored our everyday lives . . . It isn't difficult to imagine how life must have been. Here a slipper, there a mirror, here a sack of grain, there a family portrait, a child's toy. . . What gives us the right to reap the fruits of trees we have not planted, to take shelter in houses we have not built On what moral grounds shall we stand when we take ourselves to court? (Passover letter from a resident of Kibbutz Sasa in the Northern Galilee, Spring 1949)

4.

Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of these Arab villages, and I don't blame you, because these geography books no longer exist. Not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either. Nahalal arose in the place of Mahlul, Gvat in the place of Jibta, Sarid in the place of Haneifa, and Kfar-yehoshua in the place of Tel-shaman. There is not one single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population. (Moshe Dayan, *Ha'aretz*, April 4, 1969).

5.

In the village of Katannah, for example, the land was divided by the Green Line in 1949, and many olive trees belonging to villagers that were located on the Israeli side of the boundary were sold to a nearby kibbutz. After 1967, the villagers once again had access to their trees, and gradually they reestablished their use of the orchards. Realizing that Ottoman law would substantiate ownership claims if the practice persisted, the Israeli government uprooted over three thousand trees from Katannah and transplanted them to various sites around Israel. (Shaul Cohen, "A Tree for a Tree: The Aggressive Nature of Planting," 1999)



6.

The JNF was planting pine forests in areas declared as "state land." These planting programs were undertaken to prevent Palestinian planting, and to maintain land reserves for new settlements or for the future expansion of existing ones. Pine trees were chosen both because of their fast growth and because of the acidic deposit of pine needles they leave on the ground, which eradicates most smaller plants and undergrowth between the trees. (Eyal Weitzman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, 2007)

7.

The act of tree planting, so cherished by American Jews as a way of supporting Israeli and Jewish aspirations for nurture and stability, has been perverted. Today on the West Bank, the presence of olive trees is often deemed illegal. Palestinian orchards, as well as newly planted trees, are being uprooted and transplanted onto Israeli soil. Why? If the land remains uncultivated for three years, the government can claim it. If the land sports no house it too can be claimed; and if there is a house, it may be bulldozed. Land on the West Bank is slowly being dragged from Palestinian control. Slowly, slowly push "them" back and back until the land is empty – as some have pretended it was from the start. Need I say that this contradicts what I have always been taught were Jewish values: the sense of justice, of legal order, of respect for other human beings, the necessity for culture, roots, and self-determination? (Irena Klepfisz, *Yom Hashoah, Yom Yerushalayim*, 1989)

8.

In the parks created by the Jewish National Fund you will often see the ruins of a house, a fortress, orchards, cactuses, and so on. There are also many fig and almond trees. Most Israelis think of these as 'wild' figs or 'wild' almonds. But these trees were planted by human hands. Wherever almond and fig trees, olive groves or clusters of cactuses are found today, there once stood a Palestinian village. These trees are all that remain. (adapted from Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 2006)

9.

JNF parks have been established on the lands of eighty-six destroyed villages. These forestation programs have been held up as an inspiring example of sound environmental management, with the JNF boasting that it has planted 240 million trees in Israel and cares for 100,000 acres of 'natural woodlands.' What is not mentioned is that the tree of choice has been the fast-growing European pine, useful for rapidly concealing the rubble of Palestinian homes underneath the forest's evergreen canopy, and that in the process the JNF has decimated indigenous species to make way for the pine. As the Israeli scholar Uri Davis notes of the forestation activity: "It is not charitable, as the JNF would have you believe. It is a war crime. The forests of the Jewish National Fund are there to veil this criminality." (Jonathan Cook, *Disappearing Palestine*, 2008)

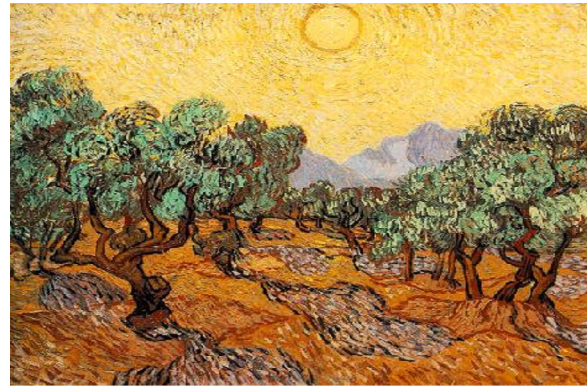
10.

On his deathbed, in Jerusalem, a survivor of seven camps and the death-march of Hungarian Jews confessed to his daughter that he had taken part in the military capture of three villages, and in the deportation of the villagers, and had been a witness to the razing of what houses were left of those villages. He made his daughter swear never to tell a soul, and she promised to keep his secret. Driving down the narrow roads off the highway to Tel Aviv, the daughter looked at the grounds that used to belong to those villages, and hated the forest of pines, funded by our rich supporters in Canada and named, understandably, after them. (Oz Shelach, *"One After the Other,"* 2003)



11.

Grandma worked all day caring for the land she lived on and also for the orchards she'd adopted. She said she missed her family's orchards in Kharrouba, the village from which she, Grandpa Hammoudeh, Mother, and her siblings had fled, along with all the other villagers, in the war of 1948. But Grandma still kept the key to her old house there and hung it on the wall where she could see it every day. Grandma loved the trees with all her heart.



"They are part of my family," she assured me. Apple, pear, fig, sumac, olive, apricot, almond, and peach trees stood within yards of her door and seemed healthy and well cared for. "Are these animals or fruits?" I would ask her, rubbing my skin against the fur of peaches. "Neither," she would reply with a laugh. "They are children." (Ibtisam Barakat, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*, 2007)

12.

The tree is the source of the problem. Here, the tree is not only a symbol of the Arab's occupation of the land, but it is also the central means through which they carry out this occupation.... It's not like the tree is the enemy's property, in which case the Bible tells you not to uproot it because it has nothing to do with the fight. Here it has everything to do with it. The tree is the enemy soldier. (David Kishik-Cohen, Chief Inspector of Israel's Civil Administration in the West Bank, 2006)

13.

As we approached the woman sitting by the 102 olive trees that the settlers cut the night before, I saw the tears rolling down her face as she stared ahead. We were coming to pay our respects: it was a funeral, a graveyard of the 30-year-old trees that were slaughtered. (Christy Bischoff, Christian peace activist, *Aljazeera*, January 12, 2006)

14.

Today was less serene. As we moved west with the harvest, we came closer to the bulldozers plowing through Deir Istiya's groves. The bulldozers are leveling olive groves for the expansion of nearby Revava settlement. My friends from Deir Istiya fear their land will be next. While we were harvesting a Revava settler with an M-16 semiautomatic weapon approached us and asked the Palestinians for their identification papers. The farmers obliged. The farmer knew it was easier and safer to comply rather than refuse and risk facing violence from settlers or soldiers. (Anna Baltzer, *Witness in Palestine: A Jewish American Woman in the Occupied Territories*, 2007)

15.

We get pine tree saplings from the JNF and from the Jewish Agency every Tu Bishvat, and we plant them on state land to prevent their seizure by aliens. These pines cost nothing, and after ten years there is an entire forest there. ... We uproot their trees because so long as Arab trees are on the land, it would be reasonably possible for them to question our possession of this land. (Doron Nir-Tsvi, Israeli lawyer and West Bank settler, 2006)

16.

We made the mountains evergreen -- like Switzerland, we liked to say. All along the road to Jerusalem we planted over the past. We covered slopefuls of terraces with pines. The pining hillsides we dotted with red-tile-roofed houses, but our trees grew sick and stood bare and gray, fell one over the other, dry, and burned for three smoky days. An army officer whose regiment happened to have depopulated several villages along what was to become the forested road to Jerusalem, and who later became a construction contractor in the same region said, in response to the fire, that these trees had done their job, now was the property developers' time. (Oz Shelach, *"The Road to Jerusalem,"* 2003)



17.

Since 1901, the JNF has planted more than 240 million trees, mostly pines, in Israel, a massive enterprise that has fundamentally altered the Israeli/Palestinian landscape. In particular, pines have been planted over the ruins of Palestinian villages in Israel, erasing them from the landscape and also preventing Palestinian refugees from returning to their homes. At the same time, the olive tree has become the quintessential symbol of Palestinian resistance and an emblem of the steadfast Palestinian connection (*sumud*) to the land. (Irus Braverman, *Planted Flags: Trees, Land and Law in Israel/Palestine*, 2009)

18.

Yunes was beneath the olive tree when the sun began to set and the reddish light started to spread across the hills of Galilee. A lone tree, set off a little from the olive grove in the countryside on the fringes of Tashiha. There he could rest and sleep, standing or lying down inside the trunk. There he would organize his thoughts, his plans, his passion, and his body. Then the tree died. He spoke of the tree as he would speak of a woman. He said it died; he didn't say they cut it down. Why do they cut down the olive trees and plant pines and palms in their place? Why do the Israelis hate the tree of sacred light? (Elias Khoury, *Gate of the Sun*, 1998)

19.

Last Friday, in Tawani in the southern Hebron hills, they sabotaged 120 trees; in Burin, south of Nablus, earlier this week, about 50 trees; another hundred or so in Burin on December 24, and 140 trees, again in Burin, on December 14. ... There is something very human about these stumps of olive trees, hundreds upon hundreds of them, their amputated branches reaching skyward as if to ask for help. . . . The IDF has uprooted thousands of olive and fruit trees in order to secure the roads it uses and to increase visibility for soldiers; to build watchtowers, checkpoints and the separation fence; and in order to pave more and more roads and construct security fences around the settlements. In the village of Qafeen alone, 100,000 trees are imprisoned behind the fence, and throughout most of the year their owners are prevented from reaching them. The reason given is "security," of course, but for some reason security always ends up with the effective plundering of more Palestinian land for the benefit of the neighboring settlement, or in order to widen and blur the Green Line and the annexation of the land to Israel. (Amira Haas, *Ha'aretz*, 11 January 2006)

20.

"He who plants barley, Dalia, will never reap wheat. And he who plants hatred can never reap love. We were exiled by force of arms. We were exiled on foot. We were exiled to take the earth as our bed. And the sky as a cover. We were exiled but we left our souls, our hopes, and our childhoods in Palestine. We left our joys and our sorrows. We left them with each lemon fruit, with each olive. We left them in the roses and flowers. We left them in the flowering tree that stands at the entrance of our house in al-Ramla. We left them in the remains of our fathers and ancestors. We left them as witnesses and history." (from Bashir Khairi's 1989 letter to Dalia Landau, quoted in *The Lemon Tree* by Sandy Tolan)



21.

My Tree in Israel (excerpt)

There is blood on my tree,
the tree with my name in Israel.
The tears of tear-gassed crowds water the roots,
and the tears of rage,
and the tears of grief for the dead.
Is this the tree I planted
to bring forth life from the desert?
The broken bones of hands throwing rocks
and the rocks they threw
pile around my tree,
the tree with my name in Israel.

It did not begin like this.
Everyone in my class planted a tree in Israel,
filled out a form and sent a letter with our names.
And now there is blood on my name
on my tree in Israel.

Do not speak to me of self-defense,
of necessity and nations and history....
Do not explain. It may be true
but it doesn't help,
it is not in the same language
in which my tree talks to the wind.

There is blood on my tree
and the smell of blood,
and I want my name to be good again.
I want my good name to grow in Israel
and put out damp new leaves
every spring,
as soft as kisses.

-Julia Vinograd



To remind ourselves of the delicate balance we walk between ourselves and others, between truths in competition, and between justice and mercy, we eat bittersweet tree fruits: oranges, grapefruits, lemons, limes.

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת עֵין הַחַיִּים שֶׁנָּתַן חַן מְקוֹם עַל יוֹשְׁבָיו.
Nevareykh et eyn hakhayim shenatan khen makom al yoshvav.

Let us bless the Source of Life, which inspires people
with a love of the places where they dwell.

Sing:

לֹא יֵשָׁא גּוֹי / Lo Yisa Goy

*Lo yisa goy el goy herev
Lo yilmedu od milkhamah.*

לֹא יֵשָׁא גּוֹי אֶל גּוֹי חֶרֶב
לֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.

And everyone 'neath her vine and fig tree shall live in peace and unafraid,
and into ploughshares beat their swords, nations shall learn war no more



The Harvest

In Jewish tradition, the olive branch has been the very symbol of *shalom*, of wholeness and completeness, as well as a symbol of peace.

The olive tree is also a symbol of Palestinian identity and culture, signifying history, tradition and the centuries-old connection between the people and their land. Olive trees are symbols of prosperity and the continuity of life from generation to generation; their products have been a key source of Palestinian livelihood and a mainstay of the Palestinian economy.

In Occupied Palestine, olive trees have become targets of systematic Israeli military and settler violence. Uprooting olive trees is a tactic regularly employed by the Israeli Army and right-wing religious settlers, with devastating consequences to the Palestinian people. Hundreds of thousands of olive trees have been destroyed to build illegal settlements, construct bypass roads, and establish military bases in the West Bank; the uprooting of olive trees has doubled since Israel started constructing the Segregation Wall. To date, more than two million Palestinian olive trees have been destroyed since 1967: bulldozed, cut, burned. The olive tree has now become a symbol of Palestinian steadfastness – *sumud* – because of its rootedness in the land and its ability to survive against all odds.

Mindful of all that olives have meant in the shared history of Jewish and Palestinian people, we bless and eat olive oil, harvested from ancient history and contemporary struggle. With this oil we experience a small taste of a world to come, in which people will not be separated by false political boundaries or the dictates of governments, but will share freely from the richest parts of themselves.

We will each tear a piece of the bread that we share around this seder table, and we dip our bread into olive oil. We will sprinkle it with zatar, the spice that reminds us of the flavors and aromas of Israel and Palestine. These are the flavors of our shared commitment to peace and to justice.

And we say:

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת עֵין הַחַיִּים הַמוֹצִיָּאָה לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

N'vareykh et eyn hakayim, hamotziyah lechem min ha'aretz.

Let us bless the source of life that brings forth bread from the earth.
Let us taste the fullness of our harvests.

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת עֵין הַחַיִּים בּוֹרֵי פְרֵי הָעֵץ.

N'vareykh et eyn hakhayim, borei p'ri ha-eytz.

Let us bless the Source of Life that creates the fruit of the tree.

Together we imagine the taste of justice and freedom.

1.

We are told this ancient story: Two men were fighting over a piece of land. Each claimed ownership and bolstered his claim with apparent proof. To resolve the dispute, they went to the rabbi. The rabbi listened but couldn't come to a decision. Each one seemed to be right. Finally, the rabbi said, "Since I cannot decide to whom this land belongs, let us ask the land." He put his ear to the ground and after a moment straightened up. "Gentlemen, the land says it belongs to neither of you, but that you belong to it." (Richard H. Schwartz, *Judaism and Global Survival*, 2002)

2.

He had gone to his olive trees. They consoled him, but they also gave him pain. He felt personally related to each of them. He loved their graceful beauty and faithful generosity. The grove was a holy place for him. He was intimately acquainted with each breeze that rustled through the shimmering leaves. Weren't they the children of last summer's winds? ... These olive trees had witnessed the era of the Turkish sultans. They had survived the British Mandate. They remained now, unperturbed and strong, combating time itself with their silent endurance and devotion. Why couldn't he be like them? Why could he not endure steadfastly, as they endured? (Najwa Qu'war Farah, "The Worst of Two Choices: or, The Forsaken Olive Trees" in *Jayyusi*, 1992)

3.

In the JNF forests planted over Palestinian villages, the original flora manages to return in surprising ways. At the site of the village of Mujaydil, former residents visiting nearly sixty years later found that some of the pine trees had literally split in two and now, in the middle of their broken trunks, olive trees had popped up in defiance of the alien flora planted over them fifty-six years ago. (Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 2006)

We too can break through what has been planted in us – myths, denial, an erasing from history – we can choose a different path. Our task now is to engage in the work of repairing the damage done across the land called Israel and Palestine, and to create conditions in which Jews and Palestinians can make new relationships within and between their communities.

The Trees of Reconciliation Seder project began in 2008 and in its first year was responsible for planting more than 3,000 olive trees in Occupied Palestine. The saplings that we plant on contested land in Palestine will, someday, contribute in a material way to the livelihoods of farmers and their families who have suffered as a result of the Israeli Occupation. In the intervening years, they will help stake a claim against government confiscation of "fallow" fields and provide a living connection to the land. We planted as a stopgap against further encroachment and annexation. We planted as an investment in a future of peace with justice. We planted as a symbol of our commitment to t'shuvah — to turning away from the injustices of the past in Palestine and toward a future of mutual recognition and respect.

Even more than the act of planting, though, our ongoing task is to begin the conversation among Jews and among Americans about what the Zionist project has meant for Palestinians and for the land that is called Holy. Our shared holy work is to help revive the fields, and to help start a dialogue about our history in Israel/Palestine and the work we must do to heal and repair. We invite each of you to become part of this work, whether by contributing financially to the planting of olive trees on contested Palestinian land, or by purchasing fair-trade olive oil from Palestinian farmers, or by joining with us in the struggle to speak the truth about what is happening in Israel and Palestine to members of our own communities – Jewish, Christian, Muslim, secular, local, regional, national, global. Whatever actions we choose to take, let us try to remember that even if the Messiah is at the doorstep, it is still up to us to take care of the seedlings we hold in our hands.

Tonight, and each night that people come together to rededicate themselves to the work for peace with justice in Israel/Palestine, is a beginning. To honor this moment, together we pick up a seed, the universal symbol of new beginnings, as together we say the *shehecheyatnu*, the blessing for arriving at a moment when a new understanding has begun to take root and a new direction has become clear.

בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה יְיָ בְּתוֹכֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהֵחַיְתָנוּ וְקִיַּמְתָּנוּ וְהִגִּיעַתָּנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

*B'rucha at Yah, b'tocheynu ruach ha'olam,
shehecheyatnu, v'kiy'matnu, v'higi'atnu lazman hazeh.*

Blessed are you, Yah, who is within us, spirit of the world, who has kept us in life,
sustained us, and helped us to reach this moment.

4.

At a demonstration in the Salfit region, I was given the opportunity to help plant roughly 30 olive trees with the villagers. The olive tree is the eternal icon of Palestinian vitality and resistance. As we marched through the olive groves, now a military service road for the Occupation forces, we carried small saplings. When we arrived at the top of the mountain where we would plant the trees, I was shocked by the devastation the army had caused there. Hundreds of century-old trees been destroyed – their roots exposed and trunks snapped in half. But the villagers had decided to replant. Men, women, and kids, armed with shovels and picks, began digging holes for the new trees. As we burrowed into the earth, clearing rocks and dirtying our hands, I began thinking about how these saplings are actually symbols of Palestinian strength. While youngsters chanted and carried flags, I watched old men and little girls, under the hot sun, pat the ground of new trees hoping they would take root. (Noticeable Changes blog, 2007)

5.

We fulfill our nature when we plant. We degrade it when we uproot. We plant when we live in a manner that reveals the connection between all things. We uproot when we live in a manner that separates and divides. When we see that *adam* is *adamah*, we cease to be separate from our Place. Ceasing to be separate, we cease to war within ourselves. Ceasing to war within ourselves, we cease to war among ourselves. And then we would have no need to stop our planting to greet Messiah. For then we would greet the Messiah in each seedling we plant, in each sapling we water, in each tree we prune and harvest, in each face we meet. (Rami Shapiro, "Re/Membering Nature," in *Trees, Earth, Torah*, edited by Ari Elon, 2003)

*Nodeh l'eyn hakhayim
hazanah et hakol
Al ha'aretz hatovah v'har'khavah
nishmor na, v'hi t'kay'meynu,
unvakeysh mazon l'hasbi'a bo
kol yosh'vey teyveyl.*

נוֹדֶה לְעֵין הַחַיִּים
הַזָּנָה אֶת הַכֹּל
עַל הָאֶרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה וְהַרְחֵבָה
נִשְׁמֹר נָא, וְהִיא תִּקְיָמֵנוּ
וְיִבְקֹשׁ מִזֶּיּוֹן לְהַשְׁבִּיעַ בּוֹ
כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֶל

Let us acknowledge the source of life, source of all nourishment.
May we protect the bountiful earth that it may continue to sustain us,
and let us seek sustenance for all who dwell in the world.

– Marcia Falk

We close our seder with these words -- may they be echoed among the nations:

All land is holy. All people are chosen.



Sing:

עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם / Osah Shalom

Holly Taya Shere

*Osah shalom bimromeyha
hi ta'aseh shalom aleynu*

May She who makes peace
shine peace on all of us

עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמֶיהָ
הִיא תַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ