

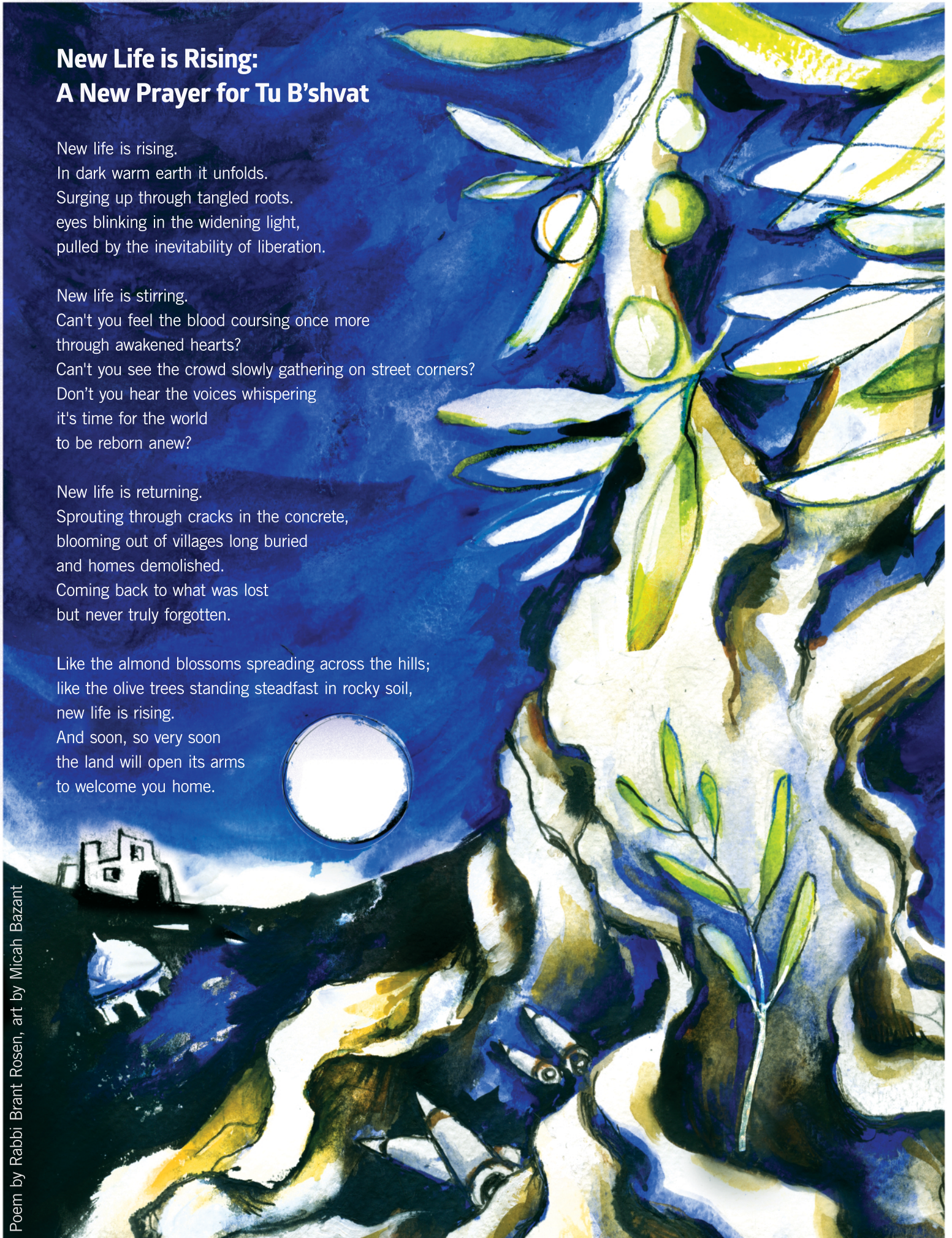
New Life is Rising: A New Prayer for Tu B'shvat

New life is rising.
In dark warm earth it unfolds.
Surging up through tangled roots,
eyes blinking in the widening light,
pulled by the inevitability of liberation.

New life is stirring.
Can't you feel the blood coursing once more
through awakened hearts?
Can't you see the crowd slowly gathering on street corners?
Don't you hear the voices whispering
it's time for the world
to be reborn anew?

New life is returning.
Sprouting through cracks in the concrete,
blooming out of villages long buried
and homes demolished.
Coming back to what was lost
but never truly forgotten.

Like the almond blossoms spreading across the hills;
like the olive trees standing steadfast in rocky soil,
new life is rising.
And soon, so very soon
the land will open its arms
to welcome you home.





New Life is Rising

A Tu B'shvat Haggadah

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Introduction

Welcome to our seder!

On Tu B'shvat we connect with the regenerative power of the natural world by celebrating trees - so central to our experience of creation and so rich in spiritual metaphors.

In its Talmudic origins, Tu B'shvat had a largely legal importance. Referred as the "New Year the Trees" by the Jewish sages, the 15th of the month of Shvat marked the beginning of the agricultural year for the tithing of fruit. Like all Jewish holidays, however, Tu B'shvat took on new layers of significance as it evolved over the centuries. In medieval times, the Jewish mystics celebrated Tu B'shvat with a seder replete with symbolic foods. Invoking a cosmic Tree of Life, the Tu B'shvat seder was viewed by the Kabbalists as a spiritual means by which we could bring the world that much closer to redemption.

With the establishment of the state of Israel, Tu B'shvat was revived as a nationalist festival. During the Zionist settlement of the land, the planting of trees was viewed as integral to Jewish national project. Generations of American Jews still recall how they helped "make the desert bloom" by putting coins in the Jewish National Fund's familiar blue and white collection cans.

We must acknowledge, however, that this so-called "greening of the desert" came at a tragic human cost. In many cases, the JNF planted their forests - made largely of non-native pine trees - on top of ethnically cleansed Palestinian villages in order to clear the way for the establishment of a Jewish state. The organization Zochrot estimates that more than two-thirds of the JNF's forests and sites are located on the ruins of Palestinian villages demolished by Israel.

Our seder seeks to face this tragic reality openly - and to reclaim the festival of Tu B'shvat in its original spirit: as a festival that celebrates the liberatory power of creation. One of the most elemental lessons we can learn from the natural world is that rebirth and liberation are not only possible but *inevitable*. For those engaged in the the work of social justice, this lesson has powerful significance indeed.

Thus, everything we will do in our seder today - from the foods we eat, to the prayers we pray, the songs we sing and the questions we ask - will acknowledge this central teaching: that even in the coldest seasons, we will affirm the power of renewal. Though there will be days when all seems dormant in our lives and our world, we yet proclaim: *new life is rising!*

As we are blessed to reach this very sacred season together, let us say the blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, shehechianu, ve'kimanu, ve'higianu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Holy One, source of all creation, you have given us life, you have sustained us and you have brought us all to this sacred time.

We sing together:

הִנֵּה מָה-טוֹב וּמָה-נְעִים שֶׁבֶת כּוֹלֵנוּ גַם יַחַד.

Hinei mah tov u'mah na'im shevet kulanu gam yachad.

(How good and wonderful it is for all of us to be together in community!)

The First Fruit

During the winter season we cover ourselves with additional clothing, just as the earth is insulated by snow. The first fruits we eat thus symbolize the winter, with hard shells that protect their vulnerable insides from forces that can be inhospitable to life itself.

For those who are engaged in the work of spiritual and political transformation, these foods inspire us to ask the following questions:

- *What are the ways that these necessary outer shells keep us from truly connecting, empathizing and finding common cause with others?*
- *How can we find the security we seek without insulating and isolating ourselves from the world around us?*

We eat fruit or nuts with an outer covering or shell and say together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵי פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, borey peri ha'eytz.

Blessed are you, Holy One, source of all creation, creator of the fruit of the tree.

The First Cup

We now prepare the to drink the first cup of juice or wine. It is wholly white, representing a season when the trees are bare and much of the ground in the northern hemisphere is covered with snow. Yet even during the winter months, we acknowledge the life force that courses underground and throughout creation. As we drink this first cup, we give thanks for the unseen power of rebirth, particularly when the world can feel so hard and cold around us.

We lift the first cup and say together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵי פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, borey peri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Holy One, source of all creation, creator of the fruit of the vine.

The Second Fruit

We now eat fruit that have a hard pit inside. As we eat these fruits we connect with the rebirth of springtime. We no longer have the need to clothe ourselves in protective shells and open ourselves to the warm world around us. At the same time, the inner stone of the fruit reminds us that even as we let down our defenses, we still carry within our souls the hard pit of left-over pain and trauma from past struggles.

The foods we are about to eat thus inspire us to ask:

- *What are the hidden wounds, the hard inner resentments that keep us from experiencing true liberation as individuals, communities and nations?*

- *How can transform these hard inner pits into seeds that might yet bear productive fruit, pointing us toward a more hopeful future?*

We eat fruit with a hard inner pit and say together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵי פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, borey peri ha'eytz.

Blessed are you, Holy One, source of all creation, creator of the fruit of the tree.

The Second Cup

We now add a dash of red to our white wine or juice. Just like the tentative spring buds that emerge from the previously hard ground, we acknowledge the creative power that invites us to blossom into our full potential.

We lift the second cup and say together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵי פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, borey peri hagafen.

Blessed are you, source of all creation, creator of the fruit of the vine.

We sing together:

עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחְזִיקִים בָּהּ, וְתִמְכֶּהָ מֵאֲשָׁר. דֶּרֶכֶיהָ דְּרָכֵי נֹעַם, וְכָל
נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שָׁלוֹם.

*Eytz chayim hi lamachazikim ba, vetomcheha me'ushar. Deracheha darchei noam,
ve'chol netivoteha shalom.*

(It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it and all who uphold it find happiness. Its ways are ways of contentment and all its paths are peace.)

The Third Fruit

We now eat fruit that can be wholly eaten, inside and out. These foods symbolize the moments of redemption and completion, in which no inner or outer barriers keep of from the realization of our dreams. We have made it through the cold hard winter, experienced the promise of springtime rebirth - and now we reap the harvest of our hard work and forbearance.

As we eat these foods, we are inspired to ask the following questions:

- *What are the specific moments of social change that inspire and keep you going?*
- *Is any moment of victory truly complete? What must we do to ensure that these "moments of redemption" will continue to bear fruit for future generations?*

We eat fruit that can be consumed completely and say together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵי פְרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, borey peri ha'eytz.

Blessed are you, Holy One, source of all creation, creator of the fruit of the tree.

The Third Cup

We pour wine or juice that is red, with just a touch of white. The increased colors in our cup reflect the warmth and satisfaction of a bountiful harvest. The remaining white is but a vestige of cold season now long past - but it is also a reminder of the winters that inevitably remain ahead. For now, however, let us raise our cups and celebrate the seasons of redemption we experience in our lives and our world.

We lift the third cup and say together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵי פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, borey peri hagafen.

Blessed are you, holy one, source of all creation, creator of the fruit of the vine.

The Fourth Cup

What does it mean to pray for the coming of a messianic age? We might well understand this yearning as the dream of a world bound together in common purpose. A dream of peoples living together as one in dignity and respect. A dream of a world where no people wields its power oppressively over another. A dream in which God's green earth is viewed as a gift to be respected and cherished, not possessed or plundered.

Because this day is still but a dream, our fourth and final category is beyond representation by any fruit. However, we now fill our cups with fully red juice or wine. This is the cup of plenitude: in which we affirm a day when God's bounty is finally made available to all.

As we raise the cup of redemption, let us commit to bringing our communities and our world that much closer to this ideal. Just as the natural world contains unseen powers of rebirth and liberation - so too do *we* have the potential to make our world whole again. May this seder inspire us to do what we must to make this day a reality.

We lift the final cup and say together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵי פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, borey peri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Holy One, source of all creation, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Closing Prayer

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Closing Niggun