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Tu B'Shevat 5782: A Celebration

Sunday, January 16, 2022, 7:30 p.m. EST

Please enjoy this Tu B'Shevat Seder resource from MERCALZ and the Cantors Assembly

Introduction: The Tu B'Shevat Song, by Debbie Friedman

In ancient Israel, Tu B'Shevat was the day when farmers offered the first fruits of their trees as a tithe to the Temple.

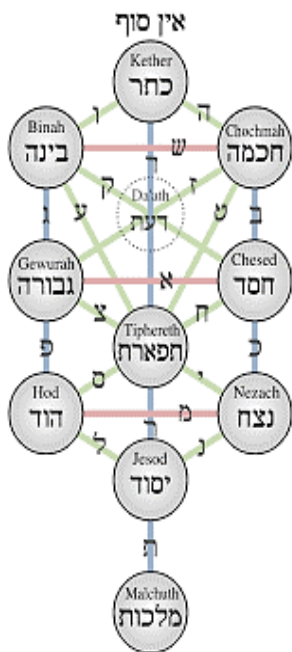
אַרְבָּעָה רְאִשֵׁי שָׁנִים הֵם. בְּאֶחָד בְּנִיסָן רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְמַלְכִים וְלְרִגְלִים. בְּאֶחָד בְּאֵלוּל רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְמַעֲשֵׂר בְּהֵמָה. רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר וְרַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן אוֹמְרִים, בְּאֶחָד בְּתִשְׁרִי. בְּאֶחָד בְּתִשְׁרִי רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְשָׁנִים וְלְשִׁמְטִין וְלִיּוֹבְלוֹת, לְנִטְעָה וְלִירִקוֹת. בְּאֶחָד בְּשֶׁבֶט, רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְאֵילָן, כְּדַבְּרֵי בֵּית שְׁמַאי. בֵּית הַלֵּל אוֹמְרִים, בְּחֶמְשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ:

There are four new years: The first of Nisan is the new year for kings and for festivals. The first of Elul is the new year for the tithe of beasts. Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say this is the first of Tishri. The first of Tishri is the new year for years, for shemittah and jubilee years, for planting and for [the tithe of] vegetables. The first of Shevat is the new year for trees, according to the words of Bet Shammai. Bet Hillel says: on the fifteenth of that month. (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1)

In the sixteenth century, Kabbalists in Tzfat connected the new year to the Tree of Life and the tree shape they saw in the Sefirot [emanations] through which God is revealed. They believed that through the Tu B'Shevat seder, we can draw nearer to God and strengthen the interconnectedness of the Sefirot.

Following the destruction the Crusades inflicted on the Jewish population of Israel, the tradition of celebrating Tu B'Shevat disappeared in Eretz Yisrael, remaining as a vestige in Eastern Europe through the custom of eating fruit. Over time, the practice expanded and, adopted by the modern Zionist movement, the Tu B'Shvat seder evolved into an expression of appreciation for and connection to Eretz Yisrael. As an agricultural holiday, it was also a natural ritual for ecologically minded Jews who saw the focus as the mitzvah of Yishuv HaOlam, the commandment to sustain our world.

The seder is a celebration of the senses. We see the colours of the wine as it changes and of the fruit. We smell their scents. We touch and we taste, and we hear the words of our prayers and of the songs we sing. Modelled after Pesach, Tu B'Shevat seders centre on four cups of wine or grape juice. Additionally, we eat different types of fruit, corresponding to types of people and to Kabbalistic spiritual realms:



- Some people are like fruits that are inedible outside and edible inside. These people are difficult to get to know, but you are rewarded once you peel away the top layer.
- Others are like fruits that are edible on the outside but have an inedible pit. It seems as if you get to know them quickly, but you will never fully know them.
- And wholly edible fruits are like the people with whom you form quick and lasting friendships.

We do not discard fruit because a part is inedible. Similarly, all kinds of people are worth knowing.

The First Cup

The first cup is white wine or grape juice, symbolizing winter's end. The light colour represents potential. As the white wine will turn to red, the world is pregnant, turning from pale winter to the promise of green spring. We pray this promise will be fulfilled.

Raise the cup in your right hand to recite Kiddush over the wine:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן

Barukh Atta Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהֶחַיֵּנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam shehecheyanu vekiymanu vehigi'anu lazman hazeh

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and allowed us to reach this moment in time

The first fruits we eat tonight are fruits with inedible peels. These symbolize Asiah [action]. Just as we eat the fruit and discard the shell, we hope to be able to accept good actions and look past the bad in life. Examples of this kind of fruit are [pomegranates*](#), almonds and other nuts, and citrus. (*[One of the seven species found in the Land of Israel.](#)) The hard shell symbolizes the protection that the earth gives us and reminds us to nourish the strength and healing power of our own bodies.

Pick up a piece of fruit and recite the blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-etz

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree

כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נַחֲלֵי טוֹב עֵינַת וּתְהַלֵּאת יִצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָר: אֶרֶץ חֹטָה וְשַׁעֲרָה וְגִפְן וְתַאֲנָה וְרַחֵן אֶרֶץ-זֵית שֶׁמֶן וְדָבָשׁ: אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְּמַסְכַּנֶּת תֵּאֱכַל-בָּהּ לֶחֶם לֹא-תִחַסֵּר כָּל בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבִיָּהּ בְּרִזָּל וּמִהַרְרֵיהָ תִחַצֵּב נְחֹשֶׁת: וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשִׂבַּעְתָּ וּבִרְכַבְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ עַל-הָאֶרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לָךְ:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of [grape] vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and [date] honey; a land where you may eat food without scarceness, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. (D'varim 8:7-10)

The Poem of the Grasses, by Naomi Shemer | שירת העשבים

*Da lekha, shekol ro'eih ve ro'eih yeish lo nigun
meyuchad mishelo. Da lekha, shekol eisev va'eisev yeish
lo shirah meyuchedet mishelo.*

*Umishirat ha'asavim na'aseh nigun shel ro'eih. Kamah
yafeh, kama yafeh vena'eih kesheshom'im hashirah
shelahem. Tov me'od lehitpaleil beineihem uvesimchah
la'avod et Hasheim.*

*Umishirat ha'asavim mitmalei haleiv, umishtoekik.
Ukhshehaleiv, min hashirah mitmalei umishtoekik el
erets yisra'eil. Or gadol azay nimshakh veholeikh
mikdushatah shel ha'arets alav.*

Umishirat ha'asavim, na'aseh nigun shel haleiv.

דע לך שכל רועה ורועה יש לו נגון
מיוחד משלו. דע לך שכל עשב
ועשב יש לו שירה מיוחדת משלו

ומשירת העשבים נעשה נגון של רועה
כמה יפה כמה יפה ונאה קנשומועים
השירה שלהם. טוב מאד להתפלל
ביניהם וכשמחה לעבד את ה'.

ומשירת העשבים מתמלא הלב ומשתוקק.
וכשהלב מן השירה מתמלא ומשתוקק
אל ארץ ישראל אור גדול אזי נמשך
והולך מקדושתה של הארץ עליו.

ומשירת העשבים נעשה נגון של הלב.

Know that each and every shepherd has his own tune. Know that each and every grass has its own poem.

And from the poem of the grasses, a tune of a shepherd is made. How beautiful, how beautiful and pleasant to hear their poem. It's very good to pray among them and to serve the Lord in joy.

And from the poem of the grasses, the heart is filled and yearns. And when the poem causes the heart to fill and to yearn to the Land of Israel a great light is drawn and goes from the Land's holiness upon it.

And from the poem of the grasses, a tune of the heart is made.



The Second Cup

The second cup of wine or grape juice is mostly white, with a little red mixed in, representing potential turning to promise as spring shows us signs of the summer bounty to come. It symbolizes the passing of the seasons and the mystical concept of formation and birth.

כִּי-הִנֵּה הַסֵּתוֹ, עָבַר; הַגֶּשֶׁם, חָלַף הַלֶּף לוֹ. הַנְּצַנִּים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ, עֵת הַזְמִיר הִגִּיעַ; וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר, נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרְצֵנוּ. הַתְּאֵנָה חִנְטָה פִּגְיָה, וְהַגָּפְנִים סִמְדָר נִתְנוּ רִיחַ; קוֹמִי לְכִי (לָךְ) רַעֲיָתִי יַפְתִּי, וְלְכִי-לָךְ

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. (Shir HaShirim 2:11-13)

Raise your cup and recite the blessing over the wine:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ סֵלָךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגָּפֶן

Barukh Atta Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam borei peri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine

We now eat fruit from the second category. These fruits are soft on the outside, with a hard pit, symbolizing the kabbalistic world of Yetzirah [Formation]. They symbolize the life-sustaining power emanating from the earth, as a reminder of the spiritual and emotional strength that is within each of us. These fruits include [olives*](#), [dates*](#), stone fruits, or persimmons.

Ordinarily, we eat whatever fruit is in season. Today, we specifically eat fruit grown in Israel. The original purpose of Tu B'Shvat was to mark our tithes to the Temple. Today it marks our connection to our historic land and its agricultural cycle, not marking the seasons where we live, but the seasons in Israel, where buds are appearing on trees. We acknowledge that we affect and are affected by the whole world and not only the immediate space in which we live.



Choose a piece of fruit and recite the blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-etz

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree

Too often we take the environment for granted, but today we focus on the mitzvah of Yishuv HaOlam, our stewardship of the earth. 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 him." Torah commands us to leave fruit trees standing when we attack a city in wartime. We are commanded to observe the mitzvah of peah, of leaving the corners of fields unharvested, so that the poor may glean from the fields.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, בְּעִיר; וּבְרוּךְ אַתָּה, בְּשָׂדֶה. בְּרוּךְ פְּרֵי-בִטְנֶךָ וּפְרֵי אֲדָמָתְךָ, וּפְרֵי בְהֵמָתְךָ--שֹׁמֵר אֲלֹפִיךָ, וְעֹשֶׂתְרוֹת צֶאֱנָה. בְּרוּךְ טִנְאֶךָ, וּמִשְׁאֲרֵיךָ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, כְּבֹאֶךָ; וּבְרוּךְ אַתָּה, כְּצֵאתְךָ.

You will be blessed in the city, and blessed in the field. The fruit of your body will be blessed, the fruit of your land and of your cattle, the increase of your livestock, and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading- trough. Blessed may you be when you come in, and blessed when you go out. (D'varim 28:3-6)

יעלז שדי

אז ירננו כל עצי יער (text from Psalm 96) | **music by Nava Tehila**

*Ya'aloz Sadai v'khol asher bo
Az y'ra'nu kol a'tzei ya'ar*

יעלז שדי וכל אשר בו
אז ירננו כל עצי יער

Let the field be joyful and everything in it; then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy.



The Third Cup

This cup is mostly red with a little white mixed in. It too symbolizes the change of seasons and the mystical concept of Beriah [creation]. In Israel, the ground has warmed to allow seeds to take root. Plants have started to grow. Even in North America, if you look closely, you can find the beginnings of buds on trees. **This time we eat the whole fruit, even the seeds.** Potential has turned into reality. The now is important, but we also acknowledge potential for the future. Here are [grapes*](#), [figs*](#), carob, and berries. Torah is compared to fruit in this category. Just as every part is edible, every part of the Torah is good to study and learn.

Raise the cup in your right hand and recite together the blessing over the wine:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ סֹלֵךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגָּפֶן

Barukh Atta Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree

Choose the fruit and recite the appropriate blessing:

Over tree fruit or grapes ...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ סֹלֵךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָעֵץ

Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-etz

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree

... Or over berries

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ סֹלֵךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָאֲדָמָה

Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam borei p'ri ha-adamah

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the earth



וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם, אֱלֹהִים, וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ, וּכְבִּשְׁתֶּהּ; וַיְרֹדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם, וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּבְכָל-חַיָּה, הַרְמִשָּׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, הִנֵּה נֹתְתִי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ, וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְרִי-עֵץ, זֶרַע זֶרַע: לָכֶם יִהְיֶה, לְאֹכְלָהּ. וְלִכָּל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכָּל רֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲנֹשֶׁר-בּוֹ נֹפֵשׁ חַיָּה, אֶת-כָּל-יֵרֶק עֵשֶׂב, לְאֹכְלָהּ; וַיְהִי-כֵן. וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד; וַיְהִי-עֶרְבַּ וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר, יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי.

And God created the human in God's own image, in the image of the Divine, God created him; male and female created God created them. And God blessed them; and God said unto them: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and care for it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.' And God said: 'Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed--to you it shall be for food; and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for food.' And it was so. And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The Human is a Tree of the Field, by Shalom Chanoch | עץ השדה

Ki ha'adam - etz hasadeh, k'mo ha'adam gam ha'etz tzome'ach; k'mo ha'etz, ha'adam nigd'a, Va'ani lo yode'a efo hayiti ve'efo ehyeh, k'mo etz hasadeh

כי האדם עץ השדה כמו האדם גם העץ צומח כמו
העץ האדם נגדע ואני לא יודע איפה הייתי ואיפה
אהיה כמו עץ השדה

Ki ha'adam - etz hasadeh, k'mo ha'etz hu sho'ef lemalah; k'mo ha'adam, hu nisraf ba'esh, va'ani lo yode'a efo hayiti ve'efo ehyeh, k'mo etz hasadeh

כי האדם עץ השדה כמו העץ הוא שואף למעלה כמו
האדם הוא נשרף באש ואני לא יודע איפה הייתי ואיפה
אהיה כמו עץ השדה

Ahavi, vegam saneti, ta'amti mizeh umizeh; kavru oti bechelah shel afar, umar li - mar li bapeh, k'mo etz hasadeh, k'mo etz hasadeh!

אהבתי וגם שנאתי טעמתי מזה ומזה קברו אותי
בחלקה של עפר ומר לי, מר לי בפה כמו עץ השדה.
כמו עץ השדה.

Ki ha'adam - etz hasadeh, k'mo ha'etz hu tzame lemayim; k'mo ha'adam, hu nish'ar tzame, va'ani lo yode'a efo hayiti ve'efo ehyeh k'mo etz hasadeh!

כי האדם עץ השדה כמו העץ הוא צמא למים כמו
האדם הוא נשאר צמא ואני לא יודע איפה הייתי ואיפה
אהיה כמו עץ השדה

Ahavi, vegam saneti, ta'amti mizeh umizeh; kavru oti bechelah shel afar, umar li - mar li bapeh, k'mo etz hasadeh, k'mo etz hasadeh!

אהבתי וגם שנאתי טעמתי מזה ומזה קברו אותי
בחלקה של עפר ומר לי, מר לי בפה כמו עץ השדה.
כמו עץ השדה.

Ki ha'adam - etz hasadeh. Ki ha'adam - etz hasadeh - etz hasadeh.

כי האדם עץ השדה. כי האדם עץ השדה. עץ השדה.

For the human is like the tree in a field, like the human, the tree grows too; like the tree, the human is chopped down, and I don't know where I've been and where I'll be, like the tree in a field!

For the human is like the tree in a field, like the tree he strives upwards; like the human, it burns in fire, and I don't know where I've been and where I'll be, like the tree in a field!

I loved, and I hated too, I tasted this and that; I was buried in a plot of dust, and I feel sour - sour in my mouth, like the tree in a field! (x2)

For the human is like the tree in a field, like the tree he's thirsty for water; like the human, it stays thirsty, and I don't know where I've been and where I'll be, like the tree in a field!



The Fourth Cup

This cup is all red, symbolizing summer. The trees are in full bloom and filled with fruit. With this cup we look to Atzilut [Emation of pure Godliness]. This cannot be represented by physical food. We acknowledge God's love, mercy, wisdom, and other attributes which we perceive with our hearts rather than our senses.

Raise your cup and recite together the blessing over the wine:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ סֵלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן

Barukh Atta Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

As we conclude, we remember that Tu B'Shevat marks the turning point between the rainy season and the beginning of spring.

It was told that Honi Hama'agal was walking along, and saw an old man planting a carob tree. Knowing 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 it's fruits?" The man answered: "I will not see this tree full grown, but my children will and their children will. As trees were planted for me, I plant this tree for them."

Every year we celebrate the same cycle of holy days, but it is not the same. We grow and develop many new insights. May we be blessed to gather next year, to seek knowledge in our texts, our traditions, and our world, and to nourish her and be nourished by her fruits. We remember our obligations as stewards of the land, and use this day as a reminder of our connection and commitments to the land of Israel, the modern state of Israel, and to each other.

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם!

L'shanah haba'ah Birushalayim!

Next year in Jerusalem!

Note: If your Tu B'Shevat seder is held as part of a greater meal with bread, Birkat Hamazon should be recited. Otherwise, recite Bracha Achrona, making the proper insertions for any fruits from Israel.



הורה ממטרה

music by Moshe Vilensky, text by Yechiel Mohar

*Ron kiluach batzinor tzinorot - orkei-hanegev zeh darko
shel hamizmor min haberez el haregev ya'alu meimei-
t'hom. Masheva omeret lechem!*

הן קילוח בצינור, צינורות" עורקי הנגב, זה דרכו של
המזמור" מן הברז אל הרגב יעלו מימי תהום. משאבה
אומרת לחם!

Negev, negev, ma miyom? Negev, mamterot alecha!

נגב, נגב, מה מיום? נגב, ממטרות עליך!

*Chorus: Sovi, sovi, mamtera, hey! Sovi, sovi, mamtera
lefazer pninei ora. Sovi vehartizi mayim. Etz yaria
basdera adama titen pirya bein geshem mishamayim,
geshem mishamayim.*

סובי, סובי, ממטרה, הי! סובי, סובי, ממטרה, לפזר
פניני אורה, סובי והתיזי מים! עץ יריע בשדרה, אדמה
תיתן פריה באין גשם משמיים.

*Hamerchav kulo natzod, tzinorot parsu hareshet,
vehineh siman vaot: betipin nireit hakeshet, brit
haperach vehanir, brit hasheket vehazemer, mamtera,
shirech hu shir, ranenihu, ad ein-gemer*

המרחב כולו נצוד, צינורות פרשו הרשת, והנה סימן
ואות, בטיפין נראית הקשת, ברית הפרח והניר, ברית
השקט והזמר, ממטרה, שירך הוא שיר, רנניהו, עד אין
גמר.

התקווה

*Kol od ba'le'vav p'nima, Nefesh yehudi ho'miyah.
U'lefa-atei mizrach kadimah,
Ayin le'Tziyyon tzofiyah.*

כל עוד בלבב פנימה
נפש יהודי הומייה
ולפאתי מזרח קדימה
עין לציון צופיה.

*Od lo avda tikva-teinu,
Ha'tikvah bat sh'not al-payim
Lih-yot am chofshi b'ar-tzeinu
Eretz Tziyyon v'Yerushalayim.*

עוד לא אבדה תקוותינו
התקווה בת שנות אלפיים
להיות עם חופשי בארצנו
ארץ ציון וירושלים

As long as within our hearts
The Jewish soul sings,
As long as forward to the East
To Zion, looks the eye –
Our hope is not yet lost,
It is two thousand years old,
To be a free people in our land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem



Acknowledgements

Compiled by Rabbi Jennifer Gorman,

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Executive Director, MERCAZ Canada & CFMJ

Hazzan Daniella Risman

Cantors Assembly

Biographies of Presenters

Gadi Perl is a member of the directorate representing MERCAZ Olami at Keren Kayemet Leisrael, also known as JNF Israel. Gadi is a member of the Finance and Land development subcommittees and an observer at the Environment subcommittee. He is part of the team, headed by Masorti and Mercaz representatives, responsible for the latest draft approving the establishment and funding of 16 million dollars for a new center to combat the climate crisis, including more than 9 million dollars in joint projects and public bids to financially assist researchers and entrepreneurs developing new green methods. A lawyer by training, Gadi lives in Jerusalem with his wife Shira and their 4-year old daughter Noga. Gadi is a PhD Candidate in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Law Faculty, and a research fellow at the Federmann Cyber Security Research Center studying the regulation of Artificial Intelligence.

Hazzan Joshua Diamond is at Congregation Beth Ohr in Bellmore, NY. He is a graduate of H.L. Miller Cantorial School at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was formally invested as Hazzan and earned a Masters Degree in Sacred Music. A native of St. Paul, MN, he holds a Bachelor of Music Degree in Vocal Performance from Lawrence University in Appleton, WI. Hazzan Diamond also completed chaplaincy training through the Center for Pastoral Education at JTS, where he worked as Chaplain Intern for older adults through DOROT (a nonprofit organization whose goal is to alleviate social isolation and provide concrete services to older adults). Hazzan Diamond enjoys bringing Torah, music, and spirituality into people's lives through many pathways -- leading prayer, teaching classes, building singing community, and pastoral outreach to our members. He enjoys playing saxophone and piano, hiking and swimming.

Hazzan Gil Ezring is the hazzan at Bet Torah in Mt. Kisco, NY. With an extensive background in music of many styles, Hazzan Ezring is an accomplished singer, songwriter and composer of contemporary Jewish music. He especially loves working with young families and children and has spent time as Mashgiach and B'nai Mitzvah tutor at Camp Ramah Darom and song leader & Music Director at Camp Zeke. Hazzan Ezring was a founding member of Rock HaRuach, a Jewish rock band based out of Charlotte, NC, where he grew up. In addition, Hazzan Ezring and his sister, Aviva Ezring, write and perform as the Jewish musical duo, AGEz. He is looking forward to marrying Hazzan Eryka Velazquez later this spring.

Hazzan Sarah Levine serves West End Synagogue in Nashville, TN. Hazzan Levine is a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary, where in May 2017 she was invested as a cantor and received an M.A degree in Sacred Music and an M.A. degree in Jewish Education. She held a number of positions at JTS, including Jewish Life Director for Graduate Students and admissions intern for the cantorial school. She served as co-gabbai of Women's League Seminary Synagogue for three years. Hazzan Levine also worked as a cantor/educator and a Hazzan Sheni during the High Holidays and interned at a number of congregations. Hazzan Levine also completed a unit of clinical pastoral education at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. She holds a B.A. in Jewish Studies and a minor in music from Temple University.

Hazzan Yishai Rackovsky is a native of Israel, and lives and works in Europe. He is the son of a hazzan and a tenor. Chazan Rackovsky served in the IDF as a hazzan and soloist in the Rabbinical Army choir. A graduate of TACI- Tel Aviv Cantorial Institute, Hazzan Rackovsky also studied Music at Bar-Ilan University. He is a member of the Cantors Assembly.

Hazzan Daniella Risman joined The Emanuel Synagogue in Hartford, CT in July 2021 after graduating from the H.L. Miller Cantorial School at the Jewish Theological Seminary with a Master of Sacred Music. She also has a Master of Music in Voice from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies from Oberlin College. She was awarded the Richard W. Briskin Cantor-in Residence Award, presented annually to an outstanding student at the H. L. Miller Cantorial School. During her studies, Hazzan Risman served as a Cantorial Intern at Ansche Chesed in Manhattan where she lead services, assisted in choir rehearsals and Torah tutoring and served as a Chaplain Intern at The New Jewish Home in New York City where she provided pastoral care and led Kabbalat Shabbat services. She has also served as a Cantorial Soloist and Guest Cantor at several congregations in the United States and Europe. A lyric soprano, she played the role of the Countess in Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro" and Micaela in Bizet's "Carmen." Hazzan Risman enjoys singing varied genres including opera, art song, chazzanut, Yiddishkeit, jazz and liturgical music. She was born in Israel and raised there and in California. She is an avid traveler and lover of languages, having studied seven languages and sung in still more. She enjoys delicious kitchen projects and hiking. She and her husband, Eric Hoffman, are the proud parents of Zahava and Yehuda.

Hazzan Eryka Velazquez is originally from Southern California. She swapped coasts to pursue her dream of becoming a cantor. Music and singing have always played a major role in her life and she utilizes the power of prayer and song to connect present-day Jews with ancient Jewish traditions. Also having a deep love for teaching, Hazzan Velazquez recently graduated from the William Davidson School of Jewish Education. During her time at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Hazzan Velazquez taught music, liturgy, b'nei mitzvah, and Judaica at Camp Ramah Wisconsin, Park Avenue Synagogue, South Huntington Jewish Center, and Women's League of Conservative Judaism. Hazzan Velazquez and Hazzan Ezring look forward to their wedding later this spring.