

Rooted in Renewal: Tu B'Shevat, Eco-Kashrut, and the Call to Planetary Consciousness

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Every year, as the winter stillness begins to soften, the Jewish calendar offers us a quiet but profound invitation: *Tu B'Shevat*, the New Year of the Trees. Often called the “Jewish Arbor Day,” *Tu B'Shevat* is far more than a celebration of nature’s beauty. It is a spiritual reminder that the world is not a backdrop to our lives—it is a living partner in our covenant with God. In a time when ecological anxiety is rising and the fragility of our planet feels

increasingly visible, *Tu B'Shevat* arrives as a gentle but insistent teacher. It asks us to look at the natural world not as a resource to be consumed, but as a sacred text to be studied, honored, and protected.

This year I invite us all to explore *Tu B'Shevat* through one of my favorite arboreal lenses that of *Elan d'Kol Hai*, “The Tree of All Life,” a mystical image that appears in Jewish liturgy and Kabbalistic tradition. *Elan d'Kol Hai* is not simply a metaphor—it is a worldview. It teaches that all life is interconnected, that every creature and every ecosystem is a branch of a single, divine tree. When one branch is harmed, the entire tree feels the wound. When one branch flourishes, the whole tree is strengthened.

Tu B'Shevat invites us to cultivate this consciousness not only during the holiday, but throughout the year. And one of the most powerful tools for doing so comes from Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, who expanded the traditional idea of *kashrut* into what he called “eco-kashrut.” While traditional *kashrut* that is a hallmark of our identity as Conservative Jews asks: *Is this food fit to eat?* Eco-kashrut extends this query and further asks: *Is this food ethically and ecologically fit for the world?*

Eco-kashrut challenges us to consider the entire chain of impact—how food is grown, how workers are treated, how animals are raised, how land is stewarded, and how our choices affect the broader web of life. It is a spiritual discipline that aligns beautifully with the teachings of *Tu B'Shevat* and *Elan d'Kol Hai*. In this spirit, I am also sharing three challenges as action directives—practical, meaningful, and rooted in Jewish tradition—that can help us deepen our planetary consciousness, practice eco-kashrut, and strengthen our connection to the Land of Israel.

1. Practice Eco-Kashrut Through Daily Micro-Choices:

Eco-kashrut invites us to see every act of consumption as a spiritual act. It asks us to honor the dignity of all creation—*kavod habriyot*—through mindful choices. This might mean:

- Choosing foods grown with organic, sustainable, ethical practices;
- Reducing single-use plastics
- Composting food scraps as we are already doing in our BAS kitchen;
- Supporting local farmers and regenerative agriculture, like a CSA;

Buying Israeli produce from farms committed to ecological stewardship.

These micro-choices are not trivial. They are daily affirmations that we see ourselves as part of the Tree of All Life, not separate from it. When we choose foods that honor the earth, we practice a form of *kashrut* that nourishes both body and planet.

Supporting the Land of Israel can be woven into this practice by purchasing Israeli fruits—especially those of the seven species—and by supporting Israeli environmental organizations working on reforestation, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture.

2. Adopt a “Mitzvah Tree” for the Year

Tu B'Shevat is a natural moment to plant trees, but the deeper spiritual work is to become a guardian of trees throughout the year. This can take many forms:

- Planting a tree in Israel through JNF or other organizations;
- Supporting reforestation efforts in areas affected by wildfires;
- Planting native species or pollinator-friendly gardens; Advocating for urban tree canopy expansion in Dayton and Montgomery County.

In the mystical imagination, every tree planted is a *tikkun*—a repair—for the world. The Midrash teaches that when God created Adam, God said, “All this I created for you. Take care not to destroy My world.” A “mitzvah tree” is a way of taking that charge seriously.

For those who want a deeper connection to the Land of Israel, consider adopting a specific forest, nature reserve, or ecological project and learning about its history, challenges, and needs.

3. Create a Personal “*Brit HaAdamah*” — A Covenant with the Earth

Just as we have a *brit* (covenant) with God, *Tu B'Shevat* invites us to create a *brit* with the earth—a personal commitment to living in harmony with the planet. This can be a written statement, a family ritual, or a set of guiding principles.

A *Brit HaAdamah* might include commitments such as:

- Observing one “tech-free” period each week leading to 25 hours on Shabbat to reconnect with the natural world;
- Donating annually to an Israeli environmental nonprofit;
- Learning one new Jewish teaching about ecology each month;
- Reducing food waste through mindful meal planning; Supporting renewable energy initiatives.

By articulating our commitments, we transform intention into practice. We become active participants in the healing of the world.

Conclusion: Becoming Branches of the Tree of Life

Tu B'Shevat is not only a holiday—it is a spiritual orientation. It reminds us that we are branches of a vast, interconnected tree whose roots stretch from Eden to Jerusalem, from our backyards to the forests of the Galilee. Eco-kashrut, *Elan d'Kol Hai*, and the teachings of *Tu B'Shevat* call us to live with reverence, responsibility, and joy. When we nurture the earth, we nurture ourselves. When we support the Land of Israel, we strengthen the roots of our people. When we live with planetary consciousness, we honor the divine spark in all creation. May this *Tu B'Shevat* inspire us to grow, to act, and to root ourselves more deeply in the Tree of All Life.