



Rabbi Andy Shugerman - Rabbinic Fellow, Florida Regional Office
anshugerman@jtsa.edu

Sacred Fruits: Eating as a Spiritual and Ritual Practice

Overview:

This study session will explore eating as a Jewish spiritual practice through a mystical ceremony developed for celebrating *Tu B'Shevat* (the Fifteenth of Shevat), the New Year of the Trees. In anticipation of this holiday, which falls on January 19th-20th this year, we will explore the Kabbalistic text *Pri Eitz Hadar* ("Fruit of the Lovely Tree"), which records the original *seder* ("ordered" ritual meal with symbolic foods) conceived to revive this holiday among the sixteenth-century mystics of Tzfat in Northern Israel. Our exploration of this ritual and its theology will offer insights into our own mindfulness practices for eating both at sacred times and in secular settings today. This will further aid in our understanding of how our tradition has creatively addressed issues of consumption and sustainability in previous generations through new myths and rituals.

Key Terms:

- *Shefa* = "abundance," the flow of divine spiritual energy from God through the *sefirot*
- *Sefirot* = "emanations," the ten divine manifestations through which *Ein Sof* (the Infinite One) takes form within the finite cosmos; each *sefirah* has specific names, attributes and energies
- *Kavvanah* = an "intention" for effecting change through the spiritual energy of a sacred act
- Destroyer = one mythic name for the force of disunity, evil and chaos in the cosmos
- *Tikkun* = an act of "repair" for the shattered vessels of Creation and for human misdeeds
- *Tzaddik* = "Righteous One," another name for the ninth *sefirah* (*Yesod*); also called "Life of the Worlds" because it funnels *shefa* from upper emanations to the lowest *sefirah* (*Malkhut*)
- *Shovavim* = "wayward ones," a reference to the spiritual offspring borne of human misdeeds (esp. nighttime emissions); also an acronym for the first six weekly Torah portions of Exodus, an annual period during which mystics would regularly fast to atone for misdeeds

Excerpts below from Dr. Miles Krassen's translation of *Pri Eitz Hadar* published in Trees, Earth and Torah - A Tu B'Shvat Anthology (JPS, 1999):

"Whoever enjoys produce in this world without pronouncing a blessing is called a robber.' (BT Berakhot 35b) For by means of the blessing, one draws down *shefa*. The angel who is assigned to that fruit [which was eaten] is filled by the *shefa* so that a second fruit can replace the first. Thus one who enjoys the fruit without a blessing is a robber...it is as if he robbed from his father and mother. For through the *kavvanah* of the blessing recited when eating fruit, a person who eats rectifies the sparks of his own soul as well as the sparks that pertain to the souls of his parents...the Destroyer's only intention is to rob the the divine sparks and to absorb them [into the realm of evil] and [to prevent them] from returning to [their source in] holiness." (p. 144-145)

"Through the special power of this *tikkun*, performed on this very day, through the power of the blessings and contemplation of the mystery of the fruit's divine roots, an effect will be produced in their structure and character above. Moreover the person performing the *tikkun* can also be affected. For through the beauty of this *tikkun*, he can correct what he distorted in damaging the [sign of the] covenant through in chastity. By virtue of performing this *tikkun* for the fruit tree, he will heal his part in the flawing of *Tzaddik* who makes fruit. There is the added benefit of the penitential period [of the six weeks of *Shovavim*] mentioned above." (p. 148)

"May it be Your will O Lord our God and God of our ancestors, that through the sacred power of our eating fruit, which we are now eating and blessing, while reflecting on the secret of their supernal roots upon which they depend, that *shefa*, favor, blessing, and bounty be bestowed upon them. May the angels appointed over them also be filled by the powerful *shefa* of their glory, may it return and cause them to grow a second time, from the beginning of the year and until its end, for bounty and blessing, for good life and peace." (p. 149)

"And may the splendid power of the blessings [said] while eating the fruit illuminate the source of blessings, *Tzaddik*, the Life of the Worlds, and let the rainbow appear, proudly rejoicing in its colors. From there, may *shefa*, favor and compassion be bestowed upon us to pardon and forgive the iniquities and misdeeds that we committed and sinned. We violated the covenant and damaged the fruit of *Tzaddik*, the Life of the Worlds, and caused the rains of its benevolence to be withheld, so that all the sources [of *shefa*] were harmed. Now let everything return to its original might...and may all the holy sparks which were dispersed by us or by our ancestors and [also] through the sin that Adam committed with the fruit of the tree now return to be included in the splendid power of the Tree of Life. May all evil be removed from them through the power of Your great name..." (p. 150)