

A Blessing for Study:

In the presence of the Infinite
 We honor the wisdom of our ancestors
 by engaging in words and deeds of Torah.

*baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam
 asher kideshanu be-mitzvotav ve-tzivanu la'asok be-divrei torah*

Text 1: Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1

(1) The four new years are: On the first of Nisan, the new year for the kings and for the festivals; On the first of Elul, the new year for the tithing of animals; Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Shimon say, in the first of Tishrei. On the first of Tishrei, the new year for years, for the Sabbatical years and for the Jubilee years and for the planting and for the vegetables. On the first of Shevat, the new year for the trees, these are the words of the House of Shammai; The House of Hillel says, on the fifteenth thereof.

Tu BiShvat is the new year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing. Lev. 19:23-25, which states that fruit from trees may not be eaten during the first three years; the fourth year's fruit is for God, and after that, you can eat the fruit. Each tree is considered to have aged one year as of Tu BiShvat, so if you planted a tree on Shevat 14, it begins its second year the next day, but if you plant a tree two days later, on Shevat 16, it does not begin its second year until the next Tu B'Shevat. So the calendar helps you know when you can begin harvesting a tree. - Rabbi Nelly Altenburger

Jewish texts often compare trees to humans...

Text 2: Jeremiah 17:8

[יְהוָה] יִרְאוּ לֵאלֹהֵי שָׁרֵשׁ יוֹשֵׁב לַחַיִּיב לֹעַל מִיָּם עַל שֶׁתּוֹלַךְ עַץ וְהָיָה
 יִמְשֹׁךְ וְלֹא יִדָּאג לֵאבִי צִרְתּוֹ בִּשְׁנֵי תַרְעֵנָה וְהָיָה חֹם יָבֹא כִּי
 פָּרַח מֵעֵשׂוֹת

(8) For [the person who trusts God] shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreads out its roots by the river, and shall not see when heat comes, and its foliage shall be luxuriant; and shall not be anxious in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

...and to the Torah:

Text 3: Proverbs 3:17-18

היא חיים עֵץ שֶׁלֵלוֹם וְכֹל־לִנְתֵיבוֹתֶיהָ דֶרֶךְ כִּינֹן עִם דֶרֶךְ כֶּהֱיָה.
מֵאֲשֶׁר רוֹתְמֵהָ בֵּהּ לִמְחַזְקִים

Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace. It is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon it, and happy is every one that holds fast to it.

The Midrash makes a very contemporary connection between our care for trees and for the environment:

Text 4: Midrash Kohelet Rabbah (Midrash on Ecclesiastes) 7:28

When the Holy One of Blessing created the first human They took them and showed them all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to them ' See My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are. Everything that I created, I created for you. Be careful not to spoil or destroy My world – for if you do, there will be nobody after you to repair it.'

Text 5: Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays*

In line with their general concern for Tikkun Olam - spiritually repairing the world - the Kabbalists regarded eating a variety of fruits on Tu B'Shvat as a way of improving our spiritual selves...Similarly, trees were symbolic of THE tree - the Tree of Life, which carries divine goodness and blessing into the world. To encourage this flow and to effect Tikkun Olam, the Kabbalists of Sfat (16th century) created a Tu B'shvat seder loosely modeled after the Passover Seder.