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A New Year for the Trees

A Tu B'Sh'vat Seder

by

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Tu B'Sh'vat Seder

Tu B'Sh'vat is the Jewish New year of the Trees. Literally it means the 15th of the month of Sh'vat (which also means branches).

When many of us hear the word 'seder,' we think 'Passover.' The word seder literally means order, and the Passover seder is an orderly ritual. Why a seder for Tu B'Sh'vat? Because a seder refers to any ordered ritual that can make an abstract idea tangible and even edible. On Passover, we don't just recite the story of liberation and call it a night. We participate in an elaborate ritual meal to remind us of the journey from bondage to freedom, and we feel it in our bodies. We become slaves as we eat foods that symbolize slavery. *Matzah* represents our poverty; horseradish, our bitterness; *haroset*, our occupation as brick layers. We become free as we eat a lavish feast and drink 4 cups of wine in the style of free people—reclining.

The Tu B'Sh'vat seder is also a ritual that makes an idea tangible and edible. The idea is that God is the source of life—of the extraordinary diversity and richness of the natural world, and it is humanity's job to help fix the world.

The Tu B'Sh'vat seder has its own order which is based on the symbolism of the Kabbalists, mystics from Safed in medieval Israel. They perceived the universe and our individual universes (our lives) to be structured according to 4 worlds: *Assiyah*, the physical world of doing, *Yetzirah*, the emotional world of being/creating, *Briyah*, the intellectual world of thinking, and *Atzilut*, the spiritual world of transcending.

The journey of this seder is personal and spiritual. We begin in *Assiyah*, the material world in which we live—a world of extraordinary variety of color, taste, forms, and sounds—and travel upward (and inward) through the unseen worlds of *Yetzirah* and *Briyah*, to the place of *Atzilut*, the world where all is One. You can imagine the journey as one of pulling back veils or passing through gates. Some Jewish mystics intuited a correspondence between these 4 worlds and the 4 elemental worlds of Earth, Water, Air and Fire. This seder, *A New Year for the Trees*, is based on this correspondence. Like the Kabbalists, we experience the journey of the 4 worlds by reading from our sacred texts and reflecting on the structure and essence of nature and our nature. And we ingest this journey, making it even more real, as we eat and drink of the specific fruits and wines symbolic of the 4 worlds.

The idea of fixing the world (*tikkun*) through our blessing is a central theme of the seder. The Kabbalists believed that before Adam ate the apple in the Garden, the world was whole. Creation was one with Creator, and peace and harmony prevailed. Then Adam rebelled against God by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The *P'ri Etz Hadar* states:

Do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for on the day that you eat of it, you will surely die (Gen. 2:17). By eating from the tree of knowledge [Adam] changed the King's laws. [He] abandoned the tree of life in which everything is perfect and upon which faith depends.

Adam's trespass shattered the soul of the world. All of creation became separated from the Creator and humanity separated from nature.

From the kabbalistic point of view, Adam's transgression testifies to the awesome power that humanity holds. It is humanity that is primarily responsible for the state of nature and the cosmos. Just as humanity holds the capacity to spoil the Creation, humanity also holds the possibility to heal and restore it. The world becomes whole when people take seriously the divine law and the obligation to fix the world.

In the kabbalistic vision, our expressions of gratitude, our blessings, are the critical link to the repair of the world. How can blessings heal? In at least two ways:

According to the Kabbalists,, nature's well-being is largely dependent on our *kavvanot*—the intentions that we hold in our hearts and express in our blessings before partaking of nature's bounty. In their worldview, the simple act of eating a fruit depletes the plant of the fruit's divine energy. We can restore the energy by offering a blessing. The plant's guardian angel channels the blessing back to the specific plant, enabling the plant to bear fruit again. Without our blessings, the angel cannot replenish the energy and the plant cannot produce a second generation of fruit. When we neglect the blessings, we fail to fulfill our obligation as creative agents in the Creation. We are like robbers, stealing the divine energy from the plant.

Blessings can also change us. When we recite a blessing, we subliminally train ourselves to appreciate the gift (the bread, the

wine, the rain) that we have been given. The power of this simple act can not be overestimated. We tend to take nature for granted. We have grown to expect that the world is ours to use for our individual gain. We feel entitled to nature's gifts and live lives of thoughtless consuming. Our souls are poorer for our inability to wonder, and nature suffers on account of our endless need to claim her for ourselves.

It requires a tremendous amount of focus and perseverance to maintain the vision that the world is holy and that our actions towards it matter. Just as we need to practice to learn to play the piano or to speak a new language, we need to practice to learn how to value and treat nature. Blessings are the spiritual practice that can help us to live as sacred guardians of Creation. This practice can help us to care for nature as we care for our souls.

On Tu B' Sh'vat then, our intention is to heal the rift between human and nature that occurred 'in the beginning' with Adam's first act of separation. Just as Adam partook of the tree that God proclaimed was off-limits to him, so we in every generation, invariably overstep our bounds, and partake of that which is not ours. Our blessings on Tu B'Sh'vat have the power to influence the world when we recite them with sincere intention. We eat as many kinds of fruit as we can because each new and different kind of fruit is an opportunity for another blessing. The more fruits, the more blessing, the more we can help repair ourselves and the world.

4 Worlds

The 4 worlds and the 4 cups form the organizing principle for A New Year for the Trees. The chart below indicates the quality, season, fruit, element, and wine that correspond to the 4 worlds in the kabbalistic framework.

World	Quality	Season	Fruit	Element	Wine
Assiyah	Action	Winter	hard outer/soft inner	Earth	White
Yetzirah	Emotion	Spring	soft outer/ hard inner	Water	White /Red
Briyah	Thought	Summer	soft throughout	Air	Red/ White
Atzilut	Spirit	Fall	Essence	Fire	Red

Introductory blessing from the *Pri Etz Hadar*

*Please, God who *makes, forms, creates, and emanates*
the upper worlds.

According to their form and character,

You created the earth below.

'You have made all of them with wisdom,'

those above and those below,

to join together the tent as one.

You cause trees and grass to grow from the earth,

just like those that grow in heaven above,

so that human beings might attain wisdom,

discernment and hidden knowledge.

You appointed holy angels to oversee their growth.

And you caused *shefa*, your heavenly essence,

to flow upon them.

May it be Your will O Lord our God
and God of our ancestors,
that through the sacred power of eating fruit,
May we benefit from the heavenly essence
upon which the fruits depend;
And may *shefa*, favor, blessing,
and bounty be bestowed upon them.

May their guardian angels
be filled by Your abundance;
may the *shefa* return
and cause the fruits to grow again,
from the beginning of the year until the end,
for bounty and blessing, for good life and for peace.

Look down from Your sacred dwelling place in heaven
and bless us this [new] year with bounty and blessing.
May all the holy sparks which were dispersed
by us and by our ancestors and by Adam
[when he ate the fruit of the tree]
now be reunited in the splendid power.

4 Questions

Leader: Designate readers for the 4 questions

Why celebrate the trees' new year in winter?

Tu B'Shvat, literally the 15th of Sh'vat, occurs in the heart of winter, just as the earth is starting to thaw. The trees draw up water through their roots, and begin to bud.

Tu B'Sh'vat is a celebration, not only, of the trees— but also of the waters, upon which they depend. It is a celebration of the tree of life, and the interdependence of all of nature.

Why celebrate Tu B'sh'vat with a seder?

A seder is an “ordered” ritual that brings an idea to life. The Kabbalists, mystics who lived in Safed in the 1700's, developed a seder for Tu B'Sh'vat to express their gratitude to God for the tree of life.

How does this seder differ from a Passover Seder?

At the Passover seder we recall the history of the Jewish people and we eat foods including *matzah*, *marror* and bitter herbs that symbolize that story.

At the Tu B'Sh'vat seder we tell the story of the wonder of the natural world—of creation and creativity. We reflect on our relationship with nature and we eat the fruits of the earth's abundance.

Why eat so many kinds of fruits?

The Kabbalists believed that the energy of our positive intentions—our blessings—could help repair the world.

According to Jewish tradition, each time we taste a new fruit, we recite a blessing. The more fruits, the more blessings, the more we can help nature heal.

Earth

Assiyah

Making

Leader

Assiyah literally means 'making' or 'doing.'

Kabbalistically speaking,

it is the world of the physical, the embodied.

It is the world that we can see and touch.

It corresponds to earth, the element of form,
substance, solidity, permanence and security.

For this 'world' we contemplate the earth:

land, rock, soil, tree, grass.

And we contemplate our place on earth.

**And* God said,

‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered
together unto one place and let the dry land appear.’

And it was so.

And God called the dry land: ‘Earth!’

And God saw that it was Good.

-Genesis I:9-10

*F*ertility depends on a combination of climate,

minerals, organic matter, and slope.

Soil must not be stiff, dry or stingy.

The Romans said that the best soils were fat, sweet and open
with just the right mix of air, water and nutrients.

Virgil insisted that the farmer taste the soil. . .

The best soils were neither salty nor bitter,

but sweet and open, like the smell of fertile soil in springtime.

-Adapted from *William Bryant Logan, Dirt*

Then God said,

“Let the land produce vegetation:
seed-bearing plants and trees on the land
that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their kind.”

And it was so. ¹

The land produced vegetation:
plants bearing seed according to their kind
and trees bearing fruit with seed in it
according to their kind.

And God saw that it was good.

-Genesis 1:11-12

The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Every tree was excited: bowing to the roaring storm; waving, swirling, tossing their branches in glorious enthusiasm—like worship. But, though to the outer ear these trees are silent, their songs never cease. Every cell is throbbing with music and life; every fiber trilling like harp strings. No wonder the hills and groves were God's first temples. And the more they are cut down and hewn into cathedrals and churches, the farther off and dimmer seems the Lord himself.

-John Muir

*F*or the Lord your God
is bringing you into a Good Land,
A Land of brooks of water, of fountains
and depths springing forth in valleys and hills;
A Land of wheat and barley and vines
and fig trees and pomegranates;
A Land of olive trees and honey;
A Land wherein you shall eat bread
without scarceness.
You shall not lack anything in it. . .
And you shall eat and be satisfied,
and bless the Lord your God
for the Good Land
which is being given to you.
-Deuteronomy 8:7-11

If you have no land, you have nothing:
no food, no shelter, no warmth,
no freedom, no life.
If we remember this,
we know that all economies begin to lie,
as soon as they assign a fixed value to the land.
People who have been landless
know that land is invaluable.
It is worth everything.
Whatever the market may say,
the worth of the land is what it always was.
It is worth what food, clothing,
shelter and freedom are worth.
It is worth what life is worth.
-Wendell Berry, "The Agrarian Standard"

The Mountains quaked before God.
-Judges 5:5

Mountaintop removal,
which provides just 7 percent of U.S.'s coal,
is done by blowing the tops off of mountains,
and then dumping the debris into stream beds.
This technique has buried more than 800 miles
of Appalachian streams in mining debris
and has damaged or destroyed an area larger
than Delaware.

Mountaintop removal poisons the water
and pollutes the air with coal and rock dust.

Coal ash piles are so toxic and unstable that
the Department of Homeland Security has declared that the
location of the nation's 44 most
hazardous coal ash sites must be kept secret.
They fear terrorists will find ways to spill the toxic matter.

-James Hansen, Climate Scientist

*I brought you to this fertile land
to eat of its fruit and its Goodness
But you came and defiled My land.
You made my gift abhorrent.
-Jeremiah 2.7

You asked us to believe in the Great Creator

and Ruler of the Heaven and Earth;

and yet you do not believe or trust Him.

For you have taken the Land for yourselves—

Land, which we occupied in common.

You scheme night and day

about how you might preserve it

so that no-one can take it from you. . .

We believe in God, the Creator

and Ruler of Heaven and Earth.

He maintains the sun.

He maintained our ancestors for so many moons, and He

maintains us. . .

And so long as we have this faith, we trust in Him

and will never bequeath a foot of ground.

-Lenape Indian reply to William Penn, 1701

Earth

Blessing for Assiyah

- *Serve fruit—hard outside, soft inside (nuts, clementines, coconuts, pineapple)*
- *Pour white grape juice/wine.*

Leader

The kabbalists said, *‘It is a good to eat an abundance of fruit on this day and to sing their praises.’ Today we eat many fruits, deepening our gratitude for the diversity of trees and all nature.

Before we eat, we pause to bless. “Blessing” is Judaism’s most important discipline. By blessing, eating becomes a spiritual experience.

For *Assiyah*, we eat fruits —hard outside and soft within—to remind us of the earth’s protective nature. We acknowledge our dependence on earth, both physically and emotionally.

Together: Recite the bracha over fruit.

BARUCH ATA ADONAI ELOHAINU MELECH HAOLAM

BORAI P'RI HA-ETZ.

Blessed are you, Eternal, Our God, Master of the Universe,
who creates the fruit of the tree.

Taste one of the Assiyah fruits.

Leader

Our first cup of wine is white, symbolizing winter, when
nature is asleep and the earth is barren, sometimes covered
with snow.

Together: Recite the bracha over wine.

BARUCH ATA ADONAI ELOHAINU MELECH HAOLAM

BORAI P'RI HA-GAFEN.

Blessed are you, Eternal our God, Master of the Universe , who
creates the fruit of the vine.

Drink the juice/wine.

Enjoy the fruits of Assiyah and reflect on your experiences of Earth.

Water

Yetzirah

Formation

Leader

Yetzirah is the world of emotion, of formation.

It corresponds to the element water—
the fluid element that dissolves and transports
nutrients around our bodies and around the world.
It is the element of purification, rebirth,
healing and blessing.

It is the element of tears, transformation and movement.
For the world of *Yetzirah*,
we contemplate the waterways of our bodies
and the waterways of the world:
the rivers, the oceans, the rains.
And we remember the creatures
whose lives depend on water.

If there is magic in this planet, it is contained in water.

-Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey*

Nothing in the world is more flexible
and yielding than water.

Yet when water attacks the firm and the strong,
none can withstand it. . .

So the flexible overcome the adamant;
the yielding overcome the forceful.

-Lao Tzu

The Hebrew letter “*mem*” comes from *mayim*, meaning water.

“*Mem*” represents the *mikvah*, the ritual bath, and the womb.

The word, *Mah*, “What?” also begins with the letter *mem*.

When a person immerses in water,
she nullifies her ego and asks, “What am I?”

Ego is the essence of permanence,
while water is the essence of impermanence.

When a person is ready to replace her ego with a question,
she is ready to be reborn with its answer.

-Aryeh Kaplan, *The Waters of Eden* (adapted).

The Lakota knew that the human heart,
away from nature, becomes hard;
and that lack of respect for growing, living things
soon leads to lack of respect for humans too.
Luther Standing Bear, in Creations, Heart of the Land (adapted)

Why do you harden your hearts, like the Egyptians and
Pharaoh?
-1 Samuel 6.6

The establishment of Everglades National Park in 1947 marked the first time in American history that a large tract of wilderness was permanently protected, not for its scenic value (many had deemed it a swamp), but for the benefit of the unique diversity of life it sustained. The habitats within the Everglades support an array of plant and animal species found nowhere else on the planet. More than 360 species of birds inhabit this watery paradise.

-Adapted from National Park website

By the 1900's, when plumed hats were the rage, the snowy white feathers of the egrets that lived in the Everglades had become more valuable than gold. More than five million birds a year were slaughtered; nearly 95 percent of Florida's shore birds butchered. The Audubon Society tried unsuccessfully to dissuade women from buying hats with feathers, but the powerful millinery industry influenced Congress to defeat national laws that would halt the killing.

-Adapted from Ken Burns, The National Parks, America's Best Idea

“So-this-is-a River!”

“THE River,” corrected the Rat.

“And you really live by the river?

What a jolly life!”

“By it, and with it, and on it, and in it,” said the Rat. “It’s
brother and sister to me, and aunts and company,
and food and drink,
and (naturally) washing.

It’s my world and I don’t want any other.

What it hasn’t got is not worth having,
and what it doesn’t know is not worth knowing.

-Kenneth Grahame, The Wind in the Willows

I found that water was flowing from below the Temple--
eastward.

When I came back, I saw gigantic trees
on both banks of the stream.

This water. . . runs to the east, and flows into the Arabah;
and when it comes into the sea of foul waters,
the water will become wholesome.

Every living creature that swarms
will thrive wherever the stream goes.

Fish will be abundant . . . All kinds of trees will grow
on both banks of the stream.

Their leaves will not wither and their fruits will not rot.

They will yield fruit every day because of the waters
which flow from the Temple.

Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.

-from Ezekiel 47:1-12

It is not possible to add pesticides
to water anywhere
without threatening the water everywhere.
-Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, 1962

**If you walk according to my law*

and keep my commandments. . .

I will give your rains in their season,

and the earth will give its produce,

and the trees of the field will give their fruit.

You will eat your bread and be satisfied,

and you will dwell in the security of your land.

You will lie down and no-one will terrify you.

-Leviticus 26:3-4, 5b-6a

Water

Blessing for Yetzirah

- *Serve fruits—soft outside, pits inside (olive, dates)*
- *Pour white grape juice; add a splash of red.*

Leader

For *Yetzirah*, we eat fruits that are solid inside and soft outside.

In so doing, we celebrate our hearts.

With strong hearts, we can let go of our protective outer shells,
and open up to life's ordinary miracles.

The *Kabbalists* said:

*One who enjoys a fruit without offering a blessing
is considered a robber because she robs
the fruit's guardian angel of the divine energy
it needs to produce more fruit. (Berachot 35b)

As you taste the fruits, eat slowly, savoring every bite; and
remember to thank the tree from which you eat.

Together recite the bracha over fruit.

BARUCH ATA ADONAI ELOHAYNU MELECH HAOLAM

BORAI P'RI HA-ETZ.

Blessed are You, Eternal, our God,

Master of the Universe,

who creates the fruit of the tree.

Taste a Yetzirah fruit.

Leader

As spring approaches, the sun thaws the frozen earth. The hillsides redden as the flowers appear. We add a splash of red to our white juice.

Together recite the bracha over juice/wine.

BARUCH ATA ADONAI ELOHAYNU MELECH HAOLAM

BORAI P'RI HA-GAFEN.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God,

Master of the Universe

who creates the fruit of the vine.

Drink the juice/wine.

Enjoy the fruits of Yetzirah and reflect on your experiences of Water.

Air

Briyah

Creation

Leader

Briyah is the world of creation—of thought.

It is the natural law inscribed
in the patterns of the universe.

It corresponds to the element of air, the wind.

Air is the element of speed, of changeability,
of ideas and dreams.

Air is the element of the breath
and language and song.

For *Briyah*, we contemplate the air,
the breath of life, the weather.

Now the earth was *tohu v' vohu*,
desolate and waste,
and the darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And the Wind of God hovered
over the face of the waters.
-Genesis 1:2

*T*hen YHWH God formed the human
of the dust of the earth,
and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life
and the human being became a living soul.
-Genesis 2:7

I asked myself how this ‘unpronounceable name’
could have been pronounced—and out from my throat came

YYY—HHH—WWW—HHH (a rough breath).

‘A breath!’ I thought.

The word that contains all words and no words—
the word from which all words arise.

The breath of life. . . of course, that is *Its* name!

-*Arthur Waskow*

In Arabic, the wind is '*ruh*,' but the same word also means 'breath' and 'spirit,' while in Hebrew, '*ruach*' includes concepts of creation and divinity. And the Greek '*pneuma*,' or the Latin '*animus*' are redolent, not just of air, but of the very stuff of the soul.

Without wind, most of the earth would be uninhabitable. The tropics would grow so unbearably hot that nothing could live there, and the rest of the planet would freeze. Moisture—if any existed—would be confined to the oceans, and all but the fringe of the great continents, would be desert. . .

But with the wind, Earth comes truly alive.

Winds provide the circulatory and nervous systems of the planet, sharing energy and information, distributing both warmth and awareness, making something out of nothing.

We are the fruits of the wind—and have been seeded, irrigated and cultivated by its craft.

-*Lyll Watson*, *The Wind*

*F*irst, there is the power of the Wind,

constantly exerted over the globe....

Here is an almost incalculable power at our disposal,
yet how trifling the use we make of it!

It only serves to turn a few mills,
blow a few vessels across the ocean,
and a few trivial ends besides.

What a poor compliment do we pay
to our indefatigable and energetic servant!

-Henry Thoreau

Here on earth too, God lives
Not in Heaven alone.

A striking fir, a rich furrow—

in them you will find God's likeness.

Divine image incarnate in every high mountain.

Wherever the breath of life flows,

You will find God embodied.

And God's household?

All being:

the gazelle, the turtle, the shrub,

the cloud pregnant with thunder.

God in Creation is

God's name forever.

-*Saul Tchernikovsky*, Israeli poet, 19th century

God . . . is the ultimate Environment which surrounds and encompasses humanity. . . In the Koran, God is said to be the All-encompassing/*Muhit*. . . *Muhit* also means Environment. Humans are immersed in the Divine *Muhit* and are not aware of it because of their own forgetfulness—the underlying sin of the soul.

The environmental crisis may . . . be caused by the human refusal to see God as the real environment, which surrounds and nourishes our life.

-*Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Spirit and Nature

*F*or the last ten thousand years. . the temperature has barely budged; it's swung in a narrow range, from 58 to 60 degrees F. That's warm enough that the ice sheets retreated from the centers of our continents so we could grow grain, but cold enough that mountain glaciers provided drinking and irrigation water to those plains; it was the 'correct' temperature for our marvelously diverse planet. . .
-Bill McKibbin, Eearth

*S*ixteen of the warmest 17 warmest years ever recorded on earth have occurred since 2001. In the last 4 decades, the frequency of natural disasters has increased almost three-fold, from about 1,300 events from 1975–1984 to over 3,900 from 2005–2014.

Arctic sea ice is at a near all-time low. Record floods have occurred from Pakistan to Queensland to the Mississippi; record drought from the steppes of Russia to the Texas plains.. Half the world's tropical and temperate forests are gone. The rate of deforestation in the tropics continues at about an acre a second. Half the wetlands and a third of the mangroves are gone. Ninety percent of the large predator fish are gone. Species are disappearing at rates about a thousand times faster than normal. The planet has not seen such a spasm of extinction in 65 million years, since the dinosaurs disappeared.
-James Gustave Speth, Bridge at Edge of World (adapted)

I have seen the earth,

and here, it is desolation and waste

and [I look] to the heavens,

and their light is gone.

I have seen the mountains

and here, they are wavering,

and all the hills palpitate.

I have seen, and here, there is no human creature.

And all the birds of the heavens have fled.

I have seen, and here,

the garden-land is now a wasteland,

and all the cities are in ruin.

-Jeremiah 4:23-26

Air

Blessing for Briyah

- *Serve fruits—soft throughout (grapes, berries)*
- *Pour red grape juice/wine; add a splash of white.*

Read together

Even if our mouths were as full of song as the sea,
and our tongues as full of praise as the waves,
and our lips as full of gladness
as the expanse of the heavens,
and our eyes as brilliant as the sun and the moon,
and our hands as outstretched as eagles wings,
and our feet as swift as the hind,
We could still not thank You enough
for even one of the
thousand thousand thousand of thousands
and myriad myriads of Goodness
that You have bestowed upon our ancestors
and upon us.

-from the Shabbat morning liturgy

Together recite the bracha over fruit.

BARUCH ATA ADONAI ELOHAINU MELECH HAOLAM

BORAI P'RI HA-ETZ.

Blessed are you, Eternal, Our God,

Master of the Universe

who creates the fruit of the tree.

Taste one of the briyah fruits.

Leader

In summer, when vegetables and fruits are abundant,

we are reminded of the richness of life.

We drink red juice/wine with a dash of white.

Together recite the bracha over wine.

BARUCH ATA ADONAI ELOHAINU MELECH HAOLAM

BORAI P'RI HAGAFEN.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Master of the Universe who

creates the fruit of the vine.

Drink the third cup.

Enjoy the fruits and wine of Briyah and reflect on your experiences of

Air.

Fire

Atzilut

Emanation

Atzilut is the world of pure spirit,
of intimacy with the divine—of oneness.

It corresponds with the element fire
and it is characterized by light.

Atzilut reminds us that our world
exists in precarious balance.

Fire is at once the energy of the world *and* the destroyer. We
have been learning the hard way
that too much fire in the form of combustion
is ruining our air and melting our glaciers.

Fire is also our passion and enthusiasm;
We must kindle our spirits to act on behalf
of the good of the world.

What will set your heart on fire
and sustain you for a life of good work?

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him

in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush,

and he looked and behold—

the bush burned with fire

and the bush was not consumed.

-Exodus 3:2

There is in biology a formula called
'the equation of burning.'
[It] describes how plants unlock stored sunlight
and turn it into the heat energy that fuels their motion,
their feeling, their thought
or whatever their living consists of.
All that is alive burns.
This is the fundamental fact of nature.
Moses saw it with his two eyes directly.
God tells Moses, 'Take off your shoes
because the ground where
you are standing is holy ground.'
He is asking Moses to experience in his own body
what the burning bush experiences—
a living connection between heaven and earth.
-William Bryant Logan, Dirt

I have never understood why the mystics of all creeds
experience the presence of God on mountaintops.
Aren't they afraid of being blown away?
It often feels best to lie low, inconspicuous,
instead of waving your spirit around
from high places like a lightning rod.
For if God is in one sense the igniter,
a fireball that spins over the ground of continents,
God is also in another sense the destroyer,
lightning, blind power, impartial as the atmosphere.
Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

The sun also rises and the sun goes down

And hastens to the place from whence it arose.

The wind goes toward the south

And turns about to the north

It whirls continuously

and the wind returns again,

according to its circuits.

All the rivers run into the sea,

Yet the sea is not full.

Unto the place from whence the rivers come,

there they return again.

-Ecclesiastes 1:5-9

Even after

all this time

The Sun never says to the Earth,

"You owe me."

Look what happens

With a love like that,

It lights the whole sky.

-Hafiz

Thirty percent more solar was installed in 2014 than in 2013 in the US. As of 2014, Iowa gets 28 percent of its electricity from wind alone, not because someone in that conservative state declared death to all fossil fuel corporations, or overthrew anyone or anything, but because it was a sensible and affordable option.

In 2015, Denmark achieved 140 percent of its electricity needs through wind generation. Scotland has achieved renewable energy generation of 50 percent and set a goal of 100 percent by 2020.

Among the EU, the highest share of renewables in gross energy consumption in 2014 was recorded in Sweden (52.6 %), while Latvia, Finland and Austria each reported that more than 30.0 % of their final energy consumption was derived from renewables.

Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark

Clean energy now is cheaper than coal and gas in most parts of the country and it creates more jobs than fossil fuels—
-Michael Brune, Sierra Club director

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can
not be changed if it is not faced.
-James Baldwin

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul.

-Emily Dickinson

My father [author and farmer Wendell Berry] says that hope is a virtue. To have it, we must work at it.

-Mary Berry

Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position. Both excuse themselves from acting.

Hope is the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact are not things we can know before hand. We may in fact not know them afterwards either, but they matter all the same, and history is full of people whose influence was most powerful after they were gone.

-Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark

Today like every other day,
we wake up empty and frightened.
Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading.
Take down the dulcimer.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways
to kneel and kiss the ground.

-Rumi, Open Secret

Fire

Blessing for Atzilut

♦ *No fruits; Pour red grape juice/wine*

Leader

*Here is the secret of secrets:

Through the intention of the blessings we make when we
honor the words of Torah
and when we acknowledge every pleasure
of this world,
blessings pour from the heaven above
to the earth below.

As summer turns to fall, fruits are ripening on the trees. The
world glows in orange and red.
The final cup of wine is full strength red.

Together recite the bracha over wine.

BARUCH ATA ADONAI ELOHAINU MELECH HAOLAM

BORAI P'RI HA-GAFEN.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God,

Master of the Universe

who creates the fruit of the vine.

Drink the fourth cup.

Enjoy the wine of Atzilut and reflect on your experiences of Fire.