



“We are nurtured by deep roots, as far back as Abraham and Sarah; we reach upwards to the heavens while standing firmly on the ground; and when we do all this right, we produce fruits that benefit the world - namely our good deeds.” (www.judaism.about.com)

Introduction

This prayer/reflection takes its inspiration from a minor Jewish feast: *Tu B'Shevat*, the New Year for Trees! Celebrated in 2008 on 22 January.

What's that about? Briefly...

At one level:

- * A festival that celebrates the “birthday” of trees and their fruits;
- * Originating in agricultural and tithing practices in ancient Israel;
- * A celebration of the gift of creation.
- * Looking forward to the spring (northern hemisphere) as seeds swell with hidden life and prepare to burst forth with fruit.

At another level:

- * A reminder of our call to spiritual growth. When our lives are nourished with roots deep in God's Word they bear the fruit of good deeds;
- * A call to ecological responsibility;
- * A symbol of the hope of redemption after the suffering of exile.

Prayer time

Sacred space

A simple arrangement of fruits (with seeds) and a green branch.

Opening reflection

In order to serve God, one needs access to the enjoyment of the beauties of nature - meadows full of flowers, majestic mountains, flowing rivers. For all these are essential to the spiritual development of even the holiest of people. (Rabbi Abraham ben Maimonides).

We pause to get in touch with our need for our spirit to be refreshed by God's Love and God's Word.

Song: *V'Sham 'Ru* (Debbie Friedman)

The singer sings of God's work of creation and recalls that God rested on the seventh day. This ‘sabbath’ is inscribed in our very being, and forevermore signifies God's relationship with His people.

Scripture

Jeremiah 17:7-8: But I will bless the person who puts his trust in me. He is like a tree growing near a stream and sending out roots to the water. It is not afraid when hot weather comes, because its leaves stay green; it has no worries when there is no rain; it keeps on bearing fruit.

Luke 13:18-29: Jesus asked: ‘What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It is like this. A man takes a mustard seed and plants it in his field. The plant grows and it becomes a tree, and the birds make their nests in its branches.’

Sharing

In what way is the tree a symbol of your life as a son/daughter of God, as a disciple of Jesus? E.G.

- * Think of your family tree, and your faith family tree reaching right back to Abraham & Sarah. For what/whom are you most grateful at this moment?
- * Share a point of growth or challenge in your faith life. In what way is your life currently about sowing seeds? Sprouting new shoots? Bearing fruit? Drawing close to a stream? Surviving a drought?

Additional points for reflection

The Jewish sages discussed the question: *Why is Torah (scripture) compared to the fig tree?*

1) You cannot pick all the figs at once, but only gradually, over a long season. Similarly, you cannot learn the whole Torah at once, but only gradually, little by little, over an entire lifetime. (Midrash Numbers Rabba 12,9; 21,15)

2) Whenever you go to the fig tree, you are likely to find ripe fruit to eat. Similarly, whenever you go to the Torah, you will find nourishment for the spirit. (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 54a, b)

Recall a time when you turned to Scripture and drew strength, nourishment, life. Share with us a memory or feeling from that moment.

A Jewish Blessing

On Fruit that Grows on Trees

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the tree.

A Catholic Blessing

For the Sprouting Seed

To You, O Lord, we pray: bless the sprouting seed, strengthen it in the gentle movement of soft winds, refresh it with the dew of heaven, and let it grow to full maturity for the good of body and soul.

A Parish Blessing

Lord God, bless our lives, and the life of our parish. May we be fertile ground for the seed of your love to be sown and to grow to fullness. May we rise up like a sturdy tree, sinking roots deeply into the gift of your Word and into the gift of your people. O Lord, may we never be afraid to grow. We ask this through Jesus Christ and in his Spirit. Amen.

