

The Jewish New Years
Tu Bishvat
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When is the Jewish New Year? It is a trick question. If you were thinking Rosh Hashanah you are only 25% right. Judaism has four new years.

The month of Nisan, in the spring, is the first month of the Jewish calendar. The full Moon of Nisan is the first New Year. It is Pesach or Passover. It is a celebration of the awakening of life. Kabbalistically, it is about awareness of our own unconsciousness, seeing the ways in which we are still bound and enslaved. It is a renewal of life and a dedication to our continuing unending path towards liberation.

The second new year is the new moon of Elul at summer's end. It is not a holiday. But it is an entire month of reflection and prayer as we prepare for the Days of Awe. It is a renewal of the self. In this life we take on many identities, ideas that we latch ourselves on to. Elul is when we look at all aspects of ourselves and ask which of these selves represent of our deepest essence, which are aspects of a higher divine self? The month of Elul is about reconnecting with our heart and renewing our love of god whatever our experience of the One is.

Rosh Hashanah, the “Head of the Year”, is on the New Moon of the month of Tishrei in the fall. It is a rededication of our life, bringing intention to our actions and our relationships. It is a time to refocus our life energy and renew ourselves in service to the most holy purpose we know. It is the time of renewal of the spirit.

The fourth new year is the full moon of Shvat, Tu Bishvat. It is known as the new year of the trees. In the late winter the roots begin to come back to life and the sap begins to flow again. Why do the trees get their own new year? It is often acknowledged as an environmental holiday and an Arbor day to plant trees and

seeds. But Kabbalistically the tree is a symbol of the human being. It is said we are as “trees of the field”. And like a tree planted in the orchard we also need to be tended. We must create an environment where we can thrive. We must plant ourselves and we must strengthen our connections with our environment in the same way a tree is connected to all the microbes and plants around it.

Our goal is to grow. But what is growth? Do we wish to grow our bellies, our egos? No, the places we need to grow is our higher potentials. We don't want to be proud boys and girls, but rather, holy men and women. I can't tell you what qualities you need to develop. We all have different potentials and unique gifts. But I can tell you what these places in our being feel like. They are always connected to the higher potential of humanity and the world. In Hebrew there is a term, “Lishma”, which means for its own sake. It refers to selflessness, letting go of ego, aligning with a higher purpose. Tu Bishvat is a time to find our Lishma, our motivation that comes out of selfless service.

Tu Bishvat is also a time to review how we nurture ourselves; body, mind and spirit. Are we cultivating family, friends and community that can support us? Are we feeding ourselves ideas, poetry and song that feed our soul? Are we nurturing our spirit with prayer, meditation and celebration. Are we avoiding toxic food, drink, drugs, media, politics, language and people?

On Tu Bishvat it is a custom to eat some fruit of the trees as a reminder of the fruits of our efforts that will come. We can't always predict the outcome of our actions, but everything we do for the right reasons will eventually benefit others and ourselves. This is a universal truth.

Tu Bishvat is a rededication to our higher purpose and a renewal of the process of taking care of our being in all its divine glory.