Jewish Family Times

A Jewish Home Celebration Guide
...for Purim

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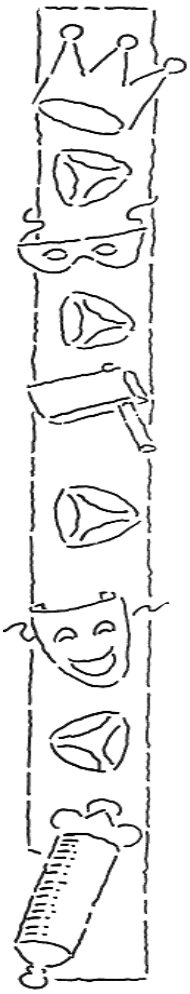
Purim Appeals to Laughter and Healing



Laughter and healing make wonderful partners. As Purim approaches, we do our best to be joyful, look at the miracles around us and appreciate God's blessings. This is the perfect time to reach out to others too.

Love, laughter and caring are the best tools for creating a caring community. When we laugh, our bodies benefit physiologically: we use our muscles, our heart rate increases, our lungs draw in fresh air, and positive hormones course through our blood highway. Love and laughter improve our well being and the well being of those around us. So why not take this Jewish month of Adar to push love and laughter to the front of our consciousness?

This issue pursues an age-old Purim custom, sending *shalach manot* (food goodies) along with the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick.

One of the special aspects about Jewish prayer is that, in order to read the Torah, we must bring together 10 Jewish adults. Reading and studying Torah are all about building community. So too, Torah must be read in a community, because that is its highest value.

When we read *Megillat Esther*, the Book of Esther, our merriment increases as we feed off each others' antics. As a community, we can also assure that those in need receive our attention.

Prepare a silly song, a dramatic reading or an impossible story. Rehearse it, make a small basket of goodies, a heartfelt card, and take the whole thing on the road to someone who needs it. Ask your rabbi or school educator for names of Jewish patients in your local nursing home, health care facility or hospital. Not only is this a *mitzvah* (commandment), you'll feel better, and you'll be the highlight of a stranger's day. Your smile may be the one influence that brings them back to complete health.

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Do you have a holiday question? Send it in for future editions of "Dear Nina."
This publication contains names of God. Please treat it with appropriate respect.

Inside:

Dear Nina! Purim Mitzvot! Resource Review!
Ecological *Shalach Manot* Baskets!
Recipes! Make People Feel Better!

Made especially for "Beit Mishpocha" of "My Fair City"
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Dear Nina:

for the young-at-heart

Puzzling Questions You Always Wanted to Ask…About Havdallah

Dear Nina—I love to practice piano, but my parents won't allow this on Shabbat. Sometimes after havdallah we have a music jam with friends. Why is piano practice forbidden on Shabbat and encouraged Saturday night? – Keyboard Crazy David

Dear David—It sounds like you have a strong passion for music. Be sure to hang on to that! Although playing a musical instrument is not one of the 29 prohibitions enumerated in the Mishnah, it is considered "work" and "creating". In Hebrew this is referred to as *melachot.* When you make the conscious choice to refrain from *melachot*, you expand the possibilities of rest, celebrating the divine in our lives, and embracing familyness and togetherness. On the other hand, having all those opportunities is hard to give up when Shabbat is over. For this reason, it is a mystical tradition to hold a *melaveh malkah* party Saturday night. This "escorting the queen" is a nice way to hold onto the beauty and peace of Shabbat while acknowledging the approaching work week. So here's my advice: let your musical inspirations refresh themselves on Shabbat. When you get to the *melaveh malkah*, let your spirit soar!

Dear Nina—What's the big deal about doing havdallah? Mad Marc

Dear Marc—Havdallah is a very simple ritual that brings closure to Shabbat. Unlike making a commitment to regularly attend services, a commitment to do havdallah takes all of five minutes. My husband recently told our rabbi, "I'd like to suggest someone for the kitchen committee project, but I don't know anyone who isn't over-committed." The essence of Shabbat is about making a separation from the craziness of our weekday lives. While there are traditional answers for how to spend Shabbat, ultimately it is what you make of it. It can start with a simple candle blessing or making motzi over the bread. It can also end with a simple set of blessings. Don't you owe it to yourself to stop and smell the … spices?

Dear Nina—If we can't light a match on Shabbat, how can we light the havdallah candle?

—Brilliant Dr. Bruce

Dear Bruce—That observation is a show stopper! Be sure to tell your mom that years of intellectual query are paying off. The havdallah ceremony was carefully designed to bridge holy and ordinary space. Just as we refrain from work over Shabbat, we mark the end of Shabbat by using fire. It is an affirmation of the cycle of work, rest, and re-entry into the world of creating. It also affirms that we are God's partners in striving to make the world a better place. Indeed, *doing* is important, but so is stopping. In balancing the two forces, we create a dynamic synergy that carries us through a Jewish cycle of time. Indeed, the end of Shabbat happens when we can see three stars in the sky. At this point, we are now allowed to "make" fire again.

Dear Nina—Why does the havdallah candle have so many wicks? Inquiring Melody

Dear Melody—The Babylonian Talmud specifies that a havdallah candle should be a torch. Rava defines "torch" as a candle that contains two or more wicks. In a shining example of erudite Jewish thinking, it was concluded: if two wicks are good, three must be better! So, the majority of havdallah candles have three intertwining wicks. Their torch-like quality is a bold reminder of Shabbat rest and rejuvenation juxtaposed against an affirmation of the work of creation. In Sefat, Israel, havdallah candles are created with up to a dozen wicks. If you can hold havdallah outdoors, I recommend purchasing one of these fantastic creations. The flames will cast a brilliant light on your havdallah ceremony.

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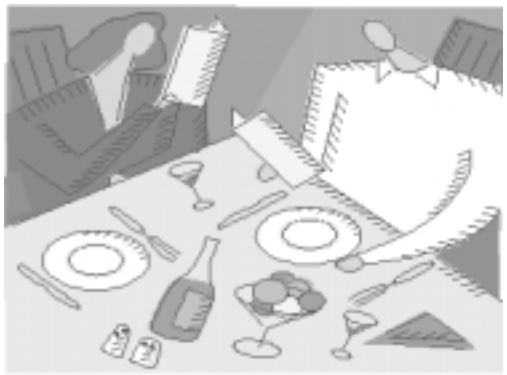
Writing Your Own Tu B'Shevat Seder—Getting Started

The Tu B'Shevat Seder is a recent historical tradition. From the sixth to eleventh centuries CE this day was marked as a Yom Kippur, or judgement day for the trees. It wasn't until the mid 16th century that Kabbalists in Sefat embraced the day for eating fruits and reciting special readings, as written down in the book *Pri Etz Hadar.* Today, the celebration of Tu B'Shevat is well established, but there is plenty of room for innovative new rituals. One growing tradition is the Tu B'Shevat Seder. This is loosely based on the Passover Seder with four cups of wine, special foods to eat, and stories to tell. Use this section as is, or add your favorite poems, songs and dances to create your own personalized creative seder.



Layer 1: Getting Started...Blessings of Thanks

The rabbis say it is meritorious to recite as many blessings as possible each day. Some people try to recite 613 *brachot* (blessings) representating the 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) that are written in the Torah. Here are three *brachot* to start off your celebration.

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בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית.

Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, o-seh ma-a-seh v'rei-sheet.

Praised are You, Eternal our God, Creator of the universe, who continually does the work of creation.

THE KAVANNAH PRINCIPLE

The Tu B'Shevat Seder gives us the opportunity to say a multitude of blessings, especially if we follow one simple ground rule. Normally, when we say a blessing over a food, it covers all foods in that category. This makes it unnecessary to say the blessing again during that meal. However, if we say a blessing with the *kavannah* (intention) that it is only covering one specific fruit, we can repeat the blessing again later.

How many blessings can you say during your Tu B'Shevat seder?

FAMILY TALK—

- **Share a work of creation that has made you feel in awe.**
- **What do you think is God's most incredible creation?**
- **Make a list of ten things for which your family can give thanks.**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁכָּכָה לוֹ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ.

Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, sh'ka-cha lo b'o-la-mo.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Source of life, whose world is filled with beauty.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁלוֹ חִיסַּר בָּעוֹלָם דָּבָר
וּבָרָא בוֹ בְּרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת.

Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam, shelo chisar b'olam davar u'bara bo bri-ote to-vot.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Source of blessings, your world lacks nothing and you have created goodly creatures.

Many communities have begun to explore alternative translations of the six introductory words of blessing. Which translations speak best to you?

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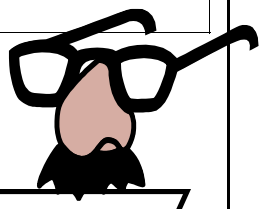
Scavenger Hunt: What Makes Our House A Special Jewish Home?



It's time to put on your special investigator glasses and take a look around your house for signs of Jewish living. Use the questions below to begin your sociological study.

1. List or draw Jewish ritual items found in your house (like a Chanukah menorah).

2. Look around your house again. Which items in your house aren't specifically Jewish, but may indicate Jewish practices? (For example, families that keep kosher have at least two sets of dishes.)

3. Which items in your house have been handed down from your grandparents? Your list may include paper documents.

4. Pick one item from your "family treasures." If it could talk, what stories would it tell? (Don't worry if your item is not specifically Jewish—it probably tells an important story about the choices made by your ancestors.)

5. Using the clues listed above, what makes your home Jewish?

6. Congratulations on completing the scavenger hunt! Now it is time to apply your findings. Your task is to "make" a Jewish home, out of cake. See page seven for details.

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