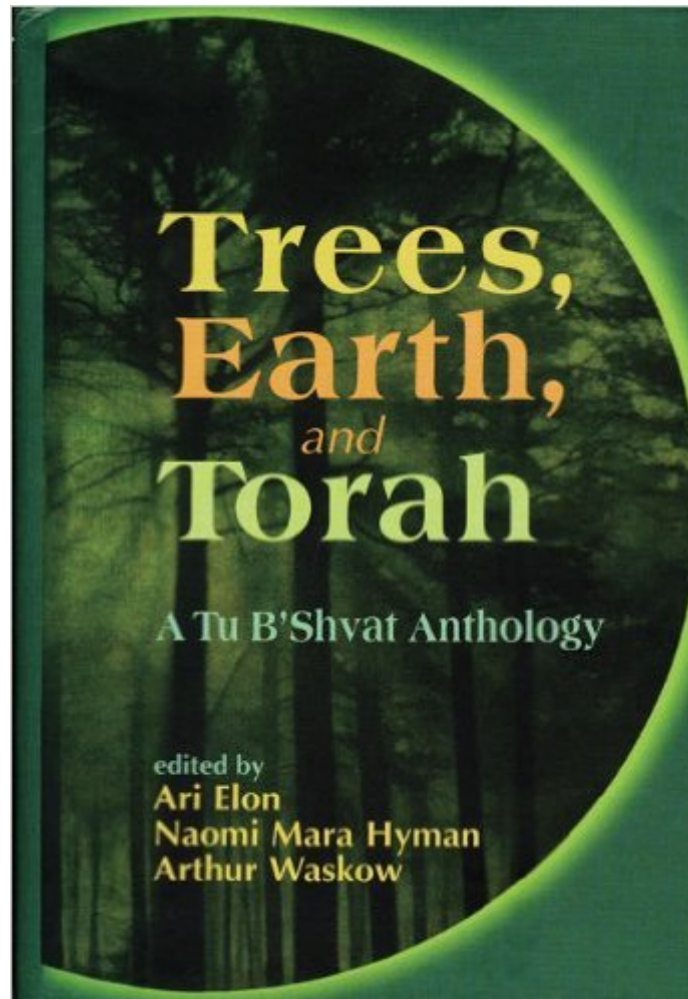


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Trees, Earth, And Torah: A Tu B'Shvat Anthology



Synopsis

This anthology draws upon biblical, rabbinical, medieval, and modern sources--from art, music, recipes, and crafts, as well as fiction, poetry, and essays--about the significance and historical development of Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish "New Year of the Trees," and includes mystical writings along with Zionist and Eco-Judaism pieces. The anthology also includes several examples of preparing a "Seder Tu B'Shevat."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As far as I know, this is the first major anthology on Tu B'Shevat, which is the "Birthday of the Trees" on the Jewish calendar. The book begins with an excellent essay called "The Living Tree: A Festival's Growth through History" by Arthur Waskow. His essay traces the development of Tu B'Shevat from an agricultural tax-date associated with tithing in biblical times, to a mystical meal to renew the Tree of Life in the Middle Ages, to its current focus on ecology and global survival. Waskow's essay becomes the framework for arranging the rest of the book like a growing tree. After all, the Torah is called a "Tree of Life"! The "roots" of Tu B'Shevat are found in biblical Judaism, the strong "trunk" was formed in rabbinical Judaism, and the "branches" are various post-Talmudic movements such as Kabbalah and Hasidism, Zionism and the Land of Israel, modern Eco-Judaism, etc. Finally, there is a section on the Festival itself, which includes a variety of essays, songs, and other resources for celebrating the holiday. Parts of this book are heavy on the "Jewish Renewal" POV, which is not surprising, since the "eco-kosher" movement began in that circle. Some of the material, such as the "Olamama" love song to Mother Earth by Hannah Tiferet, is a bit too

neo-pagan for my Orthodox tastes. And while "The Bear in Me" is a nice idea for a song about nature waking up in the spring, the words "There's a bear hibernating in the crook of a tree" are not true to life -- unless the tree is meant to be a metaphor for Tu B'Shevat. Real bears do not hibernate in trees! On the other hand, there's quite a bit of traditional material, too -- some of it never before published in English.

-----Since Tu B'Shvat is arguably the most vegetarian of Jewish holidays because of its many connections to vegetarian themes and concepts, vegetarians should joyfully welcome the publication of this anthology with its abundance of material that should contribute to the increasing popularity of this mid-winter holiday. All who are looking for ways to apply new, creative approaches to ancient festivals should also be pleased. Among the following valuable and interesting features the book contains are: 1) An introductory essay by Arthur Waskow that traces Tu B'Shvat's growth throughout history from its original status as a day that separated trees in terms of when tithings were due, through the establishment of the Tu B'Shvat seder by the kabbalists of Sefat in the sixteenth century, through the associations with tree-planting of nineteenth century Zionists, to recent adaptations by modern environmentalists; 2) Quotations related to trees and other Tu B'Shvat-related concepts from the Torah and other Jewish sources; 3) Material related to rabbinic discussions related to Tu B'Shvat, including a recently discovered medieval prayer, "Shmoneh Esrei for the New Year for Trees," and insightful essays on bal tashchit, the mandate to not waste or unnecessarily destroy anything of value, based on a Torah verse not to destroy fruit-bearing trees in wartime, by Rabbi Norman Lamm, President of Yeshiva University, and by Eilon Schwartz, Director of the Heschel Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership in Israel. 4) Seven items relating kabbalah and hasidism to Tu B'Shvat, including a translation of "Peri Eitz Hadar," a kabbalistic Tu B'Shvat seder.

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