

University of Rhode Island

Avi Schaefer Muslim/Jewish Shabbat and

Tu B'shevat Seder 2012

"We breathe and the trees breathe. We breathe in what the trees breathe out. So we breathe each other into existence.

And the breath... goes in a cycle."



Tu B'shevat Seder

(Elissa/Hania) Intro/Welcome:

(Elissa) BEFORE WE BEGIN PLEASE JUST MAKE SURE YOU TURN YOUR PHONES ONTO SILENT OR OFF!

Avi Schaefer, was born June 11, 1988 to Rabbi Arthur Gross-Schaefer and artist Laurie Gross. Avi was raised in a loving Jewish home in Santa Barbara, California, with his brothers Noah, Yoav, and Elisha. At age 18, Avi and his identical twin Yoav volunteered to serve as combat soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces. Avi served in the army for three years, first as a soldier in a Special Forces unit and later going on to train some of Israel's most elite units as a counter-terrorism instructor. Upon completion of his army service, Avi returned to the United States to begin his studies at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. In his few months at Brown Avi quickly distinguished himself as an accomplished student and a trusted voice for Israel and for peace. Avi gracefully balanced his two passions, championing the Jewish state while simultaneously establishing deep lines of communication with students who held differing perspectives. His life and work were tragically cut short on February 12, 2010, when he was struck and killed by a drunk driver while walking near campus. In just 21 years, Avi became a living testament to the idea that one committed individual can truly make a difference.

(Elissa) This year it was of vital importance to me to begin establishing real relationships and opening lines of communication with various organizations and people on our campus that Hillel and I have yet to work with. This dinner in remembrance of Avi and the Tu B'shevat Seder celebrating our earth and the renewal of the earth's trees, is a collaborative event between URI's Hillel and Muslim Student Association. Tu B'shevat is not so much a religious holiday in the Jewish tradition as much as it is a spiritual one, appreciating and celebrating something all of us enjoy as the seasons change- the different fruits of the earth and the life cycle of trees. This entire event was initiated and created by Jewish and Muslim students at the University of Rhode Island. We have worked extremely hard to create a unique and unforgettable evening, including this Seder that incorporates passages and lessons from both the Jewish Torah and the Muslim Quran. Following the Seder we will enjoy a Tu B'shevat inspired dinner! We will begin the event by combining the two reasons we are here (Tu B'Shevat and Avi Schaefer) with a small symbolic planting of white alyssum and blue morning glory by Hania and myself. Now let me say with an open heart and an open mind thank you all and welcome, Shalom.

(Hania) *As-Salāmu `Alaykum*. In Islam, we welcome one another with the greeting of peace. And it is with peace, acceptance and an open mind that I welcome you to tonight's dinner – a collaboration between the URI Muslim Student Association and Hillel.

As a student of Pakistani origin and of the Islamic faith, I have both seen and experienced the hurtfulness of hate and intolerance practices. I understand the feeling of being of a different background and religion- especially one that is not viewed in the clearest of lights. Therefore, the issues of diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance are extremely close to my heart and what I stand for. Therefore, I was very passionate about bringing Jewish and Muslim students together in honor of Avi Schaefer to foster relationships, incite discussion, and celebrate our differences by uniting. To do so, several Muslim students

and I have worked closely with Hillel over the past few weeks so that we may come together to celebrate something we all have in common: a hope for peace and unity and an appreciation for the earth that is home to us all.

In the words of Prophet Muhammad, PBUH, “Even as the fingers of the two hands are equal, so are human beings equal to one another. No one has any right, nor any preference to claim over another. You are brothers.”

And now we will begin the dinner with a short prayer. *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim – In the name of Allah, the most gracious, most compassionate* – a phrase often recited by Muslims when embarking on any significant endeavor.

[Either Hania or Elissa should explain that we will be going around the table and asking people to read the paragraphs marked **READER**. If anyone prefers not to read, they can pass the reading on to their neighbor]

Starting the Seder:

READER ‘God led Adam around the Garden of Eden and said, “Look at My works. See how beautiful they are, how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil or destroy My world – for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you – Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7.13’

READER The Quran states: “And it is He who spread out the earth, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers; and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two; He draweth the night as a veil over the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who consider. 13.3”

(Elissa) Structure of the Seder:

The Tu B’shevat Seder, like the Passover Seder, follows a specific order. The Seder is divided into four parts, representing the four worlds of mystics. As in the Passover Seder, we drink four cups of wine (but for religious and legal purposes we will be drinking grape juice), each cup here changing color to correspond to the changing seasons. Unique to the Tu B’shevat Seder is the ritual consumption of fruits and nuts, with special significance for the first three of the four worlds. According to kabbalah (Jewish mystical teachings), the **four worlds** are: **Assiyah** (action – our world of physical reality), **Y’tzirah** (formation), **B’riah** (creation), and **Atzilut** (emanation).

(We will begin with) **Blessing over the bread:** The blessing called *Hamotzi (The One Who brings forth)* is recited over any loaf of bread at any time, not just Shabbat but also other holidays. We have a custom at our Shabbat dinners at Hillel that everyone takes a hold of the challah and after we recite the blessing, everyone pulls on the loaf and gets a piece to eat. Tearing challah is a great equalizer, everyone joins together to participate in the ritual.

(Hania) Blessing over bread in **English**: "Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth. Amen."

(Elissa) Blessing over bread in **Hebrew**: "Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam, ha'motzi lehem min ha-aretz. Amen."

[After everyone gets a bite of challah Elissa or Hania invite the next reader to continue].

READER The First World: The World of Action: Assiyah – the first world, is the world of action. It is a world in which we assemble and shape artifacts without changing the form of God's raw material. It is the physical world represented by earth and the season of winter. In the world of Assiyah, we drink white wine (grape juice) and eat fruits with hard outer shells and soft insides.

READER The white wine (grape juice) symbolizes the winter earth, covered with snow. In winter we layer ourselves in clothing, blanketing ourselves from the cold just as the earth covered in snow is insulated. The fruit also symbolizes the winter season with its protected outside. Removing the hard shells exposes a fleshy vulnerable inside. The shell, which conceals also protects.

READER We crack the shells of the nuts and release the divine sparks for Tikkun Olam, healing of the world. We crack the shells of our own preoccupations and our own pains.

READER The Prophet Muhammad told his followers they would be rewarded by God for taking care of the Earth. He said: "If any Muslim plants any plant and a human being or an animal eats of it, he will be rewarded as if he had given that much in charity." (Sahih Al- Bukhari, 8:41) He also compared Muslims to a "fresh tender plant" that bends, but does not break, when afflicted with life's inevitable calamities. (Sahih Al Bukhari, 7:547).

READER Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, a Talmudic sage of the 1st century CE, said: Anytime our wisdom exceeds our good deeds, we are likened to a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few; then the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down... But when our good deeds exceed our wisdom we are likened to a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are numerous; even if all the winds of the world were to come and blow against it, they could not budge it from its place."

(Elissa) (explaining of the first course leading into the blessings) - First course: fruits and nuts with a hard shell and soft inside such as: walnuts, almonds, pistachios, oranges, pineapple and bananas.

As we eat the fruit of the Assiyah, the physical world of action, may we be blessed with the courage to reveal ourselves, to be vulnerable, to grow, and to repair and help heal. Please pour some of your white grape juice into the empty cup in front of you. After we recite the blessings in English and

Hebrew, and a special blessing to mark the occasion, please help yourselves to the first plate of fruits and nuts and drink from the cup you have poured.

(Hania) Blessing over the food in **English**:

‘We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the tree.’

(Elissa) Blessing over food in **Hebrew**:

‘Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p’ri ha-etz.’

(Hania) Blessing over the wine (grape juice) in **English**:

‘We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.’

(Elissa) Blessing over the wine (grape juice) in **Hebrew**:

‘Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p’ri hagafen.’

(Hania) Blessing over the holidays and special occasions in **English**:

‘We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe for giving us life, for sustaining us and for enabling us to reach this season.’

(Elissa) Blessing over **(Shehecheyanu)** the holidays and special occasions in **Hebrew**:

‘Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam she-he-cheyanu ve-kiyemanu ve-higi-anu, laz’man ha-zeh.’

[Elissa or Hania invite the next reader to continue]

READER The Second World: The World of Formation: God compels Muslims in the Quran to respect and revere the environment when He says, “Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth. 40:57.”

READER Yetzirah, the second world, the most vulnerable, is the world of Formation. We acknowledge God as creator not only of the physical world but also of our ability to be creative, our capacity to feel, speak, and sing. It is the emotional world represented by water and the season of spring. In the world of Yetzirah, we drink white wine (grape juice) with a dash of red and eat fruits with soft outsides and hard inner cores.

READER The white wine (grape juice) with a dash of red symbolizes the gradual deepening of color which parallels the reawakening of colors in nature as the sun brings them back to life. No longer coating ourselves in protective attire, we expose our soft bodies to the sun. We eat fruit containing pits and we are reminded that, despite the wondrous expressions of our spirit, we are still tied to the hard pit of our ego. We are still concealed, deep inside, protecting our divine sparks even from within.

(Elissa) (explaining of the second course leading into blessings) – Second course: Olives, dates, avocados, apricots, and plums. As we eat the fruit of Y'tzirah, may our hearts be open to the feelings and needs of ourselves and others, allowing the warmth of our care through the world. Please mix together some white grape juice with a splash of red. After we recite the blessings in English and Hebrew, please help yourselves to the second plate of fruit and drink from the cup you have poured.

(Hania) Blessing over the food in **English**:

'We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the tree.'

(Elissa) Blessing over food in **Hebrew**:

'Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-etz.'

(Elissa) As we drink the second cup of wine, white with a dash of red, may we, like the flowers, blossom into our full potential.

(Hania) Blessing over the wine (grape juice) in **English**:

'We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.'

(Elissa) Blessing over the wine (grape juice) in **Hebrew**:

'Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.'

[Elissa or Hania invite the next reader to continue]

READER The Third World: The World of Creation: "Fill the earth and master it," God commands humanity in the first account of the Creation of the world. The account also emphasizes that the created world, and all that fill it – the land and the seas, the trees and the grass, the sun, moon, stars, fish and birds, creeping things and land animals – are good.

READER In Islam, even the earth has inalienable rights endowed by its Creator.

READER We are instructed to cultivate for our human needs, but to do it in a manner that does not deplete and degrade Creation, but rather allows all life to flourish.

READER B'riyah, the third world, is the world of Creation; it is the world of thoughts represented by air and the season of summer. In the world of B'riyah, we drink red wine with a dash of white, reminding us that as the land becomes warmer and the colors of the fruits deepen as they ripen, we too become warmer and more open.

READER As human beings, we can develop hard shells to protect our inner core, like the fruit of the first world. We can also be more like the fruit of the second world, available up to a point, but withholding our innermost part, perhaps needing a secret toughness to keep from collapsing under the pressure.

READER But in our most precious relationships, we are most like the fruits that are soft throughout and that can be taken whole, available to each other in every aspect and facet of our personalities.

(Elissa) (explaining the third course and leading into blessings): Third course: strawberries, figs, apples, raisins, grapes, and blueberries.

As we eat the fruit of B'riyah, the world of thoughts and creation, may our thoughts and actions be integrated. May we create harmony in our lives and in the world. Please mix together some red grape juice with a splash of white. After we recite the blessings in English and Hebrew, please help yourselves to the third plate of fruit and drink from the cup you have poured.

(Hania) Blessing over the food in **English**:

'We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the tree.'

(Elissa) Blessing over food in **Hebrew**:

'Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-etz.'

(Elissa) As we drink the third cup of wine, red with a dash of white, may we cherish the warmth of the season and the abundance of our harvesting.

(Hania) Blessing over the wine (grape juice) in **English**:

'We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.'

(Elissa) Blessing over the wine (grape juice) in **Hebrew**:

'Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.'

[Elissa or Hania invite the next reader to continue]

READER According to Islamic beliefs, the earth is a sanctuary in which mankind was made to dwell in comfort. The vast oceans, forests and mountains that make up this bountiful planet have been subdued by God for our enjoyment and productive use.

READER A Talmudic story is told about Honi, who saw an old man planting a carob tree (a tree in the pea family). His grandchild was helping him. Honi laughed. “Foolish man,” he said, “do you think you will still be alive to eat the fruit of this tree?”

READER The old man replied, “I found trees in the world when I was born. My grandparents planted them for me. So, too, I am planting for my grandchildren.”

READER The Fourth World: The World of Emanation: Atzilut, the fourth world represented by fire. In the autumn world of Atzilut, we drink deep red wine (grape juice) and eat no fruit, for this world cannot be represented by any fruit. The pure red wine (grape juice) represents the full bloom of nature before the cold winter. As nature expends its last bit of energy, a full cycle is completed.

READER As we have passed through each world, we have changed with each season. We began by protecting our soft inner self and slowly peeled our hard outer layer. Within that soft layer another hardness was found, protected by the softness, which surrounded it. We came to a place where there was no distinction between the protected and the protective.

READER In the world of Atzilut, we become aware of God’s love, mercy, wisdom and other realities perceived with our hearts, not our senses. Our hearts are full and we praise the Source, which renews all creation.

READER As we drink the fourth cup of pure red wine (grape juice), may we become strong, like healthy trees, with solid roots in the ground and with our arms open to the love that is all around us.

[Elissa or Hania: instruct everyone to take a cup will all red grape juice and to drink after the blessings in English and Hebrew]

(Hania) Blessing over the wine (grape juice) in **English**:
‘We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.’

(Elissa) Blessing over the wine (grape juice) in **Hebrew**:
‘Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p’ri hagafen.’

(Hania) Knowing trees, I understand the meaning of patience.
Knowing grass, I can appreciate persistence.
- Har Borland

[Elissa or Hania: Thank people for participating in the seder. Invite them to keep nibbling on the fruit and nuts as the dinner is put out on the buffet table. When the food is put out, invite people to bring their plate to the buffet table to serve themselves]