

Spring Into Passover

Reconnecting with Passover's roots on walks designed to help you experience,
and learn teachings, related to the festival's designation as Chag Ha-Aviv, Holiday of Spring

The Seasonal Roots of Passover & Festivals

Exodus 12:1-20, contains a command to celebrate two distinct holidays:

- Pesach: a 1-day event during which we sacrifice a lamb [to commemorate our rescue from the Plague of the Firstborn].
- Chag HaMatzot: a 7-day holiday whose essence is the abstention from chametz and the eating of matzah [as a reminder of the process of our redemption from Egypt.]

הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב

Today you are going out, in the month of spring (Exodus 13:4)

בחדש האביב. קבעה תורה חג פסח בזמן האביב שהוא זמן קציר שעורים שהרי קנה השבלת נקרא אביב מלשון אב כי הוא המוליד גרגירי החטה וידוע כי כל מועדי התורה תלויים בזמנים חג הפסח בזמן האביב, חג שבועות בזמן הקציר והוא קציר חטים שנאמר (שמות כ"ג:ט"ז) וחג הקציר בכורי מעשיך, חג הסוכות בזמן האסיף, לכך תקנו לנו ז"ל בתפלה ובברכות לומר מקדש ישראל והזמנים ולא המועדים כלשון הכתוב לפי שכל המועדים תלויים בזמן. ועוד נקרא ניסן אביב לפי שהוא אב ל"ב חדשים, ובו מזל טלה אב ובכור ל"ב מזלות

Rabbeinu Bahya on Shemot 13:4

בחדש האביב, "in the month of spring." The Torah determined here that the festival of Passover must always occur in the spring, i.e. the time of the barley harvest... the stalk of the barley is known as **אביב**, derived from the word **אב**, "father." It is so called as it "begets" the kernels of grain we call wheat. It is well known that all the festivals mentioned in the Torah are related to certain seasons. Shavuot is to occur during the season when wheat is harvested as the Torah writes: "and the festival of cutting when you reap the first of your labors" (Exodus 23,16). Sukkot is to occur as a harvest festival, "the time of ingathering," i.e. at the end of the summer. This is also the reason the sages decreed that when concluding the benediction dealing with the respective pilgrimage festivals we sign with the words: "Who sanctifies Israel and the seasons."

We might have expected the formula to be "Who sanctifies Israel and the festivals," paraphrasing the wording in the Torah where these festivals are all called **מועדי ה'** "the festivals of the Lord." The reason the sages changed the formula was to remind us that the dates of these festivals are all dependent on certain seasons. Another reason we call the month of Nissan "spring" is because spring is the "father" of the 12 months in the calendar. It is also dominated by the zodiac sign of the ram, the "father" of all the twelve zodiac signs.

Karpas, the spring vegetable, represents both the historic birth of Israel out of the womb of Egypt and the rebirth of nature renewed each spring. According to Philo and Rabbi Joshua the original birthday of nature - The Creation - occurred at Pesach-time, not Rosh Hashanah. Similarly, the Italian name for spring *prima-vera* and the French *printemps* preserve the sense of the return to the original "first time" of the world. ***A Different Night Haggadah***

רבי יהושע אומר מנין שבניסן נברא העולם שנאמר ותוצא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע ועץ עושה פרי איזהו חודש ששהארץ מליאה דשאים ואילן מוציא פירות הוי אומר זה ניסן ואותו הפרק זמן בהמה וחייה ועוף שמזדווגין זה אצל זה שנאמר לבשו כרים הצאן וגו'

Rabbi Yehoshua says: From where is it derived that the world was created in the month of Nisan? As it is stated: "And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree yielding fruit" (Genesis 1:12). Which is the month in which the earth is full of grass and the trees begin to bring forth fruit? You must say that this is Nisan. And further proof that the world was created in Nisan is that when the world was first created, the animals had to breed in order to fill the world, and the period beginning with Nisan is a time when cattle, and beasts, and birds mate with one another, as it is stated: "The flocks are clothed in the meadows, and the valleys are wrapped in grain; they shout for joy, they also sing" (Psalms 65:14). ***Babylonian Talmud, Rosh HaSahanah 11a***

Blessing Trees & Flowers ● Celebrating Spring & Nature

ראה בני אדם נאין ואילנות נאין אומר ברוך שברא בריות נאות

[A person] that sees beautiful people and beautiful trees says [the following Beracha (blessing):] Baruch [Ata Hashem Eloheinu Melech Haolam] [Mi Shekacha Lo] Beriot Naot (Blessed are You Hashem, our God, Ruler of the world, Who has such beautiful creations [in God's world]). *Tosefta Berakhot 6:7*

For person is like a tree in the field / פִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה (Deut. 20)

Reciting of Song of Songs on Passover

עָנָה דוֹדִי וְאָמַר לִי קוֹמִי לֵךְ רַעֲיָתִי יָפְתִי וְלִכְיִי־לֶךְ: יֹאכֶי־הִנֵּה הִסְתּוּ [הַסְתִּיו] עֶבֶר הַגֶּשֶׁם חֲלָף הַלֵּךְ לוֹ: יִבְהַנְצָנִים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ עֵת הַזִּמְרִיר הַגִּיעַ וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרְצָנוּ: יִגְהַתְאֲנֶה חֲנֻטָּה פָּגִיהַ וְהַגִּפְנִים סָמְדָר נִתְּנוּ רֵיחַ קוֹמִי לִכִּי [לֵךְ] רַעֲיָתִי יָפְתִי וְלִכְיִי־לֶךְ

My beloved spoke thus to me, "Arise, my darling; My fair one, come away! For now the winter is past, The rains are over and gone. The blossoms have appeared in the land, The time of pruning has come; The song of the turtledove Is heard in our land. The green figs form on the fig tree, The vines in blossom give off fragrance. (2:10-13)

הָרֹאֶה בְּרִיּוֹת נָאוֹת וּמִתְקָנוֹת בְּיוֹתֵר וְאֵילָנוֹת טוֹבוֹת מְבָרֵךְ שֶׁכָּכָה לוֹ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ. הַיּוֹצֵא לְשָׂדוֹת אוֹ לְגִנּוֹת בְּיוֹמֵי נִסָּן וְרָאָה אֵילָנוֹת פּוֹרְחוֹת וְנִצְנִים עוֹלִים מְבָרֵךְ בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁלֹּא חָסַר בְּעוֹלָמוֹ כְּלוּם וּבָרָא בּוֹ בְּרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְאֵילָנוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְנָאוֹת כְּדֵי לְהַנּוֹת בָּהֶן בְּנֵי אָדָם

On seeing creatures that are beautiful or exceptionally well formed or goodly trees, one says "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe Who hast such as these in the world." If one goes out into the fields or gardens during Nisan (i.e. in the Spring) and sees the trees in bud and the flowers in bloom, say, "**Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who hast made Thy world lacking in nought, and hast produced therein goodly creatures and good and beautiful trees wherewith to delight the children of men.** *Mishneh Torah, Blessings 10:13*

Blessing on Seeing Beautiful Person or Tree

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹיָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁכָּכָה לוֹ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, she kacha loh b'olamo

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has such things in God's world

Blessing on Budding or Blooming Trees in Spring

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁלֹּא חָסַר בְּעוֹלָמוֹ כְּלוּם וּבָרָא בּוֹ בְּרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְאֵילָנוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְנָאוֹת כְּדֵי לְהַנּוֹת בָּהֶן בְּנֵי אָדָם

Barukh atab Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam shelo hiseir ba-olamo k'lum uvara vo briyot tovot v'ulanot tovim l'bitna'ot bahen b'nei Adam

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe,

Who has made nothing lacking in God's world, and created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees to give people pleasure

Blessings on Smelling Flowers, Plants, or Herbs

רַב מִשְׁרָשִׁיָּא אָמַר: הָאֵי נִרְקוּם דְּגִינוּנִיתָא — מְבָרְכִין עֲלֵיהֶּּ "בּוֹרָא עֲצֵי בְשָׁמִים". דְּדַבְרָא — "בּוֹרָא עֲשָׂבֵי בְשָׁמִים". אָמַר רַב שִׁשְׁתִּי: הֵנִי סִיגְלִי — מְבָרְכִין עֲלֵיהֶּּ "בּוֹרָא עֲשָׂבֵי בְשָׁמִים". אָמַר מֶר זוטְרָא: הָאֵי מֵאן דְּמִזְרַח בְּאַתְרוּגָּא אוֹ בְּחַבּוּשָׂא אוֹמֵר: "בְּרוּךְ שֶׁנָּתַן רֵיחַ טוֹב בְּפִירוֹת"

Berakhot 43b: Rav Mesharshiya said: Over this garden daffodil one recites: **Who creates fragrant trees**, while over a wild daffodil that grows in the field, one recites: Who creates fragrant plants. Rav Sheshet said: Over fragrant violets one recites: **Who creates fragrant plants**. Mar Zutra said: One who smells a citron [etrog] or a quince recites: Blessed... **Who gave pleasant fragrance in fruits.**

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תענית ה' ב"מ"ח: ומצא אילן שפירותיו מתוקין וצילו נאה ואמת המים עוברת תחתיו אכל מפירותיו וישב בצילו וכשביקש לילך אמר אילן אילן במה אברכך? שיהיו פירותיך מתוקין, הרי פירותיך מתוקין, שיהא צילך נאה, הרי צלך נאה אלא יהי רצון שכל נטיעותיך יהיו כמותך

Taanit 5b:12: He ate from the fruits of the tree, drank from the water in the stream, and sat in the shade of the tree. And when he wished to leave, he said: Tree, tree, with what can I bless you? That your fruit may be sweet--it is already sweet; that you should give plenty of shade--that you also do; that a spring of water may be near you, -even that you have. The one thing left me which I can wish for you is, that all trees planted from your seed may be as fruitful as you are.

תענית כ"ג א"ט"ו: יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא אמר ליה האי עד כמה שנין טעין אמר ליה עד שבעין שנין אמר ליה פשיטא לך דחיית שבעין שנין אמר ליה האי [גברא] עלמא בחרובא אשכחתי כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי שתלי נמי לבראי

Taanit 23a:15: One day, he was walking along the road when he saw a certain man planting a carob tree. Honi said to him: This tree, after how many years will it bear fruit? The man said to him: It will not produce fruit until seventy years have passed. Honi said to him: Is it obvious to you that you will live seventy years, that you expect to benefit from this tree? He said to him: That man himself found a world full of carob trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, I too am planting for my descendants



Vanessa Paloma documented a communal blessing over the flowering fruit trees made by the Jews of Casablanca in 2008 (from the Open Siddur Project, The Blessing of Flowering Fruit Trees in the Spring Season)

Today, the first morning of *Hol HaMoed Pesaj* many people in Casablanca gathered to say the blessing over the fruit trees and then we enjoyed a delicious breakfast and the sun in the garden. There were different waves of people, and as you see it was low on women! In Tangier many people have the tradition to say *Birkat Ha'llanot* the day

after the end of *Pesaj* (*Mimouna*)... and in Israel

I remember we would say it before *Pesaj*. The *Ba'al HaBait* told me his father had the same tradition, it's been a tradition in the family for 90 years to have this gathering on the first day of *Hol HaMoed*. When they built the house they planted the fruit trees before starting to build so that they would be able to have this gathering for the community.

Rabbi Yosef Israel told me that in Tetouan when he was growing up it was a tradition to go to someone's house that overlooked the whole city of Tetouan and spend the first day of *Hol HaMoed* in the garden and gathering as a community. In Portugal the community in Belmonte goes out for a picnic during the days of *Hol HaMoed* as well. *Hag HaAviv*—Passover is also called the Spring Holiday—beginning to enjoy the trees, the sun and the outdoors.

The Souls of Trees

Rebbe Nachman's birthday is the first day of Nissan. The first day of Nissan is also when we begin saying *Birkat Hailanot*, the blessing of the trees, which is said when one sees at least two fruit trees blossoming during the month of Nissan. A coincidence? I don't think so... The concept of trees corresponding to souls is firmly rooted in Kabbala. The holy *Ariza'l* teaches that the blessing of the trees has special significance. Whoever makes this blessing - especially with the proper intent - is able to redeem souls who have been re-incarnated in the plant (vegetative) realm[1], making it possible for them to ascend and complete their soul rectification. It should therefore, be said with intense concentration. *Tal Rotem, Breslov.org*

Hasidim and people of [healing] action make every effort to recite this blessing, the presence of a *mintan* of ten so that after the recital they might chant Torah verses and proclaim the *Kaddish*. All this is that the study and *Kaddish* might assist in purging and raising of the souls which are in the plant. *Sermon on the Blessing Over Trees in Nissan, Rabbi Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad, translated by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi in Trees, Earth, and Torah*

Guarding and Communing with Nature

שְׁמֹר אֶת־חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב וַעֲשֵׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב הוֹצִיאָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה:

Deuteronomy 16:1 - **Guard** the month of Spring and offer a passover sacrifice to the LORD your God, for it was in the month of Spring, at night, that the LORD your God freed you from Egypt

A Prayer of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Grant me the ability to be alone;
may it be my custom to go outdoors each day
among the trees and grass - among all growing things
and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer,
to talk with the One to whom I belong.
May I express there everything in my heart,
and may all the foliage of the field -
all grasses, trees, and plants -
awake at my coming,
to send the powers of their life into the words of my prayer
so that my prayer and speech are made whole
through the life and spirit of all growing things,
which are made as one by their transcendent Source.
May I then pour out the words of my heart
before your Presence like water, O God,
and lift up my hands to You in worship,
on my behalf, and that of my children!