

# Seder Tu B'Shvat

## A Haggadah for Celebrating the New Year of the Trees

“If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone should say that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting and then go welcome the Messiah.”

— Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, Avot de-Rabbi Natan



By Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Kligler

# Opening Song

יַעֲלוֹז שָׂדֵי וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ

אֲז יִרְנְנוּ כָּל־עֵצֵי־יַעַר

*Ya'aloz sadai v'khol asher bo*

*Az y'ran'nu kol atzei ya'ar*

The fields and all they contain will exult;  
then all the trees of the forest will shout for joy.

(Psalm 96:12, melody by Nava Tehila)

# What is this day?

In Leviticus we read that new trees should not be harvested for three years; the fruit of a four-year-old tree should be set aside as a gift to God; and the fruit of a five-year-old tree may be eaten. The Talmud established this day as the birthday of all trees to help us fulfill that commandment.

In Deuteronomy we read,  
“A human being is a tree of the field” (Deut. 20:19).

Proverbs depicts the Torah as  
“a tree of life to them that hold it fast” (Proverbs 3:17-18).

And the Jewish mystics visualized even God as a tree: with roots in creation and branches spreading far and wide ...or perhaps God is the Root from Whom all blessings flow into the varied branches of creation.

The Kabbalists created the seder of Tu B'Shvat as a “*tikkun*” — a ritual of repair. By eating fruits and nuts with special mindfulness, we strive to repair and restore the flow of life that animates all of creation.

This is a day for relating to God in and through the natural world. Amid the snow of winter, let us reconnect with the world of root and leaf, affirming our faith that spring will come.

## *Kavanah / Intention for our Seder*

May this Tu B'Shvat seder remind us of our obligations to the earth

To till it and tend it, as God told Adam.

May we be mindful of environmental destruction:

Global warming, species extinctions, the degradation of the land

Deforestation, toxic chemicals, runaway population growth. May we remember that the poor suffer the most from these ills

And may we be inspired to take action to bring healing to our planet.

*Amen, amen, selah.*

# A Prayer from the Original Tu B'Shvat Haggadah, *Pri Etz Hadar*:

O God, who makes, forms, creates, and emanates the highest worlds! You made the trees and grasses grow from the ground in the shape and pattern of these highest worlds. And this full moon is the beginning of Your work to renew and ripen the fruit trees, to bring forth the fruit of “the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden.”

May it be Your will that our eating and blessing and meditating on these fruits will strengthen the flow of love and blessing over the trees, to make them grow and bloom, for good life, for blessing and for peace. May all Creation return to its original strength and may we see the rainbow rejoicing in its colors.

And may all the sparks of divine energy, whether scattered by our hands, or by the hands of our ancestors, or by the sin of the first human against the fruit of the tree, be returned and included in the majestic might of the Tree of Life.

## I said to the almond tree...

I said to the almond tree, “Sister, speak to me of God,”  
and the almond tree blossomed.

—attributed to N. Kazantzakis

הַשְּׂקֵדִיָּה פּוֹרַחַת וְשֶׁמֶשׁ גַּם זוֹרַחַת  
צִפּוֹרִים מֵרֹאשׁ כָּל גַּג  
מִבְּשָׂרוֹת אֶת בּוֹא הַחַג  
ט"ו בְּשִׁבַּט הֵגִיעַ חַג לְאֵילָנוֹת

*Ha'shkeidiyah porakhat, hashemesh gam zorakhat*

*Tziporim meirosh kol gag*

*mevasrot et bo hekhag*

*Tu B'Shvat higiya khag ha'ilanot*

The almond tree is blossoming, the sun is shining

The birds sing out from every rooftop

Tu B'Shvat has arrived, the Festival of the Trees.

# The Words that Come Before All Else (1)

In her essential book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer – scientist, poet, mother, Native American — calls us back into sacred relationship with Mother Earth. In here work she includes a version of the traditional thanksgiving address of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, known as “The Words that Come Before All Else.”

With deep gratitude to the bearers of this tradition, we will recite these words throughout our ritual here tonight:

Today we have gathered and when we look upon the faces around us we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now let us bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People.

Now our minds are one.

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We are thankful to our Mother the Earth, for she gives us everything that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she still continues to care for us, just as she has from the beginning of time. To our Mother, we send thanksgiving, love, and respect.

Now our minds are one.

We give thanks to all the waters of the world for quenching our thirst, for providing strength and nurturing life for all beings. We know its power in many forms – waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans, snow and ice. We are grateful that the waters are still here and meeting their responsibility to the rest of creation. Can we agree that water is important to our lives and bring our minds together as one to send greeting and thanks to the Water?

Now our minds are one.

We turn our thoughts to all of the Fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. They also give themselves to us as food. We are grateful that they continue to do their duties and we send to the Fish our greetings and our thanks.

Now our minds are one.

# Preparation

We pause now to prepare ourselves for the journey we are beginning. We stop, and breathe, and notice what we are doing, how we are feeling, what this moment is like.

By eating and drinking with *kavanah* — making our consumption an act of deep appreciation for, and connection with, the natural world — we help to heal the world from its forgetfulness.

עולם העשייה

*Olam Ha'Asiyah*  
**The World of Action**

We live in the world of *assiyah*,  
action and physicality.

This is the tangible world  
of flesh, stone, wood.

Here the spark of the Divine  
is hidden by the shell of appearance.

We live in the world of *assiyah*. This is the world of tangible physicality. Each of the Four Worlds is associated with a season and an element; this world is associated with Winter and with earth. In winter the ground is frozen, but we know it contains the life of the spirit below. The white wine or juice we drink symbolizes winter's pale light and white snow.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגָּפֶן

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,  
borei pri hagafen.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being,  
creator of the fruit of the vine.

In winter we layer ourselves in clothing, blanketing ourselves from the cold just as the earth is insulated by snow. The fruit we eat for the world of *assiyah* likewise has a protective outside and soft interior. Removing the hard shells of pomegranates, walnuts, almonds, coconuts, or pecans exposes a vulnerable inside.

Some of these fruits have special significance in Jewish tradition. Like the almond, first of the fruit trees to blossom each year in Israel. Or the walnut. Rabbi Tarfon likened the people of Israel to a pile of walnuts. If one walnut is removed, each and every walnut in the pile will be shaken. When a single Jew is shaken, every other Jew is shaken and affected. (Avot D'Rabbi Natan) Likewise, when a single species is endangered, the entire ecosystem is shaken and affected.

Or the pomegranate. In the Song of Songs we read: “Come, my beloved ... let us see... if the pomegranates are in bloom.” The Rabbis comment: “These are the children who are busy learning the Torah; they sit in rows like pomegranate seeds.” The gleaming red pomegranate seeds remind us that we, too, must be attentive to studying Torah: the Torah of our holy texts, and also the Torah of the outside world.

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The shell which conceals these fruits also protects. We know what that feels like. In the world of school, work, and everyday activity, our spiritual selves require protection and nurturing. Sometimes we wrap ourselves in a tough outer shell, to protect our feelings and our hearts.

As we eat these fruits representing *assiyah*, may we find healing in our physical lives: in our relationships with our bodies, in our strength, in all matters physical and practical, in our environment.

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of *assiyah*:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam,  
borei pri ha'etz.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being,  
creator of the fruit of the tree.

# Teachings About the Earth

Teach your children  
what we have taught our children —  
that the earth is our mother.

Whatever befalls the earth  
befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.  
If men spit upon the ground,  
they spit upon themselves.

This we know.  
The earth does not belong to us;  
we belong to the earth.

Whatever befalls the earth  
befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.  
We did not weave the web of life;  
We are merely a small strand in it.

— Chief Seattle

Every part of the vegetable world is singing a song  
and bringing forth a secret  
of the divine mystery  
of the creation.

—Rav Kook

עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה  
*Olam khessed yibaneh*

I will build this world from love  
And you must build this world from love  
And if we build this world from love  
Then God will build this world from love

(Psalm 89:3; Music and English lyrics by Rabbi Menachem Creditor)

## The Words that Come Before All Else (2)

Now we turn to the vast fields of Plant life. As far as the eye can see, the Plants grow, working many wonders. They sustain many life forms. With our minds gathered together, we give thanks and look forward to seeing Plant life for many generations to come.

Now our minds are one.

When we look about us, we see that the berries are still here, providing us with delicious foods. The leader of the berries is the strawberry, the first to ripen in the spring. Can we agree that we are grateful that the berries are with us in the world and send our thanksgiving, love, and respect to the berries?

Now our minds are one.

With one mind, we honor and thank all the Food Plants we harvest from the garden, especially the Three Sisters who feed the people with such abundance. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans, and fruit have helped the people survive. Many other living things draw strength from them as well. We gather together in our minds all the plant foods and send them a greeting and thanks.

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Now our minds are one.

Now we turn to the Medicine Herbs of the world. From the beginning they were instructed to take away sickness.

They are always waiting and ready to heal us. We are so happy that there are still among us those special few who remember how to use the plants for healing. With one mind, we send thanksgiving, love, and respect to the Medicines and the keepers of the Medicines.

Now our minds are one.

Standing around us we see all the Trees. The Earth has many families of Trees who each have their own instructions and uses. Some provide shelter and shade, others fruit and beauty and many useful gifts. The Maple is the leader of the trees, to recognize its gift of sugar when the People need it most. Many peoples of the world recognize a Tree as a symbol of peace and strength. With one mind we greet and thank the Tree life.

Now our minds are one.

# עולם היצירה

*Olam HaYetzira* — The World of Formation

We live in the world of *yetzira*:  
change, emotion, transformation.

In this world we turn clay into bricks,  
iron into plows, words into poetry.

In this sphere we celebrate  
creative power: both ours, and God's.

The world of *yetzirah* is the world of emotions and heart. In this realm we celebrate change and creativity, flux and flow. This world is associated with the season of Spring and the element of water.

To symbolize this world, we drink white wine or juice with a dash of red. This gradual deepening of color parallels the reawakening of colors in nature as the sun brings the earth back to life. In spring the sun's rays begin to thaw the frozen earth and the first flowers appear on the hillsides.

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

We add a bit of red wine or juice to the white and recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגָּפֶן

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam,  
borei pri ha'gafen.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being, creator of the fruit of the tree.

The world of *yetzirah* is connected with springtime. We eat fruits without protective shells — olives, dates, apricots, peaches and plums — to symbolize how, in spring, we will forget our protective attire and expose our soft bodies to the sun.

Still, these fruits contain pits, reminding us that we may still have hardness around our hearts. Despite the wondrous expressions of our spirit, each of us is still tied to the hard stone of ego. We still feel the need to protect what makes us vulnerable.

Like the nuts we ate in the world of *assiyah*, some of these fruits have special significance in Jewish tradition. For instance, the olive. The olive tree is a sign of hope that, despite the enormity of destruction, life can be restored. When the great flood began to subside, Noah sent out a dove. “The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a leaf it had picked from an olive tree.”

(Genesis 8:11).

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As we eat the fruit of *yetzirah*, may our hearts be open to the feelings and needs of ourselves and others, allowing the warmth of our care to extend to the whole the world.

May we find healing in the realm of emotions; may we find healing in our hearts.

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of *yetzirah*:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָעֵץ

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,  
borei pri ha'etz.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being,  
creator of the fruit of the tree.

## **A teaching from the Hindu tradition**

Have a look at these great blessed trees, who live only for the welfare of others, themselves facing the severity of stormy winds, heavy showers, heat and snow, all the while protecting us from them. The birth of trees is the most blessed in the world, as they contribute unreservedly to the well-being of all creatures. Just as no needy person ever returns disappointed from the house of a benevolent individual, similarly do these trees do for those who approach them for shelter. All of their many parts - leaves, flowers, fruits, shadow, roots, bark, wood and fragrance, are useful to others... A tree does not withdraw its cooling shade even from the one who has come to cut it.

—Bhagavata Purana 10.22.32-35



צִדִּיק כַּתְּמָר יִפְרַח, כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבָּנוֹן יִשְׁגֶּה

*Tzadik katamar yifrakh, k'erez balvanon yisgeh*

The righteous blossom like a date palm

They flourish like a cedar in Lebanon

(Psalm 92:13)

## **The Words that Come Before All Else (3)**

We gather our minds together to send our greetings and thanks to all the beautiful animal life of the world, who walk about with us. They have many things to teach us as people. We are grateful that they continue to share their lives with us and hope that it will always be so.

Let us put our minds together as one and send our thanks to the Animals.

Now our minds are one.

We put our minds together as one and thank all the birds who move and fly about over our heads. The Creator gave them the gift of beautiful songs. Each morning they greet the day and with their songs remind us to enjoy and appreciate life. The Eagle was chosen to be their leader and to watch over the world. To all the Birds, from the smallest to the largest, we send our joyful greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.

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We are all thankful for the powers we know as the Four Winds. We hear their voices in the moving air as they refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help to bring the change of seasons. From the four directions they come, bringing us messages and giving us strength. With one mind we send our greetings and thanks to the Four Winds.

Now our minds are one.

Now we turn to the west where our grandfathers the Thunder Beings live. With lightning and thundering voices they bring with them the water that renews life. We bring our minds together as one to send greeting and thanks to our Grandfathers, the Thunderers.

Now our minds are one.

עולם הבריאה  
*Olam HaBriyah*  
The World of Creation

We live in the world of *Briyah*:  
air, thought, contemplation.

We recall the words of Genesis:  
“Adonai formed a human from the dust  
of the Earth, and blew into its nostrils  
the breath of life, and the human

became a living being...placed  
in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and protect it.”

The world of *briyah* is the ethereal realm of thought;  
it is associated with the season of Summer  
and the element of air.

One name for God is “The Breath of Life.” We breathe out  
what the trees breathe in; God breathes in us and through  
us. Briyah is the world of the holy breath of creation.

In the world of *briyah*, we drink red wine or juice 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.

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We add a bit of white wine or juice to the red  
and recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגָּפֶן

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,  
borei pri hagafen.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being,  
creator of the fruit of the vine.

We eat soft fruits to remind ourselves to relinquish both our shells and the stones we carry inside us. In our deepest relationships, may we be like the fruit of briyah, with no inner shell and no outer facade.

Some of the fruits we eat now, too, have special significance in Jewish tradition. The fig is mentioned in the Bible sixteen times, together with the vine, as the most important fruit of the Land of Israel. In Torah the fig symbolizes an era of peace and security. The rabbis asked, “Why were the words of Torah compared to the fig tree?” They answered, “Since all the figs do not ripen at the same time, the more one searches the tree, the more figs one finds in it.” So it is with the words of the Torah — the more we study them, the more sweet morsels we find.

A Talmudic story is told about Honi, who encountered an old man who was planting a tiny sapling. Honi laughed. “Foolish man,” he said, “do you think you will still be alive to eat the fruit of this tree?” 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.”

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As we eat the fruits representing *briyah*,  
may we find healing in our intellectual lives: in our minds,  
in our thoughts, in the heat of passionate argument and  
the light of brilliant insight.

We recite together the blessing for the fruits of *briyah*:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָעֵץ

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,  
borei pri ha'etz.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being,  
creator of the fruit of the tree.

## **The Poets Say...**

**I have come to terms with the future:  
From this day onward I will walk  
easy on the earth. Plant trees. Kill  
no living things. Live in harmony with  
all creatures. I will restore the earth  
where I am. Use no more of its resources  
than I need. And listen, listen to what  
it is telling me.**

**— M.J. Slim Hooley**

**Let the trees be consulted  
before you take any action  
every time you breathe in  
thank a tree...**

**— John Wright**

אֲדָמָה וְשָׁמַיִם, חוֹם הָאֵשׁ וְצִלְלֵי הַמַּיִם  
אֲנִי מַרְגִּישׁ זֹאת בְּגוּפִי בְרוּחִי וּבְנִשְׁמָתִי

*Adamah v'shamayim, khom ha'eish, u'tzlil hamayim  
Ani margish zot begufi, berukhi, uv'nishmati.*

*Heya, heya, heya, heya heya, heya, heya, ho (2x)*

Love the earth, love the sky, heat of fire, sound of water  
I can feel it in my body, in my spirit, in my soul

*Heya, heya, heya, heya heya, heya, heya, ho (2x)*

(Original chant by Tony Wrench; adapted at the Rainbow Gathering;  
translated into Hebrew by Shimon Lev Tahor.)

## **The Words that Come Before All Else (4)**

**We now send greetings and thanks to our eldest brother the Sun. Each day without fail he travels the sky from east to west, bringing the light of a new day. He is the source of all the fires of life. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Brother, the Sun.**

**Now our minds are one.**

**We put our minds together and give thanks to our oldest grandmother, the Moon, who lights the nighttime sky. She is the leader of women all over the world and she governs the movements of the ocean tides. By her changing face we measure time and it is the Moon who watches over the arrival of children here on Earth. Let us gather our thanks for Grandmother Moon together in a pile, layer upon layer of gratitude, and then joyfully fling that pile of thanks high into the night sky that she will know. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon.**

**Now our minds are one.**

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We give thanks to the Stars who are spread across the sky like jewelry. We see them at night, helping the Moon to light the darkness and bringing dew to the gardens and growing things. When we travel at night, they guide us home. With our minds gathered as one, we send greetings and thank to all the Stars.

Now our minds are one.

We gather our minds to greet and thank the enlightened Teachers who have come to help throughout the ages. When we forget how to live in harmony, they remind us of the way we were instructed to live as people. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to these caring Teachers.

Now our minds are one.

עולם האצילות  
*Olam Ha'atzilut*  
The World of Essence

We live in the world of *atzilut*,  
essence, divine emanation.

Physics tells us that what seems solid  
is actually filled with impossibly small spaces.

Atzilut affirms this knowing: what seems  
like creation is actually just God.

The world of *atzilut* is the world of essence and spirit. This  
world is associated with the season of Fall and the element  
of fire. This is the world of that which is intangible.

To represent *atzilut*, we drink deep red wine or juice. The  
pure red liquid represents the full bloom of nature before  
the cold winter. As nature expends its last bit of energy in  
an explosion of colorful leaves, a full cycle is completed.

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As we drink the fourth cup of pure red wine or juice,  
may we become strong, like healthy trees, with solid  
roots in the ground and with our arms open to the love  
that surrounds us.

We take up a cup of red wine or juice  
and recite together:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגָּפֶן

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,  
borei pri hagafen.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of all being,  
creator of the fruit of the vine.

In the world of *atzilut* we eat no fruit, for this world cannot be represented by any fruit. In this spiritual world, we become aware of God's love, mercy, and wisdom perceived with our hearts, not our senses. Our hearts are full and we praise the Source that renews all creation.

כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּיָהּ

*Kol haneshamah t'hallel Yah, Halleluyah*

Let every living thing Yah's praises sing, Halleluyah.

(Psalm 150)

The Four Worlds (Action, Emotion, Thought, and Spirit) are each nested inside each of the others. We live in all four realms at once. Sometimes we have hard shells, like the nuts of *assiyah*. Sometimes we have a rock inside us, like the stone fruits of *yetzirah*. Sometimes we are soft all the way through, like the fruits of *briyah*. And sometimes we are so connected with the Holy One of Blessing that we melt beyond our bodies altogether, living in *atzilut*. May we find blessing in each of these four ways of being, each of these four seasons, each of these four worlds.

# **A Prayer of Reb Nachman of Bratzlav:**

Master of the Universe, 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 Lord, and lift up my hands to You in worship, on my behalf, and that of my children!

May it be Your will, O God of our ancestors, that through our eating of the fruits You have created, the trees be filled with the glory of their ability to renew themselves for new blossoming, from the start of the year to its end, so that our lives too will be renewed and filled with goodness, blessings, and peace.

יַעֲלוֹז שְׂדֵי וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ  
אֲז יִרְנְנוּ כָּל־עֵצֵי־יַעַר

*Ya'aloz sadai v'khol asher bo  
Az y'ran'nu kol atzei ya'ar*

The fields and all they contain will exult;  
then all the trees of the forest will shout for joy.

(Psalm 96:12, melody by Nava Tehila)

## The Words that Come Before All Else (5)

We now turn our thoughts to the Creator, or Great Spirit, and send greetings and thanks for all the gifts of creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on Mother Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator.

Now our minds are one.

We have now arrived at the place where we end our words.

Of all the things we have named, it is not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way.

And now our minds are one.

צֵאתְכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם

Go in Peace