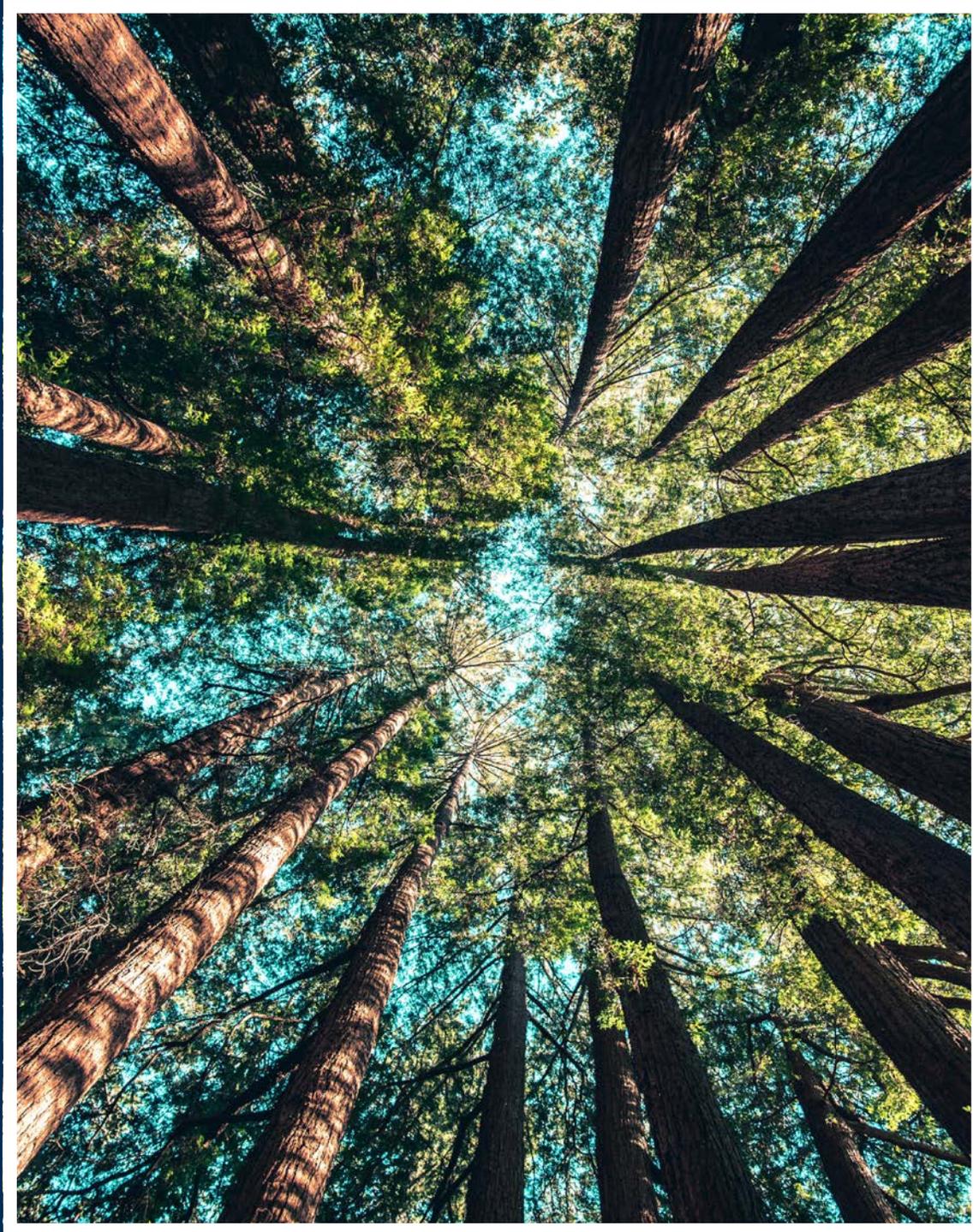


The Tree Book

Jewish National Fund-USA's
Tu BiShvat Anthology 2022 – 5782



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Table Of Contents

Introduction

Rabbi Craig Axler - National Chair, Rabbis for Israel

Section I: Judaism and The Environment

06 Most Profound of Jewish Holidays

Rabbi Carnie Rose

08 The Greatest Gift is To Plant Now

Rabbi Moshe Schwartz

10 Give a Bnai Mitzvah a Tree!

Rabbi Donald B. Rossoff

14 An Ancient Responsibility, Made
New Again

Rabbi Jonathan A. Schnitzer

16 The Liturgy of Tu BiShvat

Rabbi Shawn Zell

Section II: Guardians of the Earth

20 Plant the Sapling First Etz

Rabbi James Gibson

22 Haim – A Tree of Life The

Rabbi Ilana B. Grinblatt

24 Forest and The Trees

Rabbi Leor Sinai

26 The Sanctification of Wonder

Rabbi David Wolpe

Section III: Caretakers of The Land and People of Israel

30 The Dwelling Place of Prophets 32

Rabbi Alfredo Borodowski

Our Diversity Makes Us Stronger 34 A

Aya Benzimra

Sacred Trust

Rabbi Michael Cohen

36 God's Partners In Repairing The World Rabbi Yossi Kahana

38 The Echoes of Hope

Rabbi Lester Polonsky



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Shalom Chevrei!

The first time I remember celebrating Tu BiSh'vat in a robust way was when I was a freshman in college. I had made a connection with our small, local congregation who teamed up with another congregation in New York's Hudson Valley for an annual tradition, an adult-oriented, spiritual Tu BiSh'vat seder. This was not the seder I had experienced in my childhood synagogue, one where we tasted different fruits, dried and fresh and heard the story of Honi and the carob tree. Not that there was anything wrong with that seder. It's just that when I first gathered with a group of adults to sit in a circle and give full and spiritual appreciation for the role that trees play in our lives, literal and metaphoric, deep and spiritual – this tradition became something completely different for me. I will never forget a grizzled old hippie staring intensely at each participant and inviting us to share our connection to a particular tree that was special to us. I had never really considered my own connection to any one specific tree, but as I listened to seasoned participants share their meaningful and loving relationships, it began to make sense to me that this question was one worth serious consideration and spiritual thought. I honestly don't remember my answer at that moment, but I do remember a shift in the way that I connected my Judaism to the natural world around me.

It was two years later that I lived and volunteered on Kibbutz Tzora while engaged in an undergraduate year program at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem. Most of my work was in the fields, harvesting countless avocados, trimming and tying grape vines and pruning acres of almond trees before the winter. Out in the fields by 5 am, I felt both a kinship with the Zionist pioneers whose history I was learning and a mystical connection to these fields that my kibbutz mentors regarded on a deeply personal and spiritual (albeit, secular) basis. Charlie, who oversaw the avocados, called out "careful not to bruise my fruit" when we were too rough with the harvest – and I am fairly sure he felt every knock and jostle in a physical way. When I had a minor "incident" driving a tractor through the grape vines, the boss who had planted them with his own hands felt the vines torn from his soul. I will never forget walking out to the almond groves on the day of Tu BiSh'vat. I had spent so many months pruning these majestic beauties and wanted to see if the pioneer's song really was true – HaShekeydiah Porachat, the almond trees blossom precisely on Tu BiSh'vat. As a friend and I rounded the corner approaching the groves, we were struck by the powerful aroma of millions of almond buds simultaneously assaulting our sense of smell, and then by the vision of "snow-covered" hills of white and pink trees.

On subsequent trips to Israel, it would become more and more apparent to me just how personally connected to the trees of the Land of Israel one becomes the deeper and deeper one falls in love with this soil. Average Israelis of every religious observance can be counted upon to know way more about the flora of their land than most of my peers growing up ever knew about the varieties of trees and flowers around suburban Philadelphia.

A few years ago, I was leading a congregational tour of Israel in the weeks leading up to Pesach. Pausing just outside the gates of an ancient archaeological site, I noticed a row of pristine pomegranate trees in their early flower stage, when it is completely clear just what special juicy fruits are growing on these trees. We paused to say Birkat Hallanot – the blessing formula for seeing a fruit tree in blossom during that particular season, traditionally from the first of Nissan. And these words, seemingly clumsy in their specificity, made even more sense: Blessed are You... Who has created a world which lacks nothing, Creating within it good creatures and pleasant trees, so that humanity would beautify themselves through them.

Rabbi Craig Axler
National Chair, Rabbis For Israel
Tu Bishvat 5782

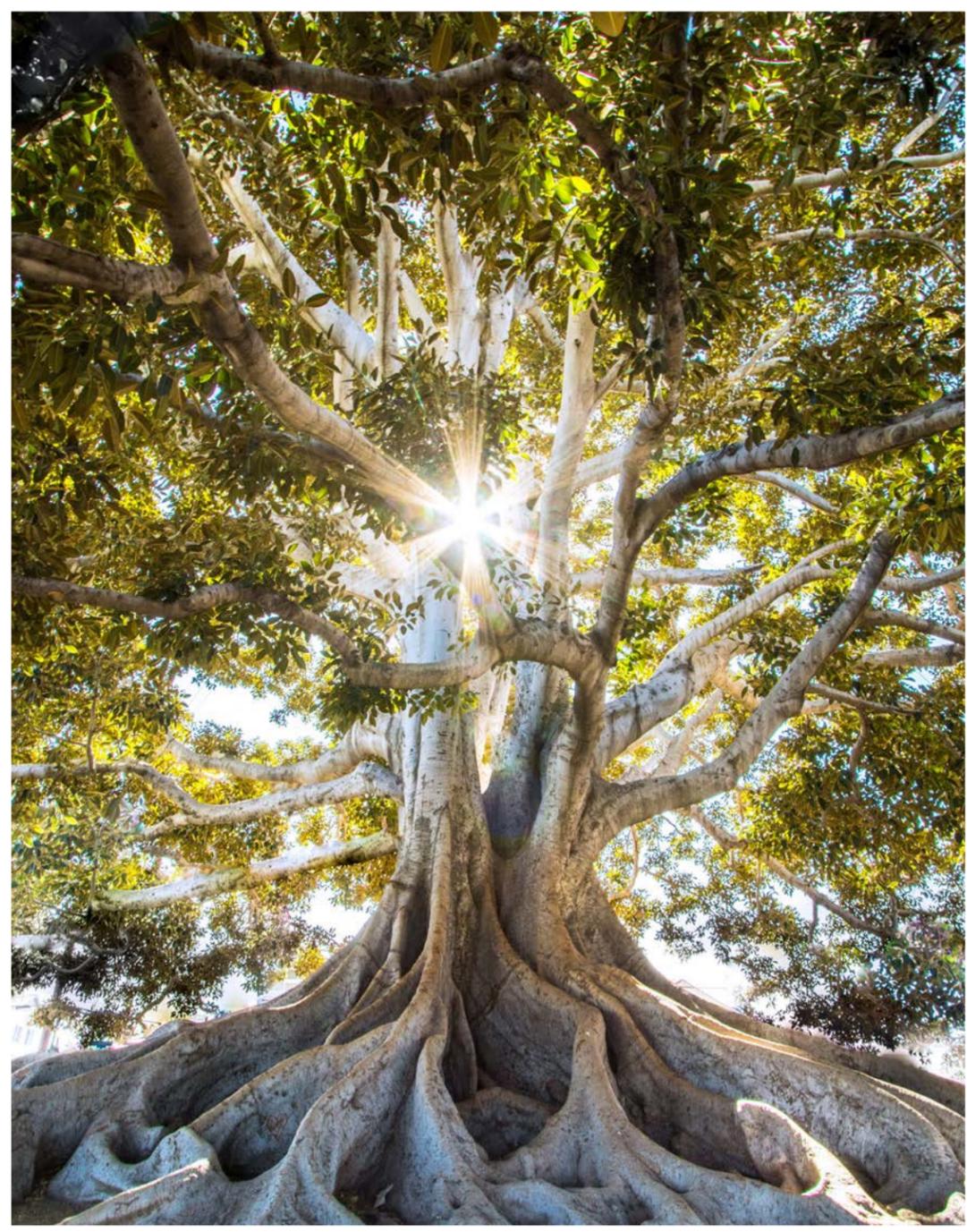
Rabbi Craig Axler currently serves as the national chair of JNF-USA's Rabbis for Israel cohort. He is the rabbi of Temple Isaiah in Fulton, Maryland. Currently, his favorite tree is the Black Turkey Fig tree he planted in his back yard five years ago which had a truly productive year of luscious, juicy and sweet figs this year, reminding him of eating figs straight from the tree throughout the North of Israel.

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Section I

Judaism and The Environment



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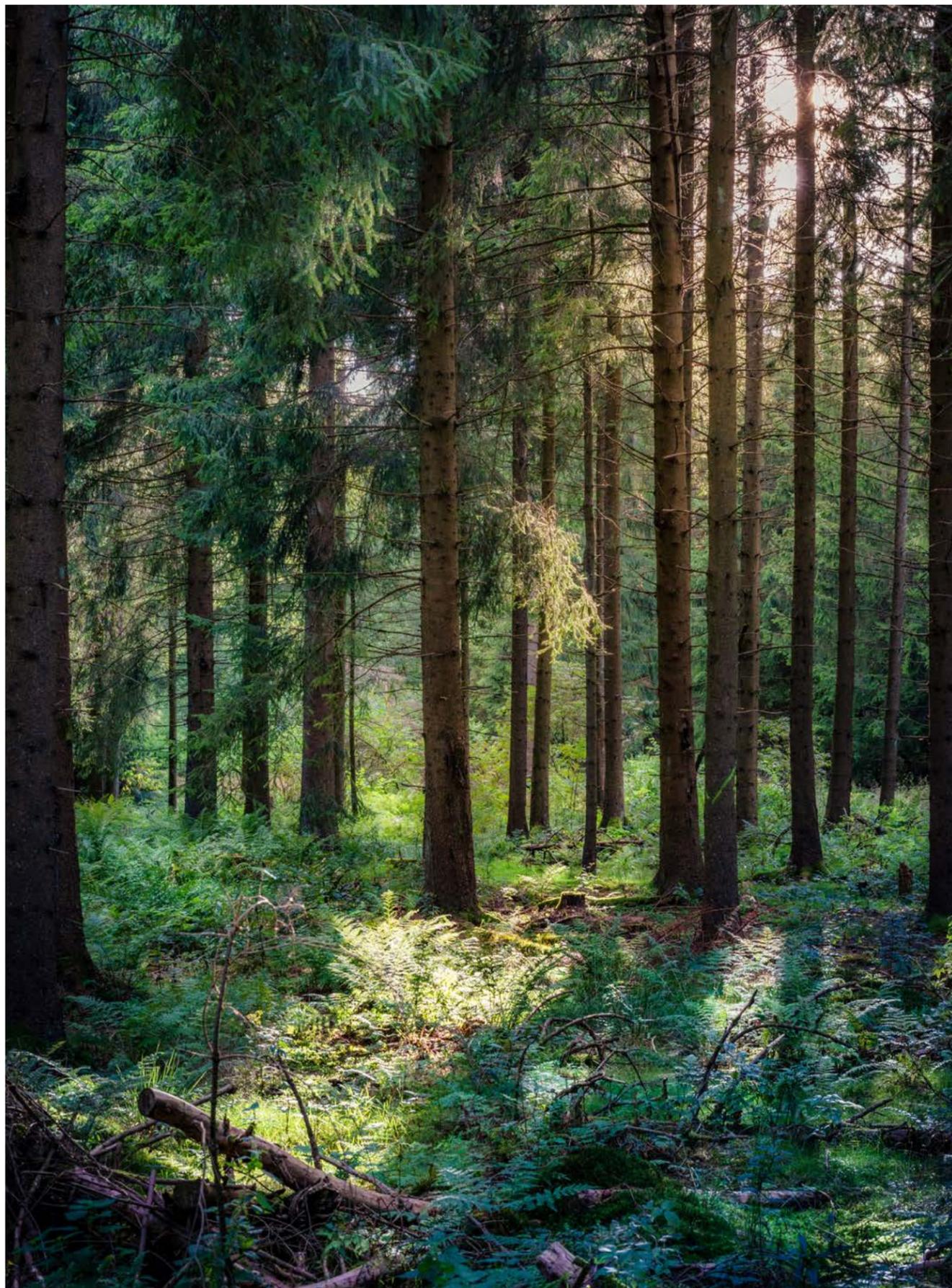
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The Most Profound of Jewish Holidays

Yedidim/Yedidot Yekarim VeYekarot
(Dearest Friends) – Shalom!

My teacher and cousin, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach (Z”L), once said that it is quite easy to tell which are the most profound Jewish Holidays. They are, he suggested, the ones that are observed by the smallest number of individuals. His statement is not only poignant, but it is also tremendously accurate - especially as it relates to the holiday which we will celebrate in just a few days, Tu BeShevat – The New Year of Trees. Sadly enough, for the most part, this day passes annually without much notice and without much recognition.

Now, we might believe that the reason the observance of this day has disappeared from our individual and communal radar screens has something to do with the fact that it is anachronistic and antiquated. Maybe its messages are no longer relevant? Perhaps Tu Beshvat no longer speaks to us in the way it spoke to past generations of Jews? After all, we are living in postmodern times. We are “more evolved” and “more sophisticated”. We know far more about the world around us than our ancients could ever have hoped to know.

Rabbi Carnie Rose

Rabbi, Carnie Shalom Rose, has lived, studied, trained and taught throughout the world - including stints in Canada, the USA, Israel, the Far East, and Europe. He is married to Pauline and they have four wonderful children - "The RoseBuds", Noa, Zakai, Lev & Ellior.

Over the years, Rabbi Rose has received many awards, honors and recognitions for his dedication and service. In 2010, he signed a "lifetime" contract with Congregation B'nai Amoona and was named the synagogue's Rabbi Bernard Lipnick (Z'L) Senior Rabbinic Chair; a particularly poignant and fitting honor as Rabbi Lipnick served as a significant mentor and role model to Rabbi Rose.

I think not! In fact, Tu B'Shevat may be even more relevant today than ever before in our history. So why and how is it that Tu BeShevat goes unnoticed and unrecognized by so many of us?

I think there are several layers to this mystery. First, the holiday of Tu BeShevat is not mentioned in the corpus of the Torah itself. It is mentioned only later in the Mishnah (c. 200 CE), and despite the fact that Judaism, as we know it today, is a Rabbinic religion (established by the Rabbinic Sages), the fact that it is not mentioned in the Bible may have contributed to its relegation to a “tier 2” holiday in the minds of some Jews.

Second, though the holiday is mentioned in the Mishnah, no specific ritual observances are mentioned in connection with this day. And as we all know, disembodied religion (religion sans ritual) has little if any ability to maintain viability.

Finally, Tu BeShevat seems to have been observed most fastidiously by two groups of Jews—Sephardim & Kabbalists (mystics). And clearly, most of us are neither Sephardic nor are we initiates in the esoteric mystical traditions of our people. Hence, the holiday seems to have fallen out of favor—at least for the majority of Ashkenazi Diaspora Jews.

Two brief examples, which I hope, will wet your appetite for additional exploration:

1) The Rabbi of Ger taught: Tu BeShevat is a special time. It is the season when we are called upon to pay heed and provide care for the trees. We tend to them and hope they will imbibe and absorb the nutrients that we lovingly provide for them. So too, is it a special time for the human to absorb the teachings of the Torah, which are nourishment to the soul. Tu BeShevat calls on us to open ourselves up anew to absorbing the waters of Torah and, in this way, become refreshed and renewed.

2) The Bialer Rebbe taught: The strength of the tree is in its roots. Without these roots, the tree cannot flourish—it cannot survive. So too, it is for the Jewish People. We must have strong roots. And these roots bind us not only to the past, but also to one another. When together we celebrate Tu BeShevat, we join our roots to the roots of the primordial tree—the quarry from which all souls are hewn.

As we grow and deepen as individuals and as an Am Kadosh (Holy Community), I pray that we will together merit to celebrate this beautiful and profound holiday. May this be God's will - and our own! Amen!

THE GREATEST GIFT IS TO PLANT NOW

Rabbi Moshe Schwartz

Rabbi Moshe Schwartz is Head of School and Rabbi Alex Salzberg is Service Learning Coordinator and a member of the Middle School Judaics faculty at Krieger Schechter Day School of Chizuk Amuno Congregation in Pikesville, Maryland. Rabbi Schwartz is also a member of Rabbis for Israel through JNF-USA.

How rare is it that a Jewish holiday that dates back to Mishnaic times and an American holiday first legislated in 1983 (making the third Monday in January a federal holiday) fall out on the same day this year? At first blush they seem to have nothing in common. The latter marks one of four Jewish New Year's and its celebration is tied to the agricultural cycle in the land of Israel. The former commemorates the life, legacy and teachings of civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Yet, both share the message of great potential — we plant seeds for the future, seeds for positive change, even if we don't see the full results in the present.

It feels almost ironic and counterintuitive in the U.S. to think about planting during one of the coldest, darkest months of the year. However, Tu B'Shevat (the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat) has never been solely about the enjoyment of trees. It is about appreciating the past, present, and future of the natural world. This appreciation has taken on new meaning in contemporary times because of our awareness of climate change and the need to nurture nature.

We plant now as a gift to future generations, knowing that we likely will not be able to enjoy the fruits ourselves.

Recall the great Talmudic story of the 1st century BCE scholar Choni Hama'agel (Choni The Circle Maker) who once encountered an old man planting a carob tree. The man told Choni that it would take 70 years before it bore fruit. Incredulous, Choni asked why the person would plant if he knew that the tree would not bear fruit in his lifetime. The man answered, "I found carob trees bearing fruit in my lifetime and I will plant trees for future generations to enjoy."

The federal holiday known as MLK Day, commemorates the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We reflect upon and recall the work of a legendary civil rights leader and the movement to effect change in our society. In many communities, including ours, MLK Day has become a day of service and volunteerism.

The challenges Dr. King sought to address such as injustice, hatred, bigotry, and racial bias are enormous. It would have been easy to become overwhelmed and give up, but he did not. Although Dr. King and many of his generation did not live to see the change, they laid the foundation for future generations to both reap the fruit of their work and also plant their own trees.

While the 2 holidays seem disconnected, we see both as involving small, very local acts that plant seeds we hope will yield fruit—literal and metaphorical—in the future. As these two holidays come together this year they serve as a reminder and powerful calling to us personally, as day educators, and to all who are committed to social justice, civil rights and societal change, that we need to keep planting seeds for the future! Even if we don't see the results in our generation we heed the words of Rabbi Tarfon who taught: "It is not one's duty to finish the work, but neither is one at liberty to desist from it."

Here at Krieger Schechter Day School, we started "Bunches of Lunches." Our program started small, in partnership with Jewish Volunteer Connection, producing about 50 lunches, monthly for those in need.

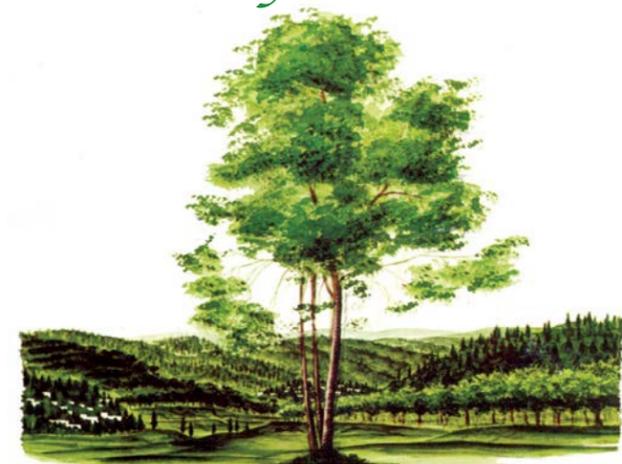
Six years later, our program has expanded to where we collect roughly 1,000 lunches bi-monthly at our location. In addition, we have inspired other community institutions to join in our efforts so that the collection happens weekly in multiple locations.

Tu B'Shevat and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day are time markers of potential, celebrating small achievements and long-term growth. The impact of small successes can be felt even if the ultimate goal is not yet achieved. Using the story of Choni and the holiday of Tu B'Shevat as our Jewish lens, we are yet again reminded that the work of Dr. King and the entire Civil Rights movement remains unfinished. It falls on us to continue it for our sake and that of future generations.





Trees for Israel



כִּי תָבוֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ הַנְּטוּעִים (ויקרא י"ג ב')
"When you shall come to the land you shall plant trees." – Leviticus 19:23

A Ring Of Trees Has Been Planted in Israel In
Honor of Eugene Madison.
On the Occasion of his Bar mitzvah.
With Love Bubby



GIVE A BNAI MITZVAH A TREE!

Give a Bar/Bat Mitzvah a tree and you give them everything!

Just about every weekend I officiated at the services in which boys and girls are initiated into Jewish adulthood (well, almost, give or take around ten years or so) by becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah. I wanted to be able to give each youngster something a bit personal, a lot meaningful, and not too costly.

My brilliant solution: plant a tree in honor of each child and present the certificate as part of the service.

At the time, I did not know how very meaningful that would become. The trees really grew on me. For as time went on, I found more and more ways to connect the idea of planting a tree in the Land of Israel with the young person standing before me. The tree and the child had much in common, and there was so much confluence between the symbolism and inherent hopes of becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and that of planting the tree. And if the connections did not speak to a particular child, I had a fair chance of something resonating with the parents, for whom this is usually more of a life cycle event than for their child anyway.

ROOTS GROW DEEP

Like the tree, this youngster has roots in Jewish soil. Roots speak of family and tradition, of individuals who sacrificed, who inspired, who loved and who hoped and whose hopes are

in many ways realized in the young person affirming an allegiance, if not love, of Torah, of Judaism and the Jewish people. Even those who are products of mixed marriages can often be brought to appreciate that their roots from the non-Jewish family bequeath to them: perhaps a heritage of religious commitment and/or the value of living life with spiritual and ethical faithfulness.

But we grow our own roots as well. Having one's roots continue to grow in Jewish soil speaks of the need to continue to develop and grow as a Jew by furthering one's Jewish education. The child has presumably mastered the skills necessary to stand before the congregation and lead them in prayer and enough familiarity with at least their own Torah/haphtarach portions so as to speak intelligently about its meaning for him/herself and for the rest of us. But what one understands and can understand at age 13 does not adequately prepare an individual for the opportunities and difficulties which life will present as a teen, young adult or adult. When the storms of life would threaten to overpower, it is only that tree, and that individual, which has deepened its roots will be able to stand erect through the difficult times. Thirteen year olds who stop learning and growing as Jews often remain immature Jews their entire lives, and have little to draw

Rabbi Donald B. Rossoff, RJE
Rabbi Donald Rossoff is the Rabbi Emeritus of Temple B'nai Or in Morristown, New Jersey.

on when the difficult questions arise. The tree that stops growing dies. The Torah IS our Tree of Life!

BRANCHES REACH OUT

As the tree grows, it's branches stretch out towards the sun, reaching out for the highest. For the tree, the sun is the source of warmth, light, and the energy of life. We, too, reach out for the Highest our own Source of warmth, spiritual light and the energy of life. We call that Source by many names, Adonai, God, the Most High, and sometimes we don't even give it a name. Like the tree, which has no language, no word for "sun," but is drawn to it nevertheless, we just sense that It is there. Some of us find our connection with that Source by looking into ourselves. Some of us find it by looking beyond ourselves. Some of us connect best in the sanctuary, some in the forest. Some of do all of the latter, finding that energy above, around and within which connects us to each other and to all that is.

It is the flow between the roots and branches, which gives the tree life. It is the ever-changing flow between our roots what we received from those before us and what we have learned for ourselves and our branches our aspirations and personal connections with God which feeds our lives as Jews.

SPREADING FRUIT

Trees grow fruit. Through its fruit,



AN ANCIENT RESPONSIBILITY, MADE NEW AGAIN

Rabbi Jonathan A. Schnitzer
Rabbi Jonathan A. Schnitzer is the Rabbi
Emertius of B'nai Israel Congregation, in
Rockville Maryland.

Tu BiShvat is a distinctive moment of the Jewish year. In the Talmud, the school of Beit Hillel suggests that Tu BiShvat, the 15th day of the month of Shevat, is the new year's day for trees. Rabbi Elazar explains that Shevat was chosen, because, in Israel, most of the annual winter rain falls by that date and the sap has begun to rise in the trees. The word "Tu" is the numerical Hebrew equivalent of 15.

We need to remember that our ancestors were deeply immersed in the world of nature. The rhythms of the year were significant to them. Tu BiShvat marked a time, therefore, when they were especially aware of the miracles that are part of life: winter passes, spring emerges, the seasons alternate in a regular pattern and trees are a highly visible aspect of that process.

Even when most Jews no longer lived in the land of Israel, Tu BiShvat was still observed. For Jews, throughout the world, it became an expression of attachment to Eretz Yisrael. In some Ashkenazic communities, a custom arose to eat 15 types of fruit on this day. Considerable efforts were often made to obtain various fruits, which are grown in Israel.

The Kabbalists who settled in the city of Sefed in the 16th century developed a new practice: a Seder for Tu BiShvat. Modeled on the Passover Seder, this Tu BiShvat ritual followed a prescribed order of eating and the drinking of four cups of wine. How delightful it is that the celebration of the Tu BiShvat Seder has experienced a revival in our era.

In the 20th century, with the return of large numbers of Jews to Eretz Yisrael,

Tu BiShvat assumed a new dimension. Jewish National Fund, responsible for changing the barren hillsides into forests, arranged for massive tree plantings on Tu BiShvat. Jews in the Diaspora- outside of Israel- were urged to provide for the purchase of such trees. Through these efforts, more than 250 million trees have been planted in giant reforestation projects. Much of the land of Israel is now green and lush- although recent arson fires have had a devastating impact. Our support of Jewish National Fund remains a very tangible and pragmatic way in which to communicate our love for the land of Israel and our concern for its well being.

But there are also other contemporary implications, which deserve our consideration on Tu BiShvat. In this era of global environmental threats such as the "greenhouse effect," the solid-waste crisis, oil slicks and the pollution of our water and foods by pesticides, Tu BiShvat reminds us how fragile and complex our ecosystem really is.

The Torah teaches us that, in the midst of besieging a city during war, an army is forbidden to destroy its trees. The rabbis took this idea and expanded it formulating a concept called "Bal Tashheet." Protecting the natural world becomes both a legal and ethical imperative. If an enemy's trees were to be preserved in time of war, how much more so the earth, the water and the air in time of peace!

Our tradition has a message to give us about the environment. On Tu BiShvat we need to focus on those teachings and the way in which they can sustain and enhance our world.

As daylight hours now perceptibly lengthen, as the earth slowly re-awakens, as we project ahead towards spring and summer, Tu B'Shevat challenges us to turn our attention to the Mitzvah of preserving the divine gift of nature.

There is a poignant Midrash, which captures that theme:

"When God created the first human being and placed him in the Garden of Eden to inspect the trees, God admonished him in the following way:

"Look how lovely and extraordinary my work has turned out to be! Please note that everything I've created is for you. Therefore, consider this responsibility carefully- and do not damage or destroy my world for if you do, there is no way to repair it after you!" (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:13)

Joyce Kilmer put it slightly differently, but equally effectively:

"I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
Against the earth's sweet flowing
breast;
A tree that looks at God all day
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree."

As we celebrate Tu BiShvat, may we feel joy in the beauty of nature all around us and responsibility for ensuring that future generations will also experience that same privilege!



the tree gives nourishment to other living things and spreads its influence beyond itself. The deeds of our lives, especially the mitzvot bein adam l'chavero (Jewish deeds of goodness towards others and God's creation) which we perform are the fruits of our lives. We hope that the fruits of our hands, like the fruits of the tree, are sweet and beautiful, bringing joy and comfort, perhaps even justice and peace. By what we say and how we say it, by what we do and the way we do it, we make a difference to other people and to the world.

A tree, which by chance bears no fruit, will live its life, however long, but will have little influence on the future. A tree with many fruits can influence the future for more generations than we can imagine. And so it is with us.

JEWISH FAMILY CONNECTION

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah day of our students is important to them, their families, friends and congregations. But it is also an important day in the life of the Jewish People. To me, giving a tree is like giving a gift on behalf of Am Yisrael, our extended Jewish

family, which rejoices in the student's accomplishments. No matter where they go or what they do, they will, if they choose, always have a connection with the Jewish people and with Jewish people wherever they live, here, in Israel, and throughout the world.

It is true that thirteen year olds generally do not have the abstract thinking ability to understand the concept of "the Jewish people," at least not as we adults do. "Jewish people" they know. But the idea of "the Jewish people," that corporate meta-

mishpacha which includes all Jews who were, are, and will ever be, here, there and everywhere ("You are standing here this day, all of you..."), that is a bit beyond them. Still, the tree, or at least the certificate, is something concrete which one, if one tries, can visualize and think of as real. It is a physical connection to an abstract ideal.

Along with tree, we give certificates from NFTY and our local Jewish Federation for teen trips to Israel. We express our hope that in a few short years, they will be able to go to Israel themselves, feel a part of the Jewish

people alive in its own land, and plant a tree with their very own hands.

PLANTING FOR THE FUTURE

Planting a tree is an act of faith and hope for the future. We plant today to build for tomorrow. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah tree is given not only in a deep sense of pride and joy felt in the moment, but with the highest expectations for the future as well. The Jewish People have a stake in this young person and his/her continued Jewish connection and commitment. That day, they link themselves in faith

and in fate to Judaism and our People.

Do they understand? Do they get it? Some do, some don't, and some only do later. For me, it is my way of planting seeds, seeds, which I hope to nourish and nurture as time goes on. It is my hope to see each of these young people grow into Jewish adults, people whose Jewish lives will truly be a blessing.

So give a kid a tree, for when you do, you are giving him or her a symbol of what it means to live the life of a spiritually awake, morally involved and joyously serious Jew.

THE LITURGY OF TU BISHVAT

Rabbi Shawn B. Zell

Rabbi Shawn B. Zell is a 1981 graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the training ground for conservative rabbis. He has been the spiritual leader of Tiferet Israel since 2006



Quite frankly, I'm surprised. Given Judaism's track record of being able to borrow from the outside world, add a Yiddish Ta'am (a Jewish flavor) and claim it for its own, I'm surprised that such a tradition, for whatever reason, didn't take root as far as Bishvat. If a braided Polish loaf of bread can take shape and become Challah (all that's needed is for a Bracha LeHaFrish Challah to be made over some separated kneaded dough), if a procrustean bed can serve as a symbol of Sodomite hospitality or lack thereof, if the Moldau can inspire enough hope so that it becomes the basis for Hatikvah, Israel's national anthem, then it's beyond me, why Judaism thought it would be going out on a limb come Tu BiShvat if it "borrowed" stories from the outside world.

Can you imagine the wealth of literature that would be ours for the recounting, if our tradition approached Tu BiShvat the same way it did cooking (stuffed cabbage taken from the Ukraine) or dress (shtreimel fur lined hat from Poland)?

Thank to the complete Hans C. Andersen what follows is just one Tu BiShvat story that could have been....

The Nafuach Tapuach The apple swollen with Pride (based on the story

The Conceited Apple Branch).

One upon a time, a great Rabbi was walking past a most beautiful apple tree. After reciting the Bracha Baruch... Ha'Olam Sheh Kacha Lo Ba'olamo, the Rabbi noticed an apple tree branch covered with delicate pink blossoms laying on the ground. Overcome by its beauty, the Rabbi picked up the branch, brought it home, and gave it to his rebbetzin, who promptly placed it in a vase. Realizing that this was the home of a great Rabbi and very much aware of its own natural beauty, the apple branch couldn't help but think a great deal of itself. What's more, the apple branch began to look down on other plants and flowers, especially the dandelion. "Nebech," said the apple branch. "It's not the dandelion's fault that it has such an ugly name (dandelion, like its Hebrew equivalent means lion's tooth). But its taste? Gevalt! So bitter! Not sweet like mine. No wonder it's a mere weed!" And just as it was feeling so smug and self-righteous, a poor Jew entered the home of the esteemed Rabbi: He had with him his three year old son, who was quite ill. Since the Rabbi was well versed in a variety of fields including medicine, the poor Jew turned to the Rabbi for help. "Esteemed Rabbi," said the poor Jew. "Please help my son! A neighbor said that if we fed him

applesauce he'd get better. But look at the poor boy!" After examining the child, the Rabbi exclaimed: "Applesauce! Applesauce is of no avail! All the apples in the world won't help him. But I'll tell you what will. Juice from a dandelion!" And with that, the Rabbi left the room only to return a moment later carrying a bunch of dandelions. Squeezing the dandelions gently, the Rabbi collected the juice in a glass, which he then gave to the child to drink. Almost immediately, the child's health returned to him. And the apple branch? The apple branch realized that Ha Shem had blessed this lowly, ugly named, bitter tasting flower in His own way.

The pre-existing Tu BiShvat stories are wonderful. But perhaps it's time to cultivate a broader base, so that not only the trees themselves blossom on Tu BiShvat, but the literature surrounding Tu BiShvat as well, thereby creating a wonderful surprise.

Section II

Guardians of the Earth



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PLANT THE SAPLING FIRST

In a version of the Avot DeRabbi Natan, the rabbinic commentary to the [Sayings of the Fathers](#), we find the following cryptic statement: “If you should happen to be holding a sapling in your hand when they tell you the Messiah has arrived, first plant the sapling and then go out to greet the Messiah.”

Well, that’s surprising. It’s counterintuitive. We Jews pray everyday for a fulfillment to our long labors in this world. We Jews labor each day that our prayers will be fulfilled, that there will be no more war, strife, anger or contention.

Yet the Messianic hope can become an obsession. We remind ourselves constantly of our prophets’ words and hope they come true: “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war anymore,” (Isaiah 2.4) or “The wolf and the lamb shall graze together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox...” (Isaiah 65.25)

We read of Chassidic masters in the old country, who as a last act before going to bed, would place their packed suitcases at the front door, to be ready to burst outside should the Messiah appear in the middle of the night.

It is this prophetic, messianic hope that has sustained us in darkest times of persecution and despair. Yet, here comes this Talmudic teaching to say that if someone proclaims the Messiah’s long-awaited arrival, and we happen to be planting a tree, we should plant first and greet later.

Maybe this statement came out of frustration during the strife of the first and second centuries of the Common Era. In those days, messianic candidates appeared by the dozen, many compelling, all of them false.

The most famous Jewish Messianic candidate (no, not the one from Nazareth) actually was given his title by Rabbi Akiba, the greatest teacher of his era, one of the most brilliant teachers our people has ever produced. Shimon Bar Kozibah, a first class warrior, was dubbed by Rabbi Akiba, Bar Kochba, and son of a star in Aramaic. This title was hoped to give Bar Kochba the stature and standing to defeat the hated Roman army. Alas, he and his forces were crushed. Rabbi Akiba was wrong. His choice for Messiah was not the one to fulfill the promises of our prophets.

So the Tradition teaches: Plant the tree first. Don’t get caught up in the emotion of the moment. Don’t be swayed by some leader’s charisma. We further the goal of redemption by planting trees, not by running out to greet the next messianic candidate. I believe this with all of my heart. Mashiachzeit, the time of the Messiah’s coming, is not in our power to know. Far greater minds and souls than ours have tried to force God’s hand, as it were, and make Messiah appear. Every contender for the position of messiah over the last 2,000 years has turned out to be a pretender instead.

We are not redeemed yet. We have not yet achieved peace or justice. We have not yet built a perfect society

to prepare the way. We have not yet planted enough trees.

Obviously, planting trees is a metaphor for the good work we do in this world. We plant them, they grow and ultimately they sustain us. Those who do not know the holiday of Tu BiShvat or the work of Jewish National Fund have at least read *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein. Trees symbolize our willingness to share, to go beyond the minimum requirement, to see beyond the momentary need and give gifts for a future of decades, centuries or even millennia.

But take a moment now and try to think what act would represent the opposite of preparing for the messianic time. I think it would be the uprooting of trees, vandalizing them or not tending to them so that they die.

Given all this, it would be easy to give in to despair and apathy. Even as we hearken back to past glory in our Torah portion, our miraculous escape at the Sea of Reeds, we cannot push away the feeling that we ourselves are drowning in the present situation. Even as we listen to Moses’ glorious song of triumph, this Shabbat we sit bundled in coats against the January cold that symbolizes the coldness we have felt in our hearts as the peace process itself has frozen. The past glory and triumphs of the Torah do not necessarily point to future hope, at least in our day.

And yet, two expressions in Hebrew guide us past lethargy. They come



from the very faith that tells us to plant trees before greeting the Messiah: B’chot Zot and Lamrot Ha-Kol. What do they mean?

B’chol Zot means “Even with all this.” Lamrot Ha-Kol means, “Despite everything.” They are staples of Israeli conversation and they underlie the hope that we cannot and must not forsake. Despite everything, we will continue to plant seeds of hope and peace. If trees are uprooted in one

place, we will plant them someplace else. If we will not enjoy the fruit in our own day, we must plant and protect the trees so their fruit will sustain our children and grandchildren.

As I said before, planting a tree is a symbolic act. We are a people and heritage that believe in the power of symbols. The Blue Box and the Tree Certificate are not hunks of metal and scraps of paper. They are symbols of hope that a time will come when

Rabbi James Gibson

Rabbi Gibson has served as the Senior Rabbi at Temple Sinai in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania since 1988. Ordained in 1983 by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Rabbi Gibson is involved in a variety of community causes and has a longstanding commitment to Israel.

the trees of the Israel will support the hunger and hopes of all her people as well as her neighbors.

Now is not the time to emotionally remove ourselves from caring about both the land and people of Israel. Now, in the dead of winter, we plant. B’chol zot, we believe that trees will take root even now. Lamrot Ha-Kol, we will plant trees even if some of them have to be cut down.

Plant a tree in Israel this Bishvat. It is an act of Messianic hope. Plant a tree in Israel this winter. It is an act that declares our belief that in the end, things will work out. Plant a tree in Israel now. Waiting to plant may well delay the day of peace for all.

Plant trees, groves, gardens, and forests. We believe that life will win in the end. We believe in Israel will find peace in the end. And if someone tells you not to bother, that your act does not matter, don’t listen. If someone tells you that the end is already here, whether it is war or peace, don’t stop what you are doing. Plant the tree anyway. Maybe its fruit will be picked in a generation that will not ever suffer hatred or bloodshed again. May that prayer come true b’karov, b’yameinu, soon, in our day. But if not, plant the tree anyway. It will come, a messianic time of peace, of sweetness, like tasting of the fruit of a long planted tree. V’chen yehi retzono. May this be God’s will.

Amen.

ETZ CHAYIM: A TREE OF LIFE



Rabbi Ilana B. Grinblatt

Rabbi Grinblatt teaches Rabbinic Literature at the American Jewish University's Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles. She is a prolific writer, and has written two books.

The tree has always been a central metaphor for the Jewish people in understanding our collective life story. Jewish tradition is replete with tree imagery, and much of that imagery is associated with learning. Every week in synagogue, we sing the verse from Proverbs, which describes Torah as an Etz chayim, "a tree of life to those that hold fast to her." In the Talmud, those who study or teach Torah are described as trees. Perhaps, our greatest teachers are our parents, and in American parlance, parents are described as trees. When a child excels, we note, "An apple does not fall far from the tree."

Why are trees so central to Jewish

tradition? What does this imagery teach us about learning Torah?

Firstly, we associate trees with joy in nature. Recall for a moment walking through a forest and feeling protected under the branches of a tree. The image of the tree is so powerful because trees evoke the cycle of life. Children learn with wonder how the tree grows from a tiny seed to an enormous oak or fruit tree. The fruit then falls to the ground and provides seeds to create another tree. The link between Torah and tree reminds us that learning should be a joyous pursuit that enhances life. Teaching Torah entails one tree to provide seeds

for a new tree; each generation passes Torah onto the next. Each generation transmits the wisdom that it has uncovered in life, only to be reinterpreted and supplemented by the coming generation who then pass it down... The cycle continues. Like the shade of the tree, the Torah protects us. We learn to avoid actions that lead to spiritual or physical danger. We learn both from the mistakes and the wisdom of previous generations how to live more fully.

Trees are part of an interdependent system of life. As children, we learn how roots are nourished by water and sun without which the tree could

not grow. The tree takes in Carbon Dioxide and produces Oxygen, without which humans could not live. All of these parts are needed to make the life cycle possible. So too in learning Torah, we are all interdependent. As Jews, we learn from our parents, teachers, and rabbis and the process is reciprocal. As a rabbi and teacher, I learn from my students as much if not more than I teach. We know well that it takes the interaction of parents, clergy and teachers to nourish a Jewish soul. To paraphrase Hillary Clinton, "It takes a village to raise a mensch."

In the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 23a) R. Johanan said: "One who studies

the Torah and does not teach it is like the myrtle in the desert." The tree is desolate and all alone; the scholar's Torah knowledge is useless because it is not shared and sharpened by teaching. Yet in that same passage, one who learns and teaches is compared to a myrtle in the desert "because it is so beloved." Indeed, teachers of Torah are precious; they enliven the Jewish community.

Lastly, I believe that the tree image is powerful because it has roots and branches. Hodding Carter wrote, "the only lasting bequeath we can hope to give our children is roots and wings." As a rabbi, my goal is to help congregants to be rooted

in Torah and encourage them to "branch out" and question the text. By questioning, one makes a text one's own.

On Chag Ha'ilanot, I hope that we can reflect about the centrality and sacredness of trees within Jewish tradition. In this way, may we nurture real trees in our world, as Jewish National Fund nurtures the environment in Israel. May we see the tree as a window into the soul of the Jewish people. May we learn Torah in joy, recognizing that each of us is needed in order to make the Jewish community flourish. In this way, Torah will truly be for us an Etz Chayim, a tree of life for all that hold unto her.



THE FOREST AND THE TREES

Rabbi Leor Sinai

As Co-CEO of the Alexander Muss High School, Rabbi Leor Sinai is the driving force behind the only non-denominational, pluralistic, English language, semester abroad, academic experience in Israel for high school students. He builds life-long bonds between youth and Israel by immersing them in—and enamoring them with—Israel’s history and culture.

There’s an old saying “don’t miss the forest for the trees”, in other words keep your eye on the big picture and don’t get caught up in the details. It is a true reminder that as leaders, Rabbis of communities, and members of Am Yisrael - we must keep up our eye on the prize. However we also cannot ignore the trees for the forest either. The trees, like our children, are our future.

On Tu BiShvat we are reminded of the story we read in the Talmud:

Rabbi Yohanan said: *...One day Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked, “How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit?” The man replied:*

“Seventy years.” Honi then further asked him: “Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?” The man replied: “I found [already grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted those for me so I too plant these for my children.”

At Jewish National Fund the big picture is literally and metaphorically – in the trees – the details. We plant seeds for life, over 250,000,000 of them.

We learn in *Pirkei Avot*, the Chapters of the Fathers, of ethics: “...one whose deeds exceed one’s wisdom, what is that person like? Like a tree whose branches are few, but whose roots are many; even if all the winds of the

world were to come and blow upon it, they would not move it from its place.”

Our role in this life is to ensure that our children have the knowledge and the conviction to forge their own link to the chain of Jewish continuity, so that their roots are deep and no matter which winds blow their way – they will stand tall and strong.

On Tu BiShvat, *Rosh HaShanna La’llanoṯ*, the new year for the trees we recall our people’s covenant with the land. “*HaShamayim L’Adonai v’HaAretz Natan L’vnei Adam*”, the heavens are for Gd and the land for humanity.

At times we get to pick the fruit of our labor, though the fruit of our labor is to

be enjoyed by our children. Rabbi Tarfon teaches: “It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it”

Join us as we fulfill the greatest cause of our time. Together we can teach our children help deepen their roots, within our people, Israel.

Since 1972 Alexander Muss High School in Israel (AMHSI-JNF) has provided a unique study abroad program for high school students where the land of Israel becomes a living classroom. All AMHSI-JNF sessions include our Israel Studies Curriculum of 4,000+ years of Jewish and Israeli history. AMHSI-JNF is fully accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.

The Sanctification of Wonder

Our spiritual life unfolds not only in books, learning and the products of mind, but also powerfully in the majesty of nature. In a rudimentary form, the spiritual power of nature was felt in pagan societies: In Ovid's metamorphosis, when Daphne holds her hands up to the sky to pray she grows leaves and becomes a tree. Something deep in our worship life touches not only on nature in general, but on trees.

branches to the sky.

When we are children, we carve our initials in trees. For we understand that unlike putting a name in pavement, the initials will grow with the tree. In later years should we see them again they will be higher, and burnished by time.

The focus on nature in the Bible reminds us of the remarkable paradox of human creation. We are both in nature and apart from it. We are the custodians of the garden at the same time as we are a shoot of the original planting. Human cultivation of the land is not only for sustenance, but an essential expression of the growth of human society.

Tu B'Shvat is a holiday that reminds us of our connection to earth. Adam, the primal man, takes his name from Adamah, meaning earth, a primal substance. Out of the Adamah the most striking product is the tree. It gives shade and bears fruit; in other words, it changes the climate and contributes its distinctive gift. At our best, we do the same: we change the moral atmosphere

Judaism sees nature not as divine in itself, but as a product of the Divine. So while repudiating worship of

Rabbi David Wolpe

Rabbi David Wolpe is the Max Webb Senior Rabbi of Sinai Temple. Rabbi Wolpe previously taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York, the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, Hunter College, and UCLA.

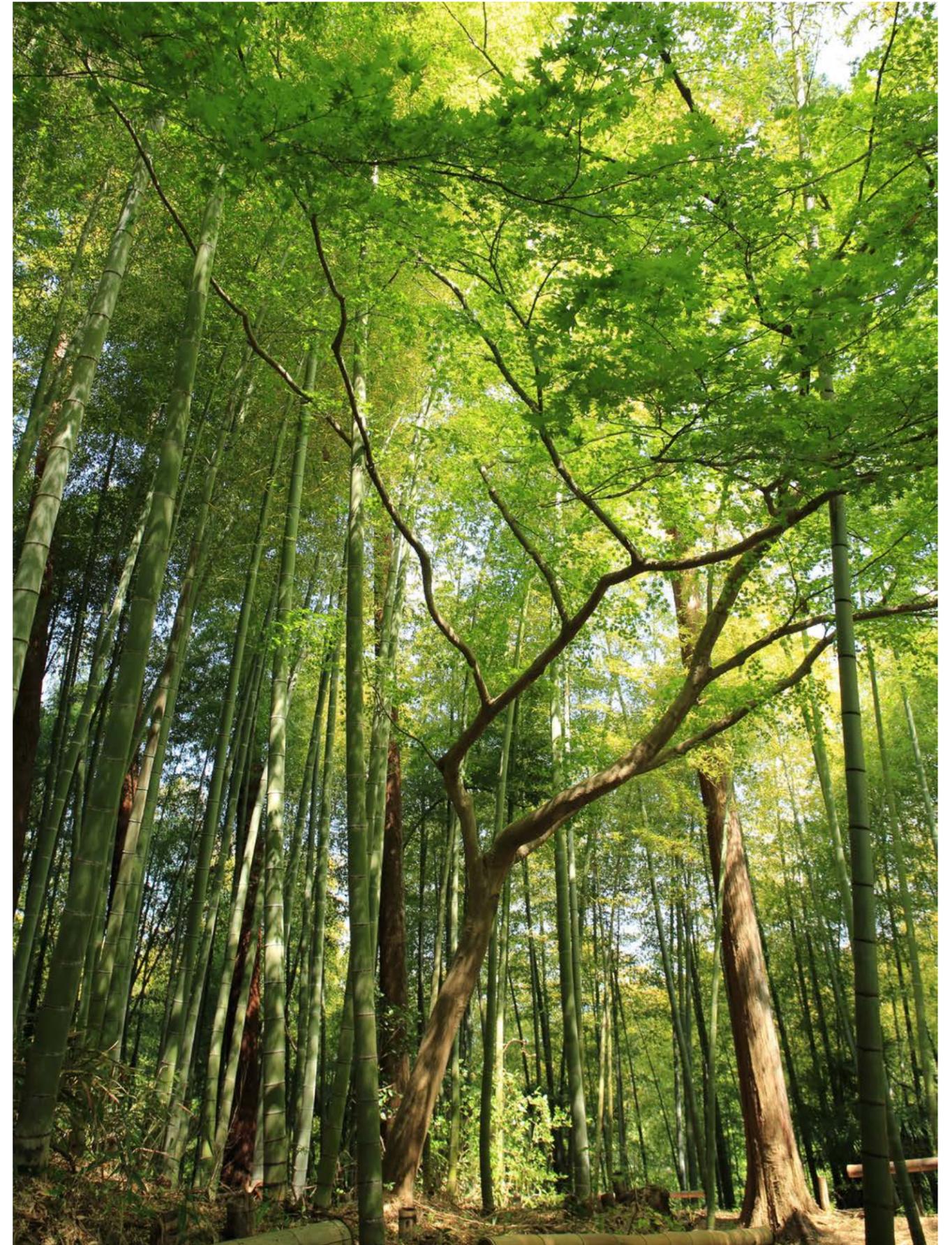
of the earth and deliver to it of our gifts.

In this important sense Zionism was a reclamation of the original project of tending the garden. Jewish National Fund has taken an important piece of the original legacy, to persuade God's world to flourish.

The Midrash calls God a tsayar, an artist. The natural world is the product of divine artistry. As the poet David Wagoner writes,

If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you, You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows where you are. You must let it find you.

Indifference to beauty is unworthy of us. Since vision is a product not only of the eye but also of the mind, to be alive to the wondrous is a sacred task. The world remains a garden crying out for us to cultivate. The tree still stands at the center, the etz chaim, the tree of life. That Etz Chaim is both the actual trees with which we enrich the natural world, and the Torah, with which we enrich the world of the spirit. The two are one in God.



Section III

Caretakers of The Land
and People of Israel



JEWISH
NATIONAL
FUND

Your Voice in Israel

THE DWELLING PLACE OF PROPHETS



Rabbi Alfredo F. Borodowski, Ph. D.
Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Alfredo Borodowski received his ordination from the Seminario Rabínico Latino Americano. He currently serves as the Rabbi at Congregation Sulam Yaakov in Westchester New York.

Tu BiShvat and JNF share a common destiny. Tu BiShvat, the holiday of the trees, has developed into a Jewish celebration of God's creation and ecological responsibility. In the same manner, JNF, who was identified with trees, has grown into an organization that cares for Israel's whole well being. Jewish National Fund, as the caretaker of the land of Israel, secures the land, forests it, and champions the most vital natural element for the future of Israel: water. JNF is the embodiment of the values of Tu BiShvat.

I am sharing with you a short piece that captures some of the essence

of JNF's work. These values are strongly connected to Tu BiShvat, which as the holiday of trees, has come to signify the overall ecological commitment that has been the trademark of JNF for a hundred years.

— Rabbi Alfredo Fabio Borodowski

Since Biblical times prophecy and water have been intertwined. Following the death of Miriam, the Book of Numbers (20:1-2) tells us "there was no water for the congregation." The Rabbis suspected that Miriam's death and the mysterious sudden water shortage could not be coincidental. But

what could the connection between Miriam the prophetess and water be? The rabbis infer that for as long as Miriam the prophetess lived, a well that God gave as a gift in honor of Miriam followed the Israelites throughout the desert. Tragically, when Miriam died and her prophecy ceased, the well dried up.

It is in remembrance of Miriam's well that today some homes place a cup of water next to Elijah's Cup at their Passover Seder. While wine is a symbol of joy, water is a symbol of life. Miriam is powerfully connected to that symbol of life. It was she who rescued her baby

brother Moses by following the infant to Pharaoh's daughter after their mother had bravely cast him into the water of the Nile in hopes of saving his life. It was also she who led the women of Israel singing and playing musical instruments through the parted waters of the Red Sea. At pivotal historic moments, Miriam showed courage and character as powerful waters offered the potential either for life or for death. As a reward, God gave a well to follow Miriam through the desert. Moses, the liberator and lawgiver, and his brother Aaron, the priest, ruled the tabernacle in which

worship of God occurred. Their domain represented the ritual and law necessary for an orderly life. Alternatively, Miriam presided over the well. Her domain represented both the nourishment and the fluidity that are essential for growth and creativity.

Today, as during Biblical times, prophecy and waters flow as one. We were faced with the nefarious prospect that Israel will run out of water by the year 2012. Yes, Israel's political challenges demand that our diplomacy and powerful army stand tall, strong, and impressive as the Tabernacle.

However, without the well and its nourishing waters, our efforts will be in vain. It is at this junction that the spirit of Miriam the prophetess must resonate within us. It is precisely at these times of political turmoil that the clarity of waters and the vision of prophecy must again find each other. Prophecies are a divine warning label in the face of an avoidable calamity. Yes, Miriam's prophecy lives. With each digging of a reservoir, every yard of water pipe adjoined, and each cleaning of a polluted river, JNF is allowing the people of Israel to continue their journey.

OUR DIVERSITY MAKES US STRONGER

The Tu BiShvat seder is a celebration of our relationship with nature and with fruit trees, and a time for reflection. The Tu B'Shevat seder is split into four sections, each centering around a different category of fruit and its attributes. Usually, we use these attributes to reflect on growth – both natural growth (of trees and plants) and personal growth (how we each change as the seasons pass). This Tu BiShvat seder is a different. February is Jewish Disabilities Awareness and Inclusion Month. Just as our table is set with so many different kinds of fruit, there are also many different kinds of people in our school, our community and in our world – and today we honor the all abilities that make the Israeli Defense Forces and Israel so rich.

Special in Uniform integrates young people with disabilities into the Israel Defense Forces, and in turn, into Israeli society. It focuses on the unique talents of each individual participant to help them find a job within the IDF that is a perfect fit, based on the belief that everyone belongs and has the right to reach his or her full potential. Special in Uniform focuses on the ability, not the disability, of each individual, encouraging transformation, independence, and integration into society.

To date Special in Uniform has integrated four hundred youths with disabilities in several IDF bases. It has shown to be successful at breaking down barriers. The experience doesn't end with the service, which can last several years. The soldiers enter the workplace with this invaluable expertise, and companies such as Intel seek them out. The story of Special in Uniform has implications far beyond Israel. Recently a delegation from the USA came to Israel to learn about the program. It demonstrates an inspiring new way of thinking about autism, one that empowers both those on the

spectrum and those around them.

Children and young adults on the autism spectrum are developing stronger-than-average perceptual skills, excelling in visually- and systematically-oriented activities like puzzles or drawings. People with autism often talk about thinking in pictures, rather than categorizing information according to language. They tend to think less in a holistic form, they're integrating lots of pieces into a whole, and they're much more likely to see the finer details of something. Special in Uniform found that those unique skills can be helpful to the Army and that there are meaningful positions for these individuals.

We have designed this special program to train young adults on the autism spectrum in professions required by the Israel Defense Forces and the civilian market. Qualified young adults, who want to volunteer for service in the IDF or integrate into the job market, are taught professions for which they have a comparative advantage.

The military service for participants in the program is up to 3 years long and begins with a 10-day pre-induction training program course, including group formation by professionals. Afterwards, the soldiers are integrated into a variety of jobs as part of the military manpower; once they complete their Army service we start preparing them for job searches and employment. The job experience and the ability to work during army service (in a non-paid work setting) assists our participants in developing work readiness skills that can lead to paid employment in integrated community settings.

The program also will help prepare young adults with autism for their futures, with training on how to deal with challenging situations related to their civilian life such as public transportation.



Our goal is simple: better training experience and employment that will be a win-win for people with disabilities, employers and taxpayers alike.

On Tu BiShvat our special soldiers will plant trees with all the typical soldiers and commanders in the IDF base.

THE ISRAEL DEFENSE Forces (IDF) goes beyond ensuring the security of Israel; it provides those who serve with valuable professional and social life skills. With the majority of the Jewish Israeli population conscripted into service, being part of the IDF becomes an integral part of life for young Israelis—it is where they make lifelong friends and connections, builds character, and teaches important life lessons.

As part of its focus on improving quality of life in Israel, Jewish National Fund is dedicated to ensuring that everyone fulfills their potential and is accepted into society, regardless of disability. A key way of achiev-

ing this goal is by integrating youth with disabilities, who otherwise would be unable to serve, into the IDF. Using the metaphor of a tree, enables our young soldiers with disabilities to speak about their lives in ways that make them stronger. It involves our members drawing their own 'tree of life' in which they get to speak of their 'roots,' their skills and knowledge, their hopes and dreams, as well as

participants attend a three-month life skills and occupational training program designed to help them integrate into their assigned bases and function independently. Next, they take part in a four-day military training course before being assigned to bases across Israel where their jobs can range from assisting intelligence, preparing protective kits, culinary work, printing, and other roles. Throughout their time with Special in Uniform, participants spend three days a month in a special Community Home to train on how to live independently. Parents also participate in courses to support their child's independent development.

Through a partnership with Special in Uniform, Jewish National Fund provides individuals with disabilities the chance to train and serve on IDF bases throughout the country. This program goes beyond the walls of IDF bases; it helps its graduates integrate into the workforce and Israeli society in meaningful ways.

The process of integrating someone with disabilities into the IDF begins with an evaluation to identify the strengths of each individual. Following these assessments,

the special people in their lives. The soldiers then join their trees into a 'forest of life' [Israeli society]. In groups, participants discuss some of the 'storms' that affect their lives, an inclusive or exclusive society and ways they respond to these storms and protect themselves and each other.

A SACRED TRUST



Rabbi Michael Cohen

Rabbi Michael Cohen has served for 10 years as the Rabbi of the Israel Congregation in Manchester Center, Vermont where presently he is the Rabbi Emeritus. A member of the founding faculty of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies on Kibbutz Ketura in 1996, he is now the Director of Strategic Partnerships.

Like nature itself Tu BiShvat has gone through a number of different seasons throughout its existence. From its Biblical origins as a tax day on fruit trees, to its Kabbalistic transformation as a nature-mystical holiday, and more recently as the environmental holiday par excellence of Judaism. Our tradition is saturated with nature sensitive messages from the charge to “guard” the earth in Genesis (2:15) to the nature-intoxicated words of many of the Psalms, to the sublime message not to disturb the environment on Shabbat.

As the Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz taught one way to understand the lesson of the Tower of Babel is not to look at the proliferation of different languages as a punishment, but rather as an

aid in making us more human and humane. The message is clear the greater diversity in the human world, the healthier the world is. It should not surprise us that we know this is true with the environment. The more diversity, the healthier it is as well. This parallel further reminds us that we need to look at ourselves not as separate from the environment, but an integral part of the environment.

It was the Zionist philosopher Ahad Haam who said, “More than the Jews have kept the Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.” One could also say, “More than the Jews have kept the Land of Israel, the Land of Israel has kept the Jews.” It was one of our most important decisions, made at the moment that we were expelled from

the Land that we decided to keep that connection to the Land strong. The Romans knew this when they changed the name of the Land from Israel to Palestine hoping to cut that connection.

We made that connection strong by making it tangible, real, and full of meaning. It is not surprising that when the Dalai Lama asked to be taught the secret of our maintaining our identity over thousands of years of exile, as he anticipates the exile of the Tibetans will be long as well, he was taught by the rabbis and teachers he met to maintain a real connection with the land.

Tu BiShvat as stated above is the holiday par excellence which makes that point. It makes no sense to celebrate the planting of trees in the middle of the winter in North America,

or Poland, or Moscow, or London for that matter. It does make sense though if you want to be reminded of the climate, the foliage, and the season, of the homeland of the Jewish People.

We know of no other people in the world who were exiled off their land for more than 150 years and maintained their identity except for the Jewish People. One of the key factors to maintaining our identity all these years was maintaining our connection to the Land.

Now that we have returned to the Land what do we have to say for ourselves? Yes we have succeeded in so many ways beyond our wildest imagination. But there has also been a price to pay. Martin Buber said in reference to the early Zionist’s reverence for the

land, “But what a great many overlook is that the powers released by this renewed bond to the soil do not suffice to accomplish a true and complete transformation.” Our connection to that soil, one of the key elements to Jewish survival for almost 2,000 years of exile, is about a reciprocal relationship.

We have not always understood and lived by that reciprocity when it has come to the Land. Sometimes out of necessity, sometimes out of ignorance, and sometimes even out of arrogance we have mistreated the Land of Israel in the name of Zionism. Yes we have also been innovative and nurturing in amazing ways as well when it comes to the Land of Israel. But we must not let our accomplishments blind us to what else

we have done.

We are told that the Land of Israel was assigned to us as a sacred trust. That trust, if we are to take it seriously, includes the care of its holy soil, water, air, and animal life. The health of the land is also a good barometer of the health of the Zionist movement. Zionism stands not just for returning the People to the Land, but also the care of that very Land so that the Jewish People may thrive on it. We prayed almost 2,000 years for the ability to return to her soil. Now, a hundred years after we have returned, a century marked by successes beyond our wildest expectations, we can no longer wait for tomorrow. The time to answer is now. The Land, this Tu BiShvat, is once again calling out to us.

GOD'S PARTNERS IN REPAIRING THE WORLD



Yossi Kahana

As the Director of Jewish National Funds Task Force on Disabilities, Yossi Kahana supports a network of JNF's partnership programs for people with disabilities, ensuring that all programs are effective and fiscally strong. Previously, he served for 17 years at Aleh, Israel's largest network of residential facilities for children with disabilities.

You may remember from Hebrew School... once a year you'd get a little bag with some raisins, dates, and carob (the hard, brown fruit sometimes known as boxer). And you'd collect money to JNF to plant trees in Israel. That was Tu BiShvat.

Of course, there's a deeper meaning behind the holiday, beyond that 13-year-old's view of Judaism!

The Torah compares a person to a tree. Roots, branches, leaves. The Torah teach that all humans are created in the image of God.

Adam was the first human in existence, created by Gd on the sixth day of Creation. The Bible describes him as being created in the image of Gd, and his wisdom is said to have surpassed that of the Heavenly angels.

Gd then caused Adam to fall into a deep slumber. While he was asleep, He took one of his sides (or ribs) and formed Eve.

About 500 years ago, the Kabbalists taught that Tu BiShvat is an opportune time for rectifying the transgression of Adam and Eve. Amazingly, just through the simple act of eating fruit

during the Tu BiShvat festive dinner, we can contribute to this cosmic repair ("tikkun").

We can ask ourselves what it means to be created in God's image? It is not only a description of our creative powers; it is also a statement of responsibility about the way that we treat others. Do we see God in them? Do we recognize that all people are created in this image, not just famous people or people who can serve us in some way?

Jewish National Fund has continued to rebuild and maintain the land of Israel

and today Jewish National Fund-USA's strategic vision has been and always will be, to ensure a strong, secure, and prosperous future for the land and people of Israel.

But we always remember that all human beings are created in God's own image and Jewish tradition teaches us of our obligation to ensure equal access for all people and to help facilitate the full participation of individuals with disabilities, indeed JNF is dedicated to ensuring that no member of Israeli society is left behind. Through a variety

of initiatives, JNF provides cutting-edge rehabilitative services, special education, and medical care for people with special needs and makes its forests, parks, picnic areas, playgrounds, nature trails, lookouts and recreational facilities inclusive for visitors of all ability levels. Partnering with like, LOTEM, Special in Uniform and Aleh Negev fulfills JNF's vision of building a society that looks beyond the surface and disability to the person within, reflecting values that are inherent to Jewish Life and Tikkun Olam, repairing the world and making it a better place.

THE ECHOES OF HOPE



Rabbi Lester Polonsky

Rabbi Lester Polonsky was ordained from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in June of 1978. He is married to Helene and they have two grown children, Seth and Rena.

We all receive junk mail. We know what it looks like, even before we open the envelope. And in most cases, we toss it away. If we have computers and email, we still receive junk mail, usually more than we like to admit. When we receive junk mail via the email, we say we have been spamed. To be spamed means to be blanketed with junk mail via the Internet.

Rabbis get spamed. I know it sounds strange, since Spam was the sandwich meat made of pork, but today it has a new meaning. Rabbis get spamed with email from various Jewish organizations, promoting their wonderful programs and worthy causes. It is the hope of these Jewish organizations that as the Rabbis begin to prepare for their High Holiday sermons, they will consider the worthiness of their organization and include it in their sermons.

Beginning in the early spring Jewish organizations will mail out elaborate brochures with pictures highlighting the success of their programs. These promoters believe that the earlier

the Rabbis receive this material, the more time they have to reflect on the important work of their organization.

Among the many pieces of mail I have received, it is the information from Jewish National Fund that I have held on to.

Why?

Certainly their beautiful color brochure with pictures of the land, fill me with memories of years spent in Israel as a student. I clearly recall those days being inspired with the richness of the land of Israel, that at one time was a desert, which now blossomed with the color of life and the agricultural and technological potential. Jewish National Fund was established some 100 years ago to bring life to an ancient land, so that its people could live and prosper.

As I held this brochure in my hand, I recall my days in Hebrew school, collecting and licking stamps to purchase a tree in Israel, or the time when my fellow students collected enough Tzedakah money to purchase a

forest in memory of a beloved teacher.

During my freshman year of college, studying in Jerusalem, I visited a JNF forest. I expected to see a grove of trees with my name on each one. We now joke as we share the birthday or anniversary card that says, "Mazel Tov, a tree has been planted in Israel. Your day to water it is Tuesday."

But the pictures from JNF brochure have moved me beyond the vague memories of years past to the present. For some reason, I can't discard this brochure. Something continues to draw me to the land of Israel. And I read on. I am amazed at the programs and accomplishments this organization has undertaken. The hope conveyed in this brochure echoes my own hope for peace. And I understand why I can't ignore this brochure, for pictures in this brochure of Jewish National Fund, blasts forth like a shining light. In a land of war and bloodshed, there is hope, Tikvah. And Jewish National Fund provides us with an opportunity to help Israel at a time, when we feel helpless.

At a time when it seems that the mention of Israel becomes synonymous with terrorism, bloodshed and suicide bombings, what can we do? What can we do to help our people, our land?

One thing we can do is:

We can continue to support Jewish National Fund. Jewish National Fund was created over 100 years ago, in 1901, as the collection agency on behalf of world Jewry to purchase the land of Israel. Since 1948, the JNF has responded to the needs of the land and people, it has drained swamps, built roads, dug reservoirs, restored riverbeds, and fought pollution.

It is now confronted by the major problem of water. The shortage of water is a growing problem globally. However, the scarcity of water is most severe in Israel. Water resources throughout the region are declining; Jordan must double its sources of water over the next two decades. Israel must now decide not only how to cut its consumption further despite an increase in population but

also how to share these precious waters with her neighbors.

JNF has become the coordinating body with the Ministry of the Environment, in the restoration of Israel's rivers and streams in order to purify the water.

Water resources are only one of the challenges that JNF is involved. Soil conservation is another. In Israel, JNF is the sole body responsible for soil conservation striving to maintain the quality of the land suitable for agriculture. The goal is to preserve the quality of the soil, preventing deterioration and assuring that the economic basis of agricultural communities is preserved.

Someday, the bloodshed will cease; there will be no mention of suicide bombings, reprisals, and bloodshed.

Someday, there will be peace, someday.

And when that day occurs, Israel the people will devote their attention to Israel the Land, to the problems of preserving

and protecting a peaceful coexistence on one land. They will continue to face the challenges of an agricultural society on a desert arid land, the challenge of providing an adequate supply of fresh water to an ever-growing population.

When peace finally arrives, Jewish National Fund will be again called upon to provide the environmental expertise as it has done for the past 100 years. But now the need will be greater.

We can do something today. The trees we plant in Israel will be part of Jewish National Fund's efforts to preserve the land and all its valuable resources.

Today, there is conflict, but tomorrow, whenever that tomorrow may be, will bring peace. And this peace will bring renewed attention to the land that we hold sacred. At that time the involvement of Jewish National Fund will be greater but its resources will be limited. As our symbol of hope and peace, we can plant a tree today. This symbol will reflect our support for the land, the people and our own hope for peace tomorrow.



PLANT TREES IN ISRAEL THROUGH JEWISH NATIONAL FUND

As an innovator in ecological development and a pioneer in forest creation, JNF has planted more than 250 million trees in Israel, providing lush belts of green covering more than 250,000 acres. JNF's parks and forests are enjoyed by millions of people each weekend and holiday. Through agricultural infrastructure development, research, and soil conservation, JNF has been able to create and extend the presence of fertile land where there was once endless desert.

One tree: \$18 · Two trees: \$36 · Ring of three: \$54
 Circle of five: \$90 · Orchard of 10: \$180 · Garden of 100: \$500*

*Includes special framed certificate and inscription in Book of Gardens.

Open an E-Z Tree™ account and save up to 50%! Visit jnf.org/ez for more information.

To order, call 800.542.TREE or visit jnf.org/trees

To avoid errors, please print clearly:

Mr. Mrs. Ms. Mr. & Mrs. Dr. Esq. Rabbi Other _____

NAME _____

HOME OR BUSINESS ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____ E-MAIL _____

HOME PHONE _____ WORK PHONE _____

I would like to buy _____ trees for a total of \$ _____

I would like my certificate to say _____

Please mail my certificate to _____

Check enclosed, payable to Jewish National Fund.

Please charge my credit card Visa MC AmEx Discover

CARD # _____

EXP. DATE _____ / _____ SIGNATURE _____

Please return form to: Jewish National Fund, 78 Randall Ave., Rockville Centre, NY 11570



Yes! I would like to plant trees for Tu BiShvat.

• \$18 for 1 tree • \$36 for 2 trees • \$54 for 3 trees • \$72 for 4 trees • \$90 for 5 trees • \$108 for 6 trees

• I am making a \$500 contribution to plant a Garden of Trees and to receive a framed certificate.

To avoid errors, please print carefully. Please use blue or black ink. Use only capital letters. Appeal: 4920-2012

Payment/Parent Information

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

• My check is enclosed. Please make payable to Jewish National Fund

Charge my: Visa MC Amex Disc CARD # _____

EXP. DATE MO ____ / ____ SIGNATURE _____

Tree Certificate Information #1: Cost \$18

FULL NAME _____ BIRTHDATE (MM/DD/YY) ____ / ____ / ____ GRADE LEVEL _____

EMAIL _____ NAME OF YOUR RELIGIOUS SCHOOL _____

TREE CERTIFICATE INFORMATION #2: Cost \$18

Please plant a tree • In Honor of • In Memory of

HONOREE NAME _____

PLANTED BY _____

Send tree certificate to:

SALUTATION (EXAMPLE: MRS.) _____

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

TREE CERTIFICATE INFORMATION #3: Cost \$18

Please plant a tree • In Honor of • In Memory of

HONOREE NAME _____

PLANTED BY _____

Send tree certificate to:

SALUTATION (EXAMPLE: MRS.) _____

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

TREE CERTIFICATE INFORMATION #5: Cost \$18

Please plant a tree • In Honor of • In Memory of

HONOREE NAME _____

PLANTED BY _____

Send tree certificate to:

SALUTATION (EXAMPLE: MRS.) _____

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

TREE CERTIFICATE INFORMATION #6: Cost \$18

Please plant a tree • In Honor of • In Memory of

HONOREE NAME _____

PLANTED BY _____

Send tree certificate to:

SALUTATION (EXAMPLE: MRS.) _____

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please return form to: Jewish National Fund, 78 Randall Ave., Rockville Centre, NY 11570