

TORAH THOUGHTS – SPEAK FOR THE TREES

Monday is *Tu B'Shevat*, the Jewish New Year for trees. It may seem odd to commemorate this in the winter, but attention to the Jewish calendar can transport us to the Land of Israel, where signs of spring begin to show near the end of January, including trees that start to bud. On this holiday, we celebrate the Holy Land by tasting its produce.

My colleague and mentor Rabbi Bill Gershon wrote, “After the barrage of secular holidays a few weeks ago, *Tu B'Shevat* comes along to remind us that we are Jews and that we are connected to our land, and to our faith. As we continue in the new century and battle the effects of assimilation, *Tu B'Shevat* is a healthy reminder for the need to strike a balance between living in the secular world and finding meaning and sustenance from the spiritual world.”

Tonight, Friday January 18, at 7:00 pm we will hold our annual *Tu B'Shevat Seder*. The Kabbalists of Safed developed this concept in the sixteenth century; today it not only celebrates Israel but also raises awareness about the environment. Come and enjoy dried and fresh produce, as well as Israeli wines! Family friendly, all are welcome.

Our tradition urges us to appreciate the beauty and the majesty of the planet. When we see a tree blossom for the first time in the year, we say, “Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe who has withheld nothing from His world and who has created beautiful creatures and beautiful trees for mortals to enjoy.” Let’s enjoy them and maintain them!

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Pont