

***Livracha* - A New NSTE Initiative**

By Rabbi Nicole Roberts

There is a passage I love in the Torah that instructs us how to celebrate each festival: make an offering on Pesach, bring sheaves from the harvest on Shavuot, count the days of the Omer, sound loud blasts on Rosh Hashanah, and more.

Nestled in amongst these instructions is a seemingly unrelated commandment: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger" (Lev. 23:22). Why is this verse placed amidst a discussion about festival celebrations? Perhaps to convey these two messages: First, as Jews, looking after those less fortunate than us is a part of our ritual and religious life, not separate from it. Second, in the midst of our most joyous times - our festival celebrations - we mustn't forget those in need, but share our abundance with them.

To this end, I am delighted to announce a new social action initiative called "Livracha" (pronounced Leev-ra-KHAH) - meaning "for a blessing" - facilitated by our Jews for Social Action (JSA). In conjunction with, and inspired by, each of the Jewish festivals we celebrate throughout the year, we will be collecting items at NSTE for people in need. We will continue, for instance, our Mazon food collection for the hungry, during the High Holy Days. And during Chanukah this December, we will be collecting cooking oil* for the Asylum Seekers Centre. JSA will deliver our donations after each festival to the recipient organisation. If you have an idea for a collection in association with a certain festival, please let us know, so we can try to work it into the Livracha cycle.

JSA's attractive basket in the foyer, used for the recent Mitzvah Day collection, will be used to collect vegetable cooking oil between now and the end of Chanukah (20 December). The cooking oil must please be in one litre containers (no larger, as the recipients will be traveling on public transport to take it home).

Please think of our Livracha collections when you come to shul for services, committee meetings, Hebrew School, b'nei mitzvah lessons, Israeli dancing, or other reasons.

The name Livracha is inspired by the festival liturgy (Mishkan T'filah p.473):

Livracha v'lo liklala

L'chayim v'lo l'mavet

L'sova v'lo l'razon

"For blessing, not curse.

For life, not death.

For abundance, not want."

May our new program, and the bounty we share with those in need, be "for a blessing."

* "The Hasmoneans... found only one cruse of oil [in the Temple]... A miracle occurred and from it they lit [the menorah for] 8 days" (Talmud, B. Shabbat 21b).