

Meditation For Tu B'Shevat: Vital Trees

By Rabbi Bernard S. Raskas

In the middle of the Hebrew month of Shevat, Israel's severe winter rain tapers off. Signs of spring appear.

The weather becomes milder and the fields sprout green. A tumult of flowers of every kind and color carpets the earth. The birds return from their migration.

This is the time of Tu B'Shevat (the 15th of Shevat), called in the Talmud "Rosh Hashanah L'Eilanot" (New Year for Trees). It's the day when it is decreed "which (plants) shall flourish and grow and which shall wither and shrink; which shall suffer from adverse weather and harmful insects and which shall brave all dangers."

The celebration of trees stressed by the holiday has deep roots in rabbinic literature. Some historians believe that hundreds of years ago, the mystic sages of Safed organized a Seder for Tu B'Shevat. Tables were set with white cloths, bedecked with fruits and graced with flasks of both red and white wine. The two colors represented the changing of the seasons.

In Jewish mystic literature we are told, "It is a good custom for those who walk upright to eat an abundance of fruit on this day and give expression to words of songs and praise for them."

There was a lovely custom in ancient Israel to plant a cedar sapling at the birth of a boy and a cypress at a girl's birth. The cedar symbolized strength and stature, the cypress signified gentleness and sweetness.

The children cared for the trees planted in their honor. When they married, branches from the trees were part of the chupah (marriage canopy).

Once, while the sage Honi was walking along a road, he saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked him, "How many years will it require for this tree to give forth fruit?"

The man replied it would take 70 years.

Honi asked, "Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat its fruit?"

The man replied, "I found a fruitful world because my forefathers planted for me. So will I do for my children" (Taanit 23).

Rabbi Isaac told the following parable: A man was wandering in the desert, hungry, thirsty and exhausted with heat. He chanced upon a tree whose fruit was sweet, whose shadow was pleasant and which had a small brook flowing at its base.

He ate the fruit, drank the water and rested in its shade. When he rose to leave, he addressed the

PLO Military Strength In Lebanon Restored To Its Pre-1982 Level

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Almost five years after the Lebanon war, the military strength of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon has been restored to almost the same level as it was when the Israel Defense Force invaded that country in June, 1982, a senior military officer told an audience in Tel Aviv.

The officer, who holds the rank of Lt. Colonel but was not identified by name, said PLO terrorists were returning to their old bases in Sidon and Tyre and their presence can be felt by the increased incidence of attempted attacks on Israel.

The officer noted that Sidon and Tyre, on the Lebanese coast,

provide the terrorists with bases for night attacks on Israel by sea.

Tu B'Shevat Celebrated At Nate Mack Religious School Of Temple Beth Sholom



Photograph by Marvin

(In front) Jacob Abbott (2nd Row L-R) Etan Earhardt & Joshua Primack (3rd Row L-R) Cantor Simon Bergman, Teresa Belkofer, Shari Husney, Darren Schwartz & Roz Sbarra (In back) Julie Earhardt. Tu B'Shevat is Jewish Arbor Day — the New Year for Trees.

tree: "Oh tree, how can I bless you? If I were to say, 'May your shade be pleasant' -- it is already pleasant.

"Were I to say, 'May your fruit be sweet' -- it is already sweet. And were I to say, 'May there be a brook at your feet' -- the brook is already there. My blessing will therefore be, 'May all your saplings be like you' " (Taanit 5).

The Fifth Zionist Congress, held in 1901 in Basel, Switzerland, passed a resolution that was to have a far-reaching effect on the development of Eretz Yisrael. The congress created Keren

Kayamet LeYisrael, or Jewish National Fund (JNF) to reclaim the land.

JNF has been mainly responsible for the afforestation of Israel. It claims to have planted 175 million trees. Forests primarily of pine cover 175,000 acres of rocky hillside across the Judean hills and Galilee mountains, coastal plains and Negev Desert.

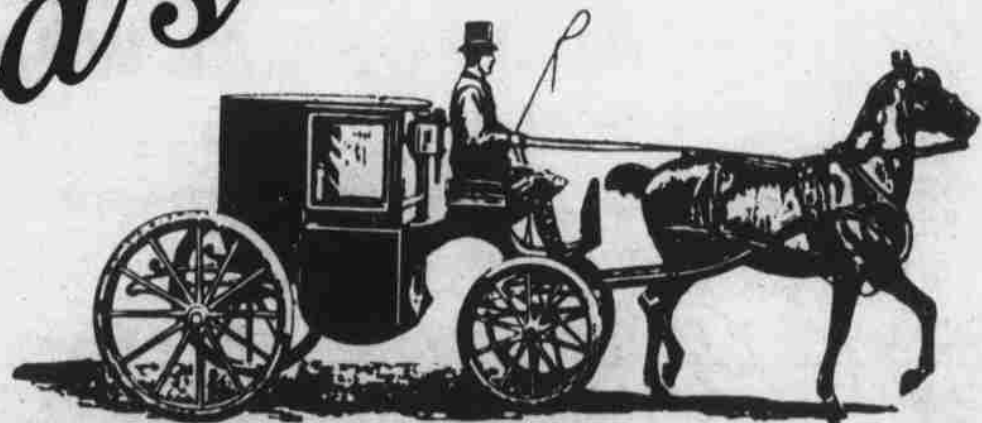
Since the creation of the state, JNF has stressed the special importance of planting trees to help convert barren wasteland into thriving rural

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