

Tu b'Shevat - The New Year Of Trees

by Dvora Waysman

(WZPS) — Just prior to the Hebrew month of Shevat, the landscape begins to change in Israel. It has been winter - the fruit trees bare, their leafless, light-grey branches silhouetted against dark clouds. Then, as Shevat is ushered in, they begin to bud, and reddish leaflets burst forth. The fields that have been covered with pale crocuses, white narcissus and cyclamens give way to red anemones, tulips and broom bushes starred with flowers. And the almond trees burst into blossom - the first harbinger of spring. It is at this time that we celebrate Tu b'Shevat - the New Year of Trees.

The New Year of Trees is mentioned in the Mishnah as one of the four "natural" New Years. The first of Nisan is designated as the new year "for Jewish kings and seasonal feasts"...that is, for calculating the reigns of Israelite kings and determining the cycle of calendar festivals. The first of Elul is the new year "for tithing cattle." The first of Tishri is the new year for calculating septennial cycles and 50 year jubilees. The new year for trees was moved from the first of Shevat to the 15th, according to the opinion of Rabbi Hillel (30 B.C.E. - 10 C.E.), for it is then when the sap is said to begin to rise, with the full moon, in Israel's fruit trees. The Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds also designate Tu b'Shevat as the date to calculate tithes (taxes) on fruit:

"You shall tithe all the yield of your seed, which comes forth from the field year by year."

(Deuteronomy, 14:22)

From December to mid-February, Israel's fruit trees are dormant. It is wet and cold and because of the low temperatures, the trees cannot absorb the nutrients from the soil. But from 15th Shevat:

"Till this day (the trees) live off the water of the past year; from this day on, they live off the water of this year."

(Jerusalem Talmud, Rosh HaShana 1,2)

Establishing the date was important, because it marked the start of the fruit's formation.

The Arabs also mark this date, and call it "the second ember," when fruit trees begin to absorb

Sisterhood Of Congregation Ner Tamid Plans Second Annual Progressive Dinner

The Sisterhood of Congregation Ner Tamid are busy planning their Second Annual Progressive Dinner scheduled for February 27, 1988 at 6:00 p.m.

Due to the tremendous success of Sisterhood's first Progressive Dinner, our chairpersons for this event, Lois Doctors and Sandy Ewan are working very hard to make this one even better.

The cut-off date for this event is February 15th, donation \$17.50 per person. Your check is your reservation, made out to Sisterhood, Congregation Ner Tamid. Please mail to Sandy Ewan, 3696 Garita Ct., LV 89121. For more information, call Temple office 733-6292.

Looking forward to a wonderful evening.

AMSTERDAM (JTA) — A psychology professor who recently testified in Jerusalem as an expert witness for the defense in the trial of accused war criminal John Demjajuk, will play the same role at the trial of Rien De Rijke, which opened recently in The Hague.

De Rijke, 68, is accused of war crimes during the years 1942 and 1943 when he served as a "kapo" at the Erika concentration camp in Ommen, in eastern Holland. He is charged specifically with extreme cruelty to inmates, especially Jewish prisoners, causing the deaths of some of them.

water. According to Arab folklore, there are three "embers" which began as fire falling from the sky and changed to caterpillars. The first falls from the sky when the earth begins to warm up; the second when the warmth spreads. They follow this with a third "ember" as summer begins.

Tu b'Shevat is one of Judaism's popular celebrations that does not involve special synagogue services. It is an enjoyable day when it is customary to eat the fruits of Israel...apples, almonds, carobs, figs, nuts and pomegranates. Many scholars stay up late the previous evening, reciting Biblical passages dealing with fruits or the earth's fertility. They read from Genesis how trees were created along with all the plants of the earth; from Leviticus the divine promise of abundance as a reward for keeping the commandments; and from Ezekiel 17, the parable of the spreading vine - symbolizing the people of Israel.

Kabbalists hold a special Seder and they celebrate, not so much the New Year of Trees,

but the New Year of the Tree...meaning the Tree of Life, which is rich with mystical connotations. They drink four cups of wine, beginning with white wine and ending with red, with the second cup a mixture more of white and the third more of red wine. It is rather like how the landscape changes from white (the pale narcissus and crocus) to red (anemones and tulips) as Tu b'Shevat approaches.

Tu b'Shevat is also the popular day to go into the fields and plant saplings. Israeli schoolchildren in the past few decades have helped Keren Kayemet - the Jewish National Fund - to plant 130 million trees, many of them on Tu b'Shevat, and these evergreens have become the backbone of the reforestation program.

Tu b'Shevat affirms the fact that the soil of Israel is holy. The People and the Land have a mystic affinity in Judaism, and the New Year of Trees reminds us annually of the wonder of God's creation.



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