

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's Tevet/Shevat/Adar 5767 (January-February 2007) Newsletter

As most would assume, here we are in the midst of Winter, but . . . so far, as I write this to you, the Winter has been exceptionally mild. Will we be inundated with snow or ice to make up for lost time? What will the affect be on our nation's agriculture?

With the weather patterns seemingly a little off kilter, our minds turn to the Jewish calendar. We see Tu B'Shevat, the New Year for trees and the holiday that emphasizes our connection to our roots: the land and its bounty. Tu B'Shevat is a wonderfully colorful and spiritually uplifting holiday filled with intense imagery and mystical overtones. Growing out of the Hasidic branch of Judaism and spreading throughout the Jewish world is the tradition of a Tu B'Shevat Seder. With special and common fruit (both fresh and dried) and nuts, participants observe this Winter holiday by eating in a certain order and acknowledging each fruit's and nut's connection to our world – both the physical and spiritual. If you have a chance to experience one, I encourage you to go . . . they are often exciting opportunities to speak and ask questions about Judaism in a less Hebrew-demanding and less weighty atmosphere.

Tu B'Shevat, as one of the four New Years of the Jewish calendar, reminds us to reattach ourselves to that which roots us – our Jewish heritage. The Torah is called a Tree of Life, for all who hold fast to it. As a “tree,” the Torah keeps us rooted in what is right and righteous, what is nourishing and healthy, what is reliable and steadfast. In many ways, this New Year is one that we need most – it is found in the midst of our Winter tempests and provides us meaning at a time of year when there seems to be a great deal missing from our lives; after all, we travel less and make fewer connections in the depths of the Winter months, appropriately cautious of venturing out into the Winter winds and cold.

As we experience the weather and Tu B'Shevat, we take stock of our lives and the connection we have made with those around us and to our heritage. It is with this as a backdrop that I encourage you to reconnect with your congregation, especially given that the Winter months usually mean a weakening of participation for the understandable reasons mentioned above, but also because it is our congregation, our community, that guarantees the stability of our lives. When we build community, we build a home for ourselves, but when we build Jewish community, we build an addition to the mansion that is our Jewish heritage. We make new friends and invigorate the relationships we've nurtured for years and we raise our spirits and increase our closeness to holiness when we open our heart to others and create new experiences that build upon the true gems we already have.

To that end, I have arranged for a mid-Winter visitor: Robert A. Seltzer, the Federation's new Executive Vice President. Mr. Seltzer will be coming to speak with us on the Friday evening of our “long Jewish weekend,” January 12, 2007 at 8pm. Renew your connection to others and to our community by making the effort, in bad weather or good, to come to shul that evening and welcome both Mr. Seltzer and his message: Building Jewish community both locally amongst the Jews of Atlantic and Cape May Counties and between us and our beloved Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel). It is an evening that I hope will inspire you further to renew your membership with Temple Beth Shalom and to donate a little more of yourself this year to making Temple Beth Shalom even more vibrant.

In advance of your voting with your checkbook, I want to thank you all for a wonderful beginning to my tenure at Temple Beth Shalom, and for joining me on our path forward as we explore what it means to be a Jew and a mensch. As we commemorate the New Year for trees, Tu B'Shevat, I look forward to learning and growing with you as we root ourselves in the vast wisdom and dynamic experiences of our Jewish heritage.

Kol Tuv (All Things Good),
Rabbi Fox

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