

February 2018 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

It probably comes naturally to most of us to say “Shanah Tovah” (“Happy New Year”) to one another at Rosh Hashanah, but did you know that our Jewish calendar actually marks **four different and distinct New Years**?

“There are four New Years: The 1st of Nisan is the New Year for Kings . . . The 1st of Elul is the New Year for the tithe of cattle; . . . The 1st of Tishrei is the New Year for years . . . The 15th of Shevat is the New Year for trees according to the School of Hillel.”

-- Mishnah Rosh HaShanah 1:1 (2nd Century C.E.)

It may seem odd to have four different New Years, but really, this just reflects real life. Jewish or not, we all have multiple New Years. To name just a few, there are January 1, January 20 (the term-year of our President), and April 15 (the Tax Year). September through June is the School Year, and each of us, of course has our own birthday. Many of us have wedding anniversaries, too. So, having multiple New Years in the Jewish calendar as well should probably be expected.

This past week, from sundown on Tuesday, January 30 until sundown on Wednesday, January 31, Jews around the world gathered to celebrate the holiday of Tu B'Shevat (the 15th day of the month of Shevat), the New Year for Trees, just as our Sunday School students did on January 28 when we participated in our annual Tu B'Shevat seder. Together we drank four cups of progressively redder grape juice:

- The first cup was entirely white.
- The second was mostly white with some red mixed in.
- The third was mostly red with some white mixed in.
- The fourth was entirely red with an imperceptible drop or two of white.

Each cup represented a different season, so by the time we finished all four, we had experienced an entire year.

In addition, the first three cups of juice were coupled with specific kinds of fruit, and the fourth came with the sweet smell of spices. The reasons for each pairing carry great meaning.

- With the first cup of juice (representing the cold of winter) we ate a fruit that is soft on the inside with a thick skin on the outside, in order to remind ourselves of times we have sought protection from the harshness of the world. When eating this fruit, we concentrated on thanking God for keeping us safe from the elements. As well, we saw that although seemingly inedible from the outside, when peeled, oranges hold gifts that transcend their outward appearance.
- With the second cup of juice (representing the rebirth of spring) we ate a fruit that had no outer protection but did have an inner pit. By paying close

attention to the seemingly worthless inner pits, we reminded ourselves that even though they tend to be discarded without thought, life itself cannot be reborn without them. As such, we discussed how these pits represent how important it is to nurture the hidden potential that each of us houses within.

- With the third cup of juice (representing the fullness of summer) we turned to eat fruit that is eaten whole, reminding us of the importance that nothing should be wasted.
- With the fourth cup (representing the vibrancy of autumn), we focused on the seemingly imperceptible drops of white juice embedded within the red, thus leading us to consider those things that truly matter yet cannot be seen. Therefore, rather than eating another fruit, we enjoyed the sweet smell of spices.

Our time together of learning and celebration could not have happened without the support of all the parents who brought and prepared the necessary foods, set up the seder table, served the children, and cleaned up afterwards. For that, we are, as always, grateful. But there is one person who went above and beyond even that. To **Suzi Marr**, I'd like to offer extra special thanks.

One important tradition associated with Tu B'Shevat is that we eat the "Seven Species of Israel" as listed in Deuteronomy 8 (*"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing."*) To fulfill this Tu B'Shevat expectation, Suzi led our students in a most wonderful "Seven Species Bread Baking" activity. She spent significant time and care beforehand finding and preparing the ingredients, and then baking with us that morning. For anyone who would like to try this on your own, we used the recipe from <http://jteach.org/project/seven-species-bread/>. It's not necessarily the simplest bread to make, but it is well worth it!

Happy Tu B'Shevat to All,
Rabbi Dubin

Copyright © 2018 Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey