Divray Ha-Rav: The Rabbi's Words

Rabbi Joshua Neely

It's a tough nut to crack.

On January 22nd we will mark Tu B'Shevat. In the Rabbinic age it was simply a dividing line for counting when trees were planted. Rather than keep track of when each tree was stuck in the ground, any tree planted before the 15th of Shevat was considered planted last year. This means that if you planted a tree on the 14th, by the next day it was already a year old. That's it, a simple bookkeeping device.

Since the end of the 19th century and the birth of Zionism, Tu B'shevat is celebrated as one of redeeming the land of Israel through reforestation. More recently we have used its agricultural motifs as a rallying point for our environmental activism. However, there is one other interpretation given to this day.

The Kabbalists, led by Isaac Luria in 1500's used Tu B'shevat as a model for a spiritual seder meant to grow the soul. Unlike Pesach, this seder is short and simple. There are numerous resources available in our library and online if you want more information and I would be happy to help if you are interested in conducting your own, but I want to focus on one element – the fruit.

During the four stages of the Tu B'shevat Seder, we enjoy for different types of fruit: Those with inedible shells, those with inedible pits, those that are wholly edible and those we enjoy without eating: nuts, apples, figs and cinnamon. This is not just a lesson in biodiversity.

Our souls easily become encrusted by fear, doubt, hate, toil and frustration. These form a dead layer that disconnects us from the world – an inedible shell. As we shed this form, we find those same barriers buried within, a hard pit inside; we can touch the world and feel God but keep too much trapped inside. Finally, when we release ourselves from the shades both within and without we can enjoy all of life and the presence of God without reservation. The sweet smell of cinnamon reminds us that there is a new level of spiritual satisfaction

ENTERTAINMENT BOOKS

Brotherhood and Sisterhood will once again be selling entertainment books. All proceeds from these books purchased through Beth Israel Congregation go towards supplementing the youth program and Hebrew school.

For further information contact Ann or Howard Cornblatt at 410-655-6094

B'nai Mitzvah **בני מצוה**

January 2008

5 Jamie Beth Rosenblatt, daughter of Sara and Alan Rosenblatt

12 Zachary Andrew Marks, son of Lania and Adam Marks

19 Eric Andrew Sussman, son of Michele and Marc Sussman

February 2008

23 Tara Jessica Wendell, daughter of Marcie and Gregory Wendell

March 2008

8 Hannah Melissa Block, daughter of Stephanie and Gary Block

8 Hailey Bryce Jerome, daughter of Barbara Chait and Scott Jerome