



Gratz Insider, January 2012 - Story Continuation

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Think Spring - in February?

As we plow through the long, gray, bone-chilling months of winter, thoughts of spring remain elusive. Jews can enjoy a spiritual escape from the winter blues, however, by celebrating the holiday of Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees, which begins at sundown on February 7th and ends the following night.

Nestled between Chanukah and Purim, this holiday holds its own unique significance. As explained by Lyndall Miller, Tu B'Shvat is a holiday that can be rooted in fun family traditions, but resonates with contemporary relevance. Miller is director of the Legacy Heritage Institute for Jewish Early Childhood Educators at Gratz College. In her booklet "Trees, Torah, and Tradition," Miller points out that while tree references abound in the Tanach, Tu B'Shvat is not mentioned there. Tu B'Shvat began as an agricultural holiday, signaling the coming of spring, and evolved into a day devoted to eating Israeli fruits and grains, as Jews attempted to stay connected to the land of Israel after being forced to leave. Later, the kabbalists ritualized this holiday with a seder, requiring various fruits to be eaten in a particular order - and adding wine, blessings and religious readings to the observance as well.

Today, the celebrations of Tu B'Shvat branch out in different directions. Many people contribute to the planting of trees in Israel. Some hold Tu B'Shvat seders and serve delicious fruit- and nut-based culinary creations. The environmentally conscious use this holiday to further earth-friendly initiatives. In addition to descriptions of these Tu B'Shvat observances, Miller's "Trees, Torah, and Tradition" includes stories and specific suggestions for celebrating the holiday with young children, such as observing the beauty of trees - even in winter - and creating family conservation goals.

So, as the winter blues set in, consider Miller's words: "Even in winter, bare of leaves, flowers, and fruit, the trees move up from the ground with their quiet grace. Soon, Tu B'Shvat tells us, they will show us that they are performers in the great dance of the earth, as we move towards spring."

Follow these links for more information about celebrating Tu B'Shvat:

<http://www.neot-kedumim.org.il/?CategoryID=241&ArticleID=137&SearchParam=tu+bshvat>

<http://www.aish.com/h/15sh/>

<http://www.tubshvattrees.com/>