

## TU B'SHEVAT - JEWISH EARTH DAY

Jewish communities across North America have embraced Tu b'Shevat as a Jewish Earth Day, linking traditional Jewish understandings of our relationship to and responsibility for all Creation with profound concern about the global ecological crisis.

This past January 22<sup>nd</sup>, we marked the celebration of Tu b'Shevat. Moving forward, as we reflect on this past holiday, we each have an opportunity to think about our own and our families' possible contribution to healing our relationship with the Earth and in helping the Earth to heal itself.

The traditional practices of Tu b'Shevat were developed primarily in the Middle Ages by Jews searching for an opportunity to connect with the Land of Israel. For most of the last hundred years, Tu b'Shevat has been widely observed as an opportunity to support the building of the Jewish state.

Increasingly, North American Jewish communities are taking time to learn about, to protect and to preserve the ecosystems they live in. Tu b'Shevat is now celebrated by learning about the places in which Jews live, studying Jewish environmental ethics and engaging in acts of ecological "tikkun," or repair.

This past Tu b'Shevat marked a significant step in the growth of the Jewish environmental movement. Jewish environmentalists find in Judaism a profound response to the environmental crisis we face as a society, and find in ecological thought and action insights and practices that have the power to renew Judaism.

Tu B'Shevat, Shabbat and many other Jewish holidays have ecological significance, as do a wide range of other Jewish observances. Both Judaism and ecological consciousness beckon us to acknowledge and act upon the recognition that there is something much larger than us at work in the universe. As we begin a New Year, we each have an opportunity to consider our own ecological footprint and what we can do to improve our relationship with the earth.

In practical terms, ***do you know that the average American throws out 4.5 lbs of garbage each day***, most of it in the form of packaging that comes home from a store and then goes straight into the garbage? One commitment each of us can take to help "clean up the earth" could be for you and your family to make a commitment to reduce your family's use of paper products. You could also look into the establishment of a home recycling program for paper waste, as well as buying paper products such as paper towels, napkins and toilet paper that have high recycled content, or that are made out of renewable resources.

As we enter a presidential election year, another practical step we can each take as we consider which candidates we want to support is to examine each candidate's environmental record and see where they stand on issues such as recycling and global warming. Challenge those candidates who you may want to support by asking them what their plan is on the environment in general and more specifically for a solution to global warming. One website which you may want to look at is The League of Conservation Voters (LCV.org) which allows you to access information on local and national political candidates.

Let us embrace the challenge of forging an ecologically sustainable future, raise our voices as Jewish individuals and institutions in favor of protecting all of Creation, and make a commitment to embody personally and communally the millennia-old Jewish mandate to protect the Earth on which we live.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please call Harriet Shugarman at 201-906-2675.

*Source: The Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life, Program pages*

