

The holiday of Tu B'shvat, one of four new years we celebrate during the Jewish calendar, begins tonight. Tu B'shvat is the new year of the trees because at one time the age of trees was calculated for tax purposes, and it was assumed that any tree's birthday was the 15th, or Tu, of Shvat.

Our tax basis is different now, but we still have this holiday as a celebration of trees, their fruits, and all the splendid and abundant gifts of nature. We may observe Tu B'shvat a number of different ways, such as conducting a special seder, eating the seven species cited in the Bible as abundant in the land of Israel, or planting a tree. Those of you who are around my age may remember collecting money as school children to send to Israel for planting trees on Tu B'shvat.

The importance of trees to the Jewish people was thrown into sharp relief in December. While Israelis naturally felt agony over the tragic loss of life in the Carmel forest fire, they also grieved over the loss of the trees in this beloved wooded area. This would be a good year to renew the tradition of allowing our children to be responsible for planting trees in Israel.

Trees even serve as a metaphor for what which could be considered our source of knowledge and life: our Torah. Given by Adonai, it's warmly referred to as Etz Chayim, the tree of life. Could our valuation of trees be more highly marked?

Tu B'Shvat is a wonderful opportunity after the hectic winter holiday season to feel one of the most glorious gifts we have: gratitude. Little feels as wonderful as feeling grateful for the creation of this world and all its marvels from the trees to those we love, and we are able to inhabit this feeling through prayer, as I pray now.

Adonai Eloheinu, thank you for the trees which give us life in the very air we breath, beauty as we look around, scents to enrich our environments, rustling sounds to calm, fruit to delight our tastes, and bark to feel rough and smooth against our palms. Even more, thank you for the gift of creating in us the ability to take such joy and pleasure in this world, the family, friends and community with whom we share it, and the ability to work for its preservation. Grant that every day we experience and truly appreciate the gifts that you have given and the fact that you created us with the capacity to enjoy them.

And let us say, Amen.

Composed by: Sara Blatt
Blessing theme: Tu B'shvat