



# Congregation Etz Chaim

A Reform Jewish Congregation  
Fairport, New York

## CONGREGATION ETZ CHAIM

January- February 2019

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### From the Rabbi's Desk

This coming Monday, as Americans, we will be celebrating Martin Luther King day. But as Jews, we will be celebrating Tu B'Shevat – the New Year for the trees, that falls on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the Hebrew month of Shevat. (and this year coincides with Jan 21).

It is one of *four* new years that the Talmud describes. Nisan 1 (Passover occurs in Nisan, which in Biblical times was known as Aviv – literally, Spring) is the new year for a king's rein, and the new year for festivals.

The first day of Elul is the new year for tithes (the form of taxation in ancient Israel and Judah), and, by extension, animals. The first of Tishri is the new year of Years, sabbaticals, jubilee (after 7 Sabbatical years), and for *planting* of trees and vegetables.

So how come the New Year for trees falls on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of a month – Shevat - instead of the first day? Well, you're not the first to ask that question. In fact the Talmudic sage, Shammai, and his disciples, said the new year for trees should be on the first day of Shevat. The school of his contemporary and rival, Hillel, held out for the 15 as the new year for trees. As happened in all but 18 of their disputes, the rabbinic consensus ultimately sided with Hillel, for a simple and practical reason.

Eretz Yisrael has two seasons: dry and rainy. By the 15<sup>th</sup> of Shevat, most of the season's rains have fallen. This is when buds appear on the trees, buds that ultimately will become fruit. If buds appeared before tu b'shevat, the tithe was for the preceding year. After tu b'shevat, the tithe is for the coming year.

Kind of makes this celebration of the trees' new year seem rather mundane, doesn't it?

But that was the nature of Talmud. It was detailed study down to extreme minutiae, and that in itself makes it an extraordinary work.

But there is more to Judaism than the dictum of rituals and ethics as spelled out in Torah and Talmud. Hundreds of years after the compilation of the Talmud, Jewish mysticism began to flower. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century of the common era, sages in Safed, led by Rabbi Isaac Luria, developed the seder for Tu B'Shevat, and attributing to different fruits characteristics that parallel the different emanations through with the Divine (Ein Sof in Hebrew – literally "Without End") is revealed to us in both physical and metaphysical terms.

By imbuing this spirituality into the holiday, the mystics of Safed

modernized it. By celebrating a new year for trees, it was an act of faith that God would again provide the fruit of the trees in the coming seasons. It thus becomes a metaphor for God's continuing sustenance of humanity in general, and faith in God's physical *and spiritual* sustenance of the eternal people, the Jews.

Vegetables will appear in the Spring, grains will grow, barley will be harvested and inventoried, and Passover will celebrate our deliverance. The first fruits will be harvested at the beginning of summer, when we celebrate the Feast of Weeks, and the giving of the Torah. And by the fall, after the Days of Awe, we will celebrate the full fall harvest, eating in our sukkot, and acknowledging with lulav and etrog the Omnipresence of the God who sustains us.

Finally, in modern times where Tu B'Shevat is devoted to conservation, it reminds us that we have a covenant with the Divine. The Divine has provided us with a planet that sustains us; it is our responsibility to sustain the planet, and all its inhabitants. Pick up the sparks, repair the world. We are partners, created b'tzelem Elohim, in God's image.

Kein y'hi ratzon.

Rabbi David Abrahams

## **Annual Tu B'Shevat Seder**

On Friday, January 18th, please join us at 7:00pm as we celebrate Tu B'Shevat! **Tu** BiShvat (Hebrew: תּוֹבֵשֶׁבֶט ט"ו) is a Jewish holiday occurring on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat (in the current year, **Tu** BiShvat begins at sunset on January 20 and ends in the evening of January 21). It is also called

"Rosh HaShanah La'Ilanot" (Hebrew: לילאילנות השנה ראש), literally "New Year of the Trees.

## **Thinking About Summer**

And who doesn't want to think about summer during these cold wintry days? Normally we would have a Shabbat service/cookout at Perinton Park in June. This year, however, a Shavuot dairy potluck is scheduled for Saturday, June 8. Rather than having two dinners in the same month, we have elected to move the Perinton Park service/cookout to Friday, August 16. Reminders will be sent out as the season progresses but it's never too early to mark your calendar for this summer event.

## **Fundraising Ideas Wanted!**

Everyone can use a little extra money, and Etz Chaim is no exception. We're kept afloat by dues and generous donations but sometimes it's just enough to get by. The Board has been discussing possible ways to do some fundraising activities to boost our income but we'd like input from our members, especially if you've participated in a successful fundraiser for another organization or have a great idea for one we might try. Please contact Ashley with your suggestions/ideas and she will pass the information on to the Board.

## **Your Congregation**

Etz Chaim Board meetings are held at 7 p.m on the third Sunday of each month at Mountain Rise. Right now there are two seats available on the Board that we would like to fill by June. We would appreciate getting new voices and ideas

to enhance our congregation for the future. If you have an interest in joining the Board or have any questions, please contact Lynn Harris at [harris8g@gmail.com](mailto:harris8g@gmail.com)

## **Eastman Film Series**

The film series is already underway, but there's still a few Sunday's left. Check out the link for more information!

<https://www.eastman.org/film-series/lchaim-celebrating-jewish-life>

## **Shout Out!**

Becca OKeefe (daughter of Sue and Marty) graduated December 2018 from the University of Pittsburgh with a Master of Science in Physician Assistant studies . She will be working as a hospitalist at Cayuga Medical Center in Ithaca.

## **Donations**

### General Fund

Ellen Lerner  
Stacey Freed

### In Memory of Harvey Steron

Judy Kramer and Steve Ignacazak  
Thomas Newcomb  
Elaine Tecler  
Cheryl Steron  
Ray Mondschein

### In Memory of David Goodfriend

Judy Kramer and Steve Ignacazak

### High Holiday Donation

Stuart and Jodi Sacks

## **Oneg Sign Up**

If you haven't had a chance yet to sign up for a few Onegs or Holiday potlucks, it's not too late! Just email me at [ashleyetzchaim@gmail.com](mailto:ashleyetzchaim@gmail.com) or call 585-223-5344 and let me know when you think you can help. It's hard to plan out months in advance, so just make your best guess. If you're unable to help out on your assigned dates, no worries—just let us know and we'll find a replacement for you.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Comments</b>
FEBRUARY	1	Friday	Shabbat Service	7:30 PM	Mountain Rise
	3	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	10	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	10	Sunday	Board Meeting	7:00 PM	Mountain Rise Classroom
	15	Friday	Shabbat Service	7:30 PM	Mountain Rise
MARCH	1	Friday	Shabbat Service	7:30 PM	Mountain Rise
	3	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	10	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	15	Friday	Shabbat Service	7:30 PM	Mountain Rise
	17	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	17	Sunday	Board Meeting	7:00 PM	Mountain Rise Classroom
	22	Friday	Purim Potluck	6:00 PM	Mountain Rise Social Hall (DAIRY)
	24	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	31	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
APRIL	5	Friday	Shabbat Service	7:30 PM	Mountain Rise
	7	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	14	Sunday	Annual Meeting	6:00 PM	Mountain Rise Classroom
	14	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC

	20	Saturday	Community Seder	5:30 PM	Mountain Rise Social Hall (set up 4:30)
	21	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	28	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
MAY	3	Friday	Shabbat Service	7:30 PM	Mountain Rise
	5	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	12	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	17	Friday	Shabbat Service	7:30 PM	Mountain Rise
	19	Sunday	Board Planning Meeting	7:00 PM	Mountain Rise Classroom
JUNE	2	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	8	Saturday	Shavuot dairy potluck	7:00 PM	Mountain Rise (Ice Cream Social)
	9	Sunday	Religious School	9-12:00 PM	JCC
	15	Friday	Shabbat Cook Out	6:30 PM	Perinton Park
	23	Sunday	Board Meeting	7:00 PM	Mountain Rise Classroom