



Tu B'shevat New Year Be-Leaf Boards

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Subject Area: Holidays and Eco-Judaism

Single/Multi-unit lesson plan single

Target Age: 7th through adult

Objectives:

- 1) Participants will learn about the 4 Jewish new years.
- 2) Participants will understand how the life cycle of a tree can teach them about renewal in their own lives.
- 3) Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their lives and have the opportunity to slow down and meditate.
- 4) Participants will be able to articulate their goals and visions for the coming year.

Text

1) First ask participants if they know about the 4 Jewish new years and if they can guess what they are. Go through each and why each one exists. (See notes below for details). Talk about “new years resolutions” and how in Judaism, we have the opportunity to reinvent ourselves in every moment, but since we often get caught up in our own lives, we at least get four times per year in the Jewish calendar to reinvent ourselves.

2) This renewal is especially relevant on Tu B'shevat, the new year of the trees. The trees literally go through a resting period (as do many animals as well) and emerge invigorated for the season ahead. Talk about if the participants feel more or less lethargic in each season and why we as humans do or don't take the winter for hibernation. Talk about how our energy is connected to the sun and the shorter days mean the potential for more artificial energy (drinking more coffee or tea in winter for example).

3) Take participants outside and look at the surroundings. In February, especially in Boulder, everything looks dormant. Give participants a moment, in silence to look around and maybe walk up to a tree or a shrub and examine it closely. After a few brief moments, ask participants to look for signs of life on plants or shrubs. (may or may not happen depending on the year and the weather). Ask them to visualize the inner workings of the tree that will be waking soon (certainly sooner in Israel). Sap will begin to flow, nutrients will be pulled from the earth, buds will begin to appear. Ask them to take a moment while looking

at the tree to visualize their own inner workings the dormant ideas, desires, creative bursts that may be sitting quietly under the surface. What are the passions, dreams and hopes that are bubbling under the surface just waiting for their chance to spring forth and have their time in the sun? Take a moment to realize the complexity and beauty of trees. In all of human's infinite wisdom, we can plant trees, but we can't recreate them. We can take a moment to realize that we are seeing one of G-d's miracles.

4) While everyone is outside, have someone turn down the lights in the classroom, light all of the candles and spread the candles, magazines, cardboard, glue and scissors around the room (on tables or on the floor). Turn on the music. Have participants return in this atmosphere and sit in front of a piece of cardboard. Continue the meditation you began outside. Ask them to begin to visualize these hopes, dreams and passions. Is there a project you've wanted to begin? Is there a dream job? Dream relationship? Dream volunteer project? Ask them to look at their cardboard. This is the blank slate of possibility upon which to create their be-leaf board. The board they can use as inspiration believing in themselves and the infinite wellspring of ideas lying just beneath the surface, just like the leaves that will emerge from the limbs outside. Use the wisdom in the trees – the fact that trees which just look like sticks in the ground do not seem like they could ever spring forth life in their current state. Yet, they will produce beautiful leaves, blooms and seeds in just a few months. You may not believe that your dreams could become a reality, but use the strength in the trees to allow your own blossoms to be set free. As with the tree, these dreams may not happen overnight but could emerge slowly over the next few months.

5) Now, have participants begin to look through the magazines finding pictures that depict their be-leaf in their dreams for the coming year. They can cut or tear them out of magazines and glue them to their be-leaf boards.

6) When everyone is done, have each person go around and share their intentions for the coming year and what they hope to manifest in the coming seasons.

Materials

Used magazines (the more the merrier)

Recycled posterboards or large cardboard boxes cut so that each participants gets a panel of the box (various colors okay)

Glue (1 glue stick for every 2-3 participants)

Scissors (1 for every 2-3 participants)

Candles and candle holders

Music – I recommend Neshama Carlbach although any calming Jewish music will work.

A device to be able to play the music

Access to at least one tree or a group of trees

Notes

The Four Jewish New Years (adapted from sixthirteen.org)

1 Tishrei - The first of Tishrei serves as the New Year for several purposes, the best known being the New Year for the **civil calendar**, or “the new year for seasons” — Rosh Hashanah, literally “the head of the year.”

15 Shevat - The second new year is 15 Shevat, the New Year for **trees**. Most Jewish sources consider 15 Shevat as the New Year both for designating fruits as orlah and for separating fruits for tithing. (**Orlah:** (a) The prohibition of benefiting from the fruit of a tree for the first three years after it is planted. (b) The forbidden fruit. (c) The tractate of the Mishnah that discusses these laws. – from www.chabbad.org)

1 Nisan - The third Jewish new year is 1 Nisan, which corresponds to the season of the **redemption** from Egypt and the birth of the Israelite nation. The Torah’s command that “this month [i.e. Nisan] is for you the beginning of the months, it shall be the first month of the year to you.”

1 Elul - The last new year, 1 Elul, is the New Year for the tithing of **cattle**.