



Grow, Grow

If you watch really closely, at this time of year in particular, you can hear the truth of that wonderful line in Bereishit Rabba, “There is not a single blade of grass that doesn’t have a constellation in the heavens pulling it forward and saying to it, ‘grow’”. (10:6)

The seasons are changing, the days are longer, Shabbat comes in slightly less crazily early, there are buds on the otherwise scrawny hydrangea in the Synagogue garden, readying to explode into foliage and my favourite dwarf witch hazel’s yellow blossom are already braving the winter cold.

It’s a little early, still, for fruit tree blossom, but this is the blessing to be said on seeing the first fruit tree blossom in the year;

“Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has made nothing lacking in God’s world, and created in it good creatures and good trees to give pleasure to human beings”. (Talmud Brachot 43b)

It’s always good to have the text ready, much like the boy in the poem by Hannah Yerushalmi cited by Rabbi Natasha where an 8 year-old carries “emergency confetti” in his pocket, “everywhere / just in case / there is good news.”

We mark Tu Bishvat this Sunday night with a wonderful celebration at New London. Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg is joining us. We have Muslim participation, a presentation on swifts and Chen Reiss will be singing. It’s an opportunity to acknowledge our place in this beautiful but fragile world, to feel closer to it and, perhaps above all, to feel touched by the possibility of good news that is slowly reaching out into the wintery light.

6-7:30pm, all welcome. More here <https://shulcloud.newlondon.org.uk/event/for-the-love-of-trees.html>. And, even if you can’t come, please take an opportunity to watch, really closely, a blade of grass and see if you can make out the call of the constellations in the emergence of life from the dark of winter.

I’m also delighted to share this reflection on Tu Bishvat and the cutting down of the Sycamore Gap sycamore from the Times of Israel blog of our member Claire Silverstone-Bright – here <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/tu-bishevat/>.

This Sunday is the stonesetting of Chazan Stephen Cotsen, of blessed memory. 11:15 at the Western Cemetery in Cheshunt. We’ll be gathering to remember, celebrate and dedicate the stone, and a token from the Synagogue that will mark his grave. For those who visit Cheshunt but aren’t able to join us this weekend, Stephen’s grave is just behind that of Rabbi Louis and Shula Jacobs, by the memorial garden at the front of the cemetery.

And, phew!, this Shabbat is Shabbat Shira. As well as a wonderful BM – Mazal Tov Lilly – Yoav and I will be celebrating the reading of the Song of the Sea at the heart of Parshat Beshallach by taking a whistlestop tour through the world of Jewish songful prayer. This good news – for us all – is that Yoav will be doing the singing.

Shabbat Shalom
Tu Bishvat Sameach

Rabbi Jeremy

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Can you also please share this

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In Honour of Holocaust Memorial Day

I was deeply moved to see so many organisations and individuals recognise Holocaust Memorial Day, and an honour to recognise the efforts of the HMD Trust and all who work so hard to ensure the most bleak experience of our Jewish past, and indeed humanity, is never forgotten.

I have been asked by members a response to the failure of the BBC to properly recognise the uniquely Jewish nature of the Holocaust. It was a telling and very considerable failure. We are, however, delighted to be able to share a recording of Halicha L'Kesaria (better known as Eli Eli) made in honour of Holocaust Memorial Day by our member Chen Reiss.

<https://youtu.be/ZZOc9qKxrgM>

Rabbi Jeremy