

Reconstructionists and Jewish Alliance for Food, Land and Justice to host Tu B'Shevat Shabbaton

Carol Lessure and Margo Schlanger, special to the WJN

Do you remember celebrating Tu B'Shevat—the Jewish New Year for trees—when you were young? Maybe you shivered your way outside and planted

and resources relating to traditions and holidays. He explains that it was Kabbalists of Safed who in the 17th century created a Tu B'Shevat seder, loosely modeled on the Passover seder. Over the past several decades, Jews across the world have used Tu B'Shevat as a time to focus on the environment.

The January Shabbaton will be environmentally-themed throughout. It will begin Friday, with a Tot Shabbat service from 5:45–6:15 p.m.; Rabbi Strassfeld will lead preschool kids with songs and a story. Kabbalat Shabbat services start at 6:30 p.m., followed by a vegetarian (nut free) potluck dinner. Childcare will be provided (with reservations). On

Saturday, January 23, Rabbi Strassfeld will lead text study at 4 p.m., followed by a Tu B'Shevat seder at 5:30 p.m.

Rabbi Strassfeld explains: “The classic Jewish texts about the environment [Deuteronomy 20:19-20; Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars 6:8, 10] prohibit the wanton destruction of nature. The stress on wanton destruction implies that the destruction of natural resources is permissible if it benefits human beings. We will study other Jewish texts to see how Judaism can help us to create a contemporary environmental ethic rooted in the value of all things.”

The Tu B'Shevat seder is structured around eating of four different kinds of fruit, coupled with readings, songs and kavanot/reflections. Rabbi Strassfeld notes, “Our Tu B'Shevat seder will combine the focus on personal growth of the Jewish mystics with contemporary ecological concerns.” Detroit's Congregation T'Chiyah and its rabbi, Alana Alpert, will be joining the Ann Arbor community for the seder, as will several Hazon Detroit fellows.

The events are co-sponsored by AARC and the Jewish Alliance for Food, Land, and Justice. They are a continuation from last year's year-long exploration of the teach-

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ings of Shmita, and are funded by an impact grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor. AARC and the Alliance welcome all community members to join any or all these Shabbaton activities; the events are free, but online registration is required.

More details and registration for any or all of the events can be found at <http://aarecon.org> and <http://shabbaton-FoodLandJustice.eventbrite.com>. ■



Rabbi Michael Strassfeld

a tree (if the ground wasn't frozen) or took a walk and learned to identify trees by their bark and evidence of their leaves and fruits on the ground. For many, this minor holiday didn't resonate. It may be the beginning of spring in Israel, but in North America, it's hard to celebrate trees in the dead of winter.

This year, the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation (AARC) and the Jewish Alliance for Food, Land, and Justice invite the community to join them to engage with Tu B'Shevat, on Friday night, Jan. 22, and Saturday afternoon, Jan. 23, at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor. The events will be guided by Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, a frequent visiting rabbi with AARC this year and Rabbi Emeritus of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City. Rabbi Strassfeld is the author, editor, or co-editor of numerous books and articles, including three versions of the *Jewish Catalog*, *A Shabbat Haggadah: Ritual and Study Texts for the Home*; and *Jewish Holidays*, a guide to the holidays used in many Jewish households. Since the 1973 appearance of the first *Jew-ish Catalog*, subtitled “a do it yourself kit,” Rabbi Strassfeld's books have been the go-to publications for progressive American Jews seeking explanations, contemporary readings,