

Repairing the World, and Your Home, on Tu b'Shevat

By Edmon J. Rodman

Los Angeles (JTA) — The Jewish green day of Tu b'Shevat is not just the new year for trees anymore.

Jews are being asked increasingly to dedicate Tu b'Shevat to repairing the world. The Tu b'Shevat seder at the Jewish Funds for Justice is called "Tikkun [repair] and Transformation." Kolel, the Adult Center for Liberal Jewish Learning, suggests four tikkunim, or repairs, to interact with traditional Tu b'Shevat seder themes: social, cosmic/existential, national, and ecological. On the Reclaiming Judaism website, Rabbi Goldie Milgram writes, "Tu b'Shevat is meant to help repair this world."

But before you go out and make your repairs to the world, don't you think you should fix up your home? Like what about that broken clothes dryer or dishwasher?

You might be surprised, but this has a basis in Jewish tradition. The injunction of "ba'al taschit" - do not destroy - is the Jewish version of "waste not, want not." To avoid waste, we need to learn how to repair rather than throw things away.

It's time to think globally and act locally — very locally, like in your kitchen or utility room.

Yes, there's a drought in Israel

and there was that terrible fire in the Carmel Mountains of northern Israel, but that doesn't absolve you of doing something about the water drip dripping down your drain because you don't know how to fix it.

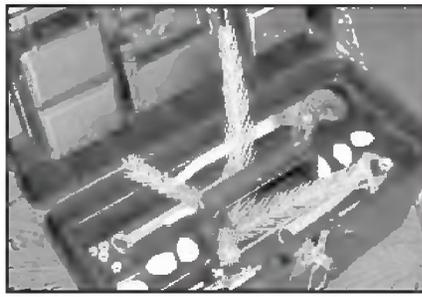
At Tu b'Shevat, consider this: With the money saved from a few simple home repairs, you can fix your house and your world.

The holiday is often observed with a Tu b'Shevat seder, a Feast of Fruits. Nuts in the shell, like almonds, play a part in the ritual, and to those bent on repair, they bring to mind another kind of nut - those metal hexagonal ones that are really holding the world together.

Repairs have never been more expensive, but repair parts and instructions on how to install them have never been more accessible. With household expenses such as insurance and utilities on the rise, why throw away that perfectly good but too-expensive-to-repair appliance when you can fix it yourself?

What you can toss is that old stereotype of Jews, men or women, not being handy, or even owning tools.

To get started, the Talmud says, "On three things the world stands: on justice, on truth, and on peace." Generations of Jewish engineers, plumbers and electricians would



Tooling around: A basic set of tools helps you green up your life in a variety of ways. (Edmon J. Rodman)

add a fourth: a toolbox.

With a household tool set as basic as flat head and Phillips head screwdrivers, adjustable wrench, pliers, and hammer, you can save enough money over a year to green up your yard for the next Tu b'Shevat.

My toolbox was a wedding gift. It was wrapped with a bow, just like the other presents, but over the years its contents have far outlived the usefulness of the crock pots, slicers/dicers and sundry plug-in space-taker-uppers that we received for our home.

Over time, my tool box has opened my eyes to conservation. I like to think that with my repairs of a washing machine, dryer and oven, even computer, my personal landfill is smaller.

Each repair has been a reminder that what is broken can

often be fixed. With each repair, each turn of the wrench, the kabbalistic concept of the Tu b'Shevat seder known as *asayah* - gaining awareness of the physical world - becomes more accessible.

For those who are tool challenged, do as Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, suggests: "Find for yourself a teacher."

I consult with my father-in-law, Stanley Berko, a professional who has repaired appliances for much of his adult life: TVs, ovens, microwaves.

In a kind of repairman's oral law, he has passed down to me, patient phone call after call, an order to repair worth sharing: "Always check first to see if it's plugged in," he invariably tells me.

"Then check the circuit breaker," he adds for good measure.

This might sound like a big "duh" until Stanley regales me with tales of the house calls he has made in which the plug is simply out or the breaker popped.

Our dishwasher tanked recently. Not enough water was going in, resulting in cloudy drinking glasses and a serving of grayish dried patina on everything else.

With California in a drought, all that extra hand rinsing certainly wasn't helping.

By Googling the dishwasher's make and model number along with the prompt "Doesn't clean, not filling with water," I found a help site where several respondents for a similar request had suggested clearing the filter in the washer's inlet valve.

But where was the valve? At an Internet parts site I found a schematic that showed the valve and filter were up front and easily accessible. I also found instructions on how to remove and clean it out.

After unplugging the appliance and turning off the water, I did exactly that, with the aid of an adjustable crescent wrench and screwdriver. The result: cloudless cups and clean cutlery.

A basic repair call would have been \$100. Additionally there would have been the cost of a replacement part and the labor to install it. By doing the repair myself, I saved a lot of green.

Yes, there was fire in Israel, and with a simple repair or two you can save enough to replant a couple of trees — with enough left over for a fine spread of nuts (the edible kind) for your Tu b'Shevat seder. ✨

(Edmon J. Rodman is a JTA columnist who writes on Jewish life from Los Angeles. Contact him at edmojace@gmail.com.)

Op-Ed: Our Tu b'Shevat Responsibility

By Steve Gutow and David Saperstein

Washington (JTA) - As the holiday of Tu b'Shevat approaches, congregations and families prepare to look at the natural world with wonder and celebrate the abundance of earth's incredible resources. At many of our celebrations, we will read from Ecclesiastes 1:4: "One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the same forever."

Yet our generation is learning that this promise may not be ensured. The earth is changing before us, and the resources we enjoy today - abundant food, a stable climate, and clean, breathable air - may not be here forever.

This Tu b'Shevat, which falls on January 26, brings an awesome responsibility: We must act to save the very creation that we celebrate - the planet that is ours in trust.

Tu b'Shevat, which began as a minor holiday marked by a festive meal, has grown into the modern Jewish Earth Day, linking traditional celebration with our growing sense of environmental responsibility. As we connect our tradition to these modern challenges, we deepen our sense of personal responsibility, planting trees, and reminding ourselves that it's a mitzvah to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Jews have long taught that every act counts and each decision matters.

But we must also step beyond. As citizens of the nation that sets the tone for the world's environmental standards, American Jews have a special duty. It is a Jewish imperative to raise our voices for what we believe is right and just: legislation that will effectively ad-

dress the environmental crises of our generation.

This Tu b'Shevat, we have the opportunity to move beyond individual and communal celebratory activities to raise our voices in addressing broader challenges to our environment. To truly mark the holiday and meet its intent, we must do more than plant trees or attend a Seder - we must commit to advocacy on the policies that affect environmental integrity. And the place to start is the United States Congress.

Scientists, economists and religious leaders agree on the need for comprehensive climate and energy legislation. We need laws that include science-based targets placing a strong cap on carbon emissions and have stringent short- and long-term goals. This is the only way to limit both the current global temperature rise and future environmental degradation.

We need laws that will create the bedrock for America's transition from polluting fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy sources. It's simply not enough to tell citizens and corporations to pollute less. We must provide them with viable alternatives, and that will require a national legislative framework.

We need meaningful measures to minimize the impact of climate change and new energy policies on low-income communities and vulnerable populations in America and around the world, including sufficient funding for international adaptation programs that help communities confront the effects of climate change - drought, flooding, changing agricultural patterns - that some are already

seeing. Industrial changes of this magnitude will have an enormous impact on the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. We must see to it that in our efforts to save the planet, we do not harm the people who live on it. In the aftermath of Haiti, we see vividly the horrifying damage of neglecting infrastructure among the poorest of the poor.

Some argue that Congress needs more time to consider environmental legislation, insisting that we cannot rush such an important task. Yet time is the one thing that we, and the planet, do not have. As ice caps melt and oceans rise, island nations and entire species are becoming endangered even faster than predicted.

The United States exerted essential leadership at the United Nations climate conference in Copenhagen, and it is time for our nation to follow that lead with leg-



Rabbis Steve Gutow, left, and David Saperstein.

islation. We must call on our elected representatives and the administration to pass comprehensive energy and climate legislation for a healthier environment - and for the cause of human survival.

In Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah, we learn that the Creator led Adam around the Garden of Eden saying, "Look at My works. See how beautiful they are, how excellent. See to it that you do not spoil or destroy My world - for if you

do, there will be no one to repair it after you."

On Tu b'Shevat, it is our moral and spiritual duty as part of our celebration to call on our lawmakers to join us in the task of tikkun olam, repairing our broken world. The seasons are turning, and time is not on our side. ✨

(Rabbi Steve Gutow and Rabbi David Saperstein are board members of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life.)

Richard Chess of UNC Asheville Literature Faculty Wins Prestigious Award

Richard Chess of UNC Asheville's literature faculty was awarded prestigious honors this fall semester. Chess was named Western Region Distinguished Poet by the North Carolina Poetry Society and its Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet Series.

The North Carolina Poetry Society describes its new Western Region Distinguished Poet, Richard Chess, as an "award-winning much-sought after teacher." As Western Region Distinguished Poet, Chess will be literary mentor to three student poets and one adult poet; the resulting works by

the four poets will be presented at Western Carolina University's annual Literary Festival and at readings at area libraries.

"It's a great honor to be given this opportunity to share my love of poetry with four terrific poets, including a seventh grader from The Odyssey Community School, a junior from Asheville High School, an undergraduate from Lenoir Rhyne, and a professional flutist/poet/writer from Bakersville," said Chess. "I hope I will be able to help each of these poets in some small ways to deepen their practice of poetry."

Chess is the author of three books of poetry, "Third Temple" (2007), "Chair in the Desert" (2000), and "Tekiah" (1994). His poems have appeared in many journals as well as several anthologies, including "Bearing the Mystery: 25 Years of Image, Best American Spiritual Writing 2005," and "Telling and Remembering: A Century of American-Jewish Poetry." Chess is UNC Asheville's Roy Carroll Professor of Honors Arts and Sciences and professor of literature and language. He also directs the university's Center for Jewish Studies. ✨