

Greater Toronto Area

Tu b'Shvat seder promotes environmentalism

By CAROLYN BLACKMAN
Staff Reporter

The Jewish Nature Centre of Canada, Torat HaTeva, is intent on re-connecting Jews to the environment.

The organization, whose mission is to promote ecological awareness and provide models for spiritually and ecologically sustainable Jewish living, held the fifth annual

manity and all of creation.”

Each morning and evening before reciting the *Shema*, “there are two blessings that introduce the declaration of the oneness: one for nature and one for Torah,” he said.

At the seder, participants were reminded of how “wasteful we can be. Our obsession with overpackaging haunts us and mocks us in the form of landfills and litter.

“Pollutants from its production fill our air and intercede with our sun’s light, turning it against us,” Spetgang said. “The mitzvah of guarding the body originates as a caution to care for one’s soul. The body is the soul’s encasement, its means of nourishment and sustenance. How beautiful it is then, that keeping one’s body fed organically, wholesomely and without toxicity is at once healthy for the soul and the earth.”

Participants were told to use the date palm, one of the seven species of Israel, as an example of how to conduct their lives.

“Dates can be used for food or medicinal purposes. Husks are used for camel fodder, fibres for weaving of baskets and rope. Its presence signifies the location of an oasis, and its fronds are used for shelter.

“Best of all, it is biodegradable and renewable... let us become more conscious of how the packaging we choose affects both our physical and spiritual lives.”

Torat HaTeva offers, among other programs, seminars for students of all ages, a wilderness adventure for grades 7 and 8 students, programs for synagogues and community centres; training for camp staff, naturalists and Jewish educators; and a small community outreach program.

For information call 416-992-9972.



The fifth annual Tu b'Shvat seder sponsored by The Jewish Nature Centre of Canada, Torat HaTeva, was organized by, from right, Shai Spetgang, Matthew Steinberg, Lisa Steinberg, Tally Wolf and Chaya Leah Purwitsky. Missing is Matthew Somers. [Carolyn Blackman photo]

Tu b'Shvat seder at Earl Bales Park Community Centre.

Tally Wolf, educational director of Torat HaTeva, said the concept for the seder, in honour of the Jewish new year of the trees, goes back to the 15th century, but in recent years “there has been new life breathed into it.”

Environmentalism is an inherent part of Jewish life, said Shai Spetgang, chair of the board of directors of Torat HaTeva. “One of our foremost mitzvot is, prevent waste – do not destroy things for no reason.”

The group’s commitment to help the environment, he said, “is our commitment to Judaism. In addition to our personal and national identities, we all exist as part of hu-