

Taking Root and discovering ‘radical amazement’

DOROTHY LICHTBLAU
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

Taking Root, an event held Nov. 30 at Canvass, celebrated the palate by offering attendees the pleasure of sampling an array of environmentally conscious delicacies created by local entrepreneurs.

Taking Root was conceived as an evening dedicated to acknowledging and honouring the people who help Shoresh thrive and to celebrate Shoresh's successes, according to the organization's executive director, Risa Alyson Cooper.

Shoresh is a Toronto organization that sees “environmental ethics as a core element of Jewish identity and is actively committed to responsible stewardship of the earth.”

Among the 30 purveyors of food were Sweets From the Earth, Neal Brothers, New Moon Kitchen and RawFoodz. The selection of savoury and sweet treats included vegetarian sushi, tartlets, fruit and nut mixes, ersatz chocolate, mini veggie squares, veggie chips, and environmentally conscious wine and beer.

As well, the event was an opportunity

to spend time with like-minded people who value ethical farming and care of the earth. Canvass, the cavernous space in which Taking Root was held, was packed and buzzing with conversation.

The centerpiece of Taking Root was a panel discussion that explored the idea and meaning of “Radical Amazement.”

The six people on the panel were, writer and reporter Dan Sax, who took on the role of moderator; Rachel Kimel, co-founder of The Bowery Project, a non-profit organization that creates opportunities for urban agriculture through temporary use of vacant urban spaces; Ilana Rubenstein, an occupational therapist and Jewish educator; Calgary-based Dan Balaban, the founder, president and CEO of Greengate Power Corp, a leading renewable energy company, Zane Caplansky, deli food lover and restaurateur and Emily Rose Antflick, founder and chief community cultivator of Shecosystem.

Generally, the panellists' conceptions of the path to “Radical Amazement” had much in common. They agreed that a sense of awe was often inspired by experiences in and with nature, connection with



Risa Alyson Cooper YARONEINI.COM PHOTO

simple routines that didn't involve any form of electronic device, enactment of ritual, following one's passions, immersing oneself in love and feelings of gratitude and peace, reconnecting with Shabbat and not rushing but allowing oneself to connect with what is occurring here and now.

All the speakers felt that encouraging children to explore and play outdoors is essential to cultivating amazement and awe. The notion they seemed to be expressing was that pleasures such as digging in the earth, collecting rocks or shells, observing a worm disappear into the soil, or a moth flutter among garden plants, support the development of fascination with nature.

In the event promotional booklet, the panellists talked about what makes them say “Wow!”

Sax mentioned, “the way the sun lights up things when I walk my daughter to daycare.” Kimel said, “the delicious mo-

ment of calm in a quiet house.” Rubenstein declared, “my morning coffee,” and Balaban began with, “the beauty and diversity of our world.” Caplansky emphatically declared, “incredible flavours,” and Antflick began her list with “Nature's love for patterns.”

Established by Cooper and a few of her friends with similar world views, Shoresh, “root” in Hebrew, has expanded beyond its original vision, the creation of Kavanah Garden, a space in Thornhill, Ont. dedicated to the practice and teaching of ethical growing, to a significant organization connected with several gardens in Toronto and with Bela Farm, a centre for land-based Judaism in Hillsburgh, Ont.

Now the organization's main activities are transformative education, leadership cultivation and the promotion of social justice. Its programs include guided nature walks, after school programs, academic internships and growing food for community members in need. ■

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Encouraging children to explore and play outdoors is essential to cultivating amazement and awe

Gideon Landau
Fleet Operations Manager
Wietzes Toyota
gideon.toyota@gmail.com

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