There are four "New Years."

• The first of Nissan is the beginning of the year for kings and holidays.

• The first of Elul is the beginning of the year for animal tithes.

  Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say that [animal tithes start] on the first of Tishrei.

• The first of Tishrei is the beginning of the year for years, for the Sabbatical years, the Jubilees, for planting, and for vegetables.

• The first of Shevat is the beginning of the year for trees, so says Beit Shammai.

Beit Hillel says it is the 15th of that [month].

– Talmud B. Rosh Hashanah 2a

On the last Shabbat of January we will celebrate the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat, better known as TU biSh’vat: the New Year of the Trees.

This minor but special day is combination of Arbor Day and Groundhog Day. In Israel the blossoming of the almond tree is said to forecast the coming of spring. In the Middle Ages the rabbis developed seders for TU biSh’vat that celebrated the produce of the land of Israel. Our own Reform movement published a ‘haggadah’ for such a TU biSh’vat seder not long ago.

The notion of multiple "new years' in a given year resonates for us as both Jews and cosmopolitan, multi-cultural New Yorkers. There are so many New years in the course of our year its hard to keep track: the Jewish New Year, the School New Year, the secular New Year, the Chinese New Year, the Budget New Year, Solstices and Equinoxes, and of course, our Birthday New Year. I’m sure you can add to that list.

Perhaps the reason that any one year needs so many New Years is that we humans need more than a single opportunity to reflect upon the immediate past, and recraft our vision of the future. Assessment of our actions and our resolve to new action is not constant, but as variable as the seasons themselves.

TU biSh’vat comes in the depths of Winter, when heart and spirit, like body, can often be frozen into pattern. The symbol of the blossoming almond tree (in Israel at least) and the seder of Israeli produce, offers a foretaste of Spring, Seder and Hope that awaits in just a few months.

Please join us on Friday evening, January 25th as our synagogue youth group, BHGSY, leads services followed by a brief but scrumptious TU biSh’vat seder . Join us for both or either opportunities as we celebrate the leadership of our teens and warm our winter-bound souls.