

FROM THE RABBI

PRAYER—GOOD FOR THE SOUL, GOOD FOR THE PEOPLE



This bulletin contains the highlights for the months of Shevat and Adar. Holidays fall in the middle of both months. The Fifteenth of Shevat or *Tu B'Shevat* is the Jewish Arbor Day or the "Birthday of the Trees". And the fourteenth (Purim) and fifteenth (Shushan Purim) are the days we remember a catastrophe that *almost* took place in ancient Persia.

A prominent story is told each year on *Tu B'Shevat*. A wonderful and holy man known as Choni HaMagol, Choni the *Circle Maker*, was known for his devoutness in prayer. He was so great, the Talmud tells us in the *Aggadata*, that when he prayed he would draw himself into a circle and would say to G-d: "I will not move from this place, O L-rd, until my prayer is answered!" Thus we see the great power of prayer, when petitioned with purity of meaning.

In the story of Purim, we read each year of the assimilation of the Jews of Persia. So great is their desire to become citizens of the Empire, they place decrees and laws which were the antithesis of Torah belief ahead of their desire to be loyal to the G-d of Israel. It is only after, Haman, the Evil, plots the annihilation of the Jewish people in all provinces of Persia and Media from India to Ethiopia, do the Jewish people realize their true heritage and return to it.

What changes the outcome of the Purim story? Like Choni's specialty—it is prayer. Esther, as you recall, sends a message to Mordechai asking all of the Jewish nation—in all of the provinces—to fast and to pray that such a terrible and horrific massacre will *not* take place.

Many times I have heard disparaging and/or even sarcastic comments regarding prayer in general and *minyan* attendance in particular as being non-helpful. There are those who do not realize that doing a favor and helping with the *minyan* is a small part of what we do.

Prayers to HaShem work. That is our means of communication, better than the telephone, computer or FAX. Perhaps we don't realize it. Yes, sometimes we don't get the "answer" or "outcome" we want. But perhaps it is the outcome we need.

So pray. And come pray with us. Our *minyan* is calling to you. In numbers there is strength, our rabbis tell us.

We pray for a good year agriculturally for Israel and our nation and the world. We pray for the safety of our people everywhere. And we pray for peace, understanding and kindness among people and nations throughout the world.

And at this time we pray that the people of Haiti will be assisted in every way possible, including our financial aide.

HAPPY TU B'SHEVAT and a *Freilichen* PURIM!

Rabbi Edward H. Garsek

COPY OF AN EDITORIAL IN THE TOLEDO BLADE—December 30, 2009

TOLEDO BLESSED BY WONDERFUL CLERGY

Having been born and raised in Toledo (DeVilbiss High School and the University of Toledo) I like to believe that I have always maintained my "smaller" town roots. I have lived in the Chicagoland area for over 30 years and am still thankful for the positive values and morals that I trace back to my hometown.

I do not get back to Toledo as much as I used to but do want to reflect on my visit last month. Unfortunately it was for the dedication of my late mother's (Caroline Lill Kander Rosenberg Z"l) tombstone at Eagle Point Cemetery in Rossford—she died earlier this year.

I want to say how fortunate the City of Toledo is to have such outstanding, upstanding and highly respected clergy such as Rabbi Edward Garsek of Congregation Etz Chayim. From his weekly sermons to the ongoing spiritual support he gives to his congregation and the community in general, he elevates everybody's spirit and well-being. I personally and publicly want to thank this "human jewel" for the love and support he showed my mother through her healthy times as well as her not-so-healthy times. His kind words and good deeds are a constant reminder of his love and devotion to those who are fortunate enough to be a part of his congregation as well as those Toledoans who know him outside of his congregation.

So during this holiday season let's all be cognizant of the often underappreciated clergy who invest so much of their energy and love for all of us.

Marty Kander