

## Our place in nature

### *Thought for the Day*

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There's nothing that feeds a glowing sense of national pride quite as much as breaking a record – is there? Well, perhaps not when the promised record is for the coldest spring ever, as was being predicted earlier this week, with temperatures possibly dropping to nearly  $-30^{\circ}$ .

But it is spring, isn't it? – the snowdrops and crocuses are starting to appear, the birds are noisily making their domestic arrangements, and trees are already in bud – and tomorrow is the official beginning of spring in the Jewish calendar. Once, in the days of the Temple, this “new year for trees” was the start of the new agricultural tax year, providing a fairly clean break between the late fruits of the old year and the earliest produce of the new, and it's still observed throughout the Jewish world as a day to celebrate the natural world and have a bit of a party. In many synagogues, including mine here in Glasgow, we'll be sitting down after the service to a light snack of as many kinds of fruit as we can find in the current shortage at the greengrocers!

For some people it's also a reminder of the inexorable turn of the calendar, and so indirectly of more serious messages – exactly a month later is Purim, and exactly a month after that, Pesach, Passover – the two occasions that best live up to the old joke that Jewish festivals can be summarised, “They tried to destroy us. We won. Let's eat!”!

For others, it's a time to think about our place in nature, and our obligations to the planet and the other creatures we share it with. There are no “alternative facts” about climate change – in a country where every conversation has to include some reference to the weather, we talk about it all the time! We might argue about whether human fecklessness is responsible or not, but even if it's just part of a long-term natural cycle, so long as we can do something to reduce its already devastating effects, don't we have a duty to try?