

## **Taxing for posterity**

### *Thought for the Day*

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Demographers say there are two kinds of people: those who say there are two kinds of people and those who don't! So for example, either you got your tax return in before last week's deadline, or you didn't; either you panicked or you felt smug!

So we're all very comfortable with the fact that 1<sup>st</sup> January is not the only new year: there's the tax year, the school year, and for that matter your own years of life.

The Jewish calendar is no different, and last weekend we celebrated one of our four new years, the quaintly named "New Year for Trees". This harks back to the agricultural society described in the Bible, which continued until the Jewish state was destroyed by the Romans 1937 years ago.

There was a complex system of what we now call social security: tithes were offered to the Temple in Jerusalem and distributed to the needy, the corners of fields were left uncut for the poor to collect, and the Talmud teaches that even those who rely on charity to make ends meet should give a share of their meagre income to help others.

The new year for trees was the cut-off date for taxing fruit, and nowadays the custom is to mark it by eating more than our recommended five daily portions, and in Israel by planting trees. It has also become an opportunity to focus on environmental issues.

The Bible may not have anything to say directly about greenhouse gasses, or about nuclear waste, but it is full of reminders that we are merely temporary custodians of the planet, and have an obligation to preserve it for future generations.

The Talmud tells the story of a farmer tending a carob tree. A passer-by asks him when it will first bear fruit, and the farmer replies, "In 70 years."

"So why are you working so hard, when you will have no benefit?"

And the farmer says, "so that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will have food to eat."

So should we panic or feel smug about our environmental tax return? What are we leaving for future generations?

*Ephraim Borowski*

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