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Rockland toddlers celebrate Jewish Earth Day

By Hema Easley

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ORANGEBURG - Teaching Jewish values is part of everyday lessons at the Orangetown Jewish Center Nursery School.

Yesterday, good deeds and charity were the focus of a class devoted to Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish Earth Day and Arbor Day, which is today.

The day is a celebration of spring and renewal, and the symbiotic relationship between man and nature. It coincides with the beginning of spring in Israel.

Two- and 3-year-olds sat on the carpet and listened intently as their teacher, April Kupferman, told them about the importance of planting trees, especially in Israel, where the dry climate made it difficult for them to grow.

"In America where we live, trees grow everywhere," Kupferman told the children, explaining how seeds fall off trees onto the ground and grow to be new trees. "In Israel they don't grow like that because it is a desert. Almost all trees in Israel are planted by people, not by other trees."

As part of the day's lesson, the toddlers learned about the importance of mitzvah, or good deeds, and tzdekah, or charity. On Tu B'Shevat, the two values combined in donating money to plant trees for the greening of Israel.

The students were then visited by Blue Box Bob, a 4-foot-high charity box character that came to collect money for the Jewish National Fund. The century-old organization was created with the single task of reclaiming the land of Israel. It has championed ecology, environmentalism and conservation.

Each child was given a small replica of the box to take home. All donations collected in the box will go to the Jewish National Fund.

"This is tzdekah," Kupferman told the children.

The lesson was supervised by Sandy Peck-Borowsky, education director of the nursery school.

"It's about a bond with Israel, a bond with nature and a bond with giving," Peck-Borowsky said.

As a lead-up to Tu B'Shevat, toddlers learned about the four seasons. They also made drawings and cuttings of trees, which were then hung on their classroom walls.

To make it easier for the children to understand the importance of Tu B'Shevat, teachers referred to the holiday as the birthday of the trees.

Students tried their hand at potting seeds in dirt in little clay pots, and then watered them. The pots were then placed on windowsills where they could catch sunlight.

"Is it going to make the trees grow stronger?" asked Jordyn Levine, 3, of Tappan as Beth Simon, another nursery school teacher, helped them with the planting.
