

Since I moved to Iowa, now almost six years ago, I've developed a personal custom of sowing cold weather seeds in seed trays on Tu B'shvat so that I could plant the seedlings out in the spring or at least harvest some microgreens for my home Seder at Pesach-time.

Rabbis love seed-and-plant metaphors. They are all over the tradition; our ancient ancestors were excellent agriculturalists. (Rabbis were also partial to figs – the Talmud is filled with them!) And it is true, seeds are remarkable little things; small but mighty, hidden yet on the cusp of being revealed. They are buried in the darkness of the land but vibrantly burst into the light. We scatter them, plant them, nurture them—and our reward is a harvest hundredfold.

Seeds are a fitting analogue for Jewish community life, and I, as a rabbi, often feel like a gardener. Often, our toils are hidden from view and the payoff is in the future, during a far-away harvest cycle. Sometimes, our labors immediately bear fruit.

Usually though, rabbinic life is considerably more mundane. We write a lot of emails and host a lot of Zoom meetings. We quietly check in on people who need support, guide people through life during intensely personal moments and crises, wash the deceased, counsel the bereaved, teach those who seek Jewish wisdom and open the doors of Judaism in ways that may not always be apparent. During the pandemic, our work as rabbis became even more private and insular, our Torah like seeds burrowed deep into the soil. Yet now, we are starting to see the seedlings sprout through. Our Sunday School is abuzz with Hebrew song and learning as I encourage the kids to move their bodies through 'Shira'. Our services are gathering back old friends and welcoming new as more people feel more confident attending. New members continue to find their way to our community as our synagogue continues to grow. At the base of these successes lie a hundred small steps, by lay leaders and Jewish professionals alike. A membership pack sent out, a pastoral call made,