

**Jewish Environmental Education:**

**Guidelines and Principles for a Responsible Jewish Environmental Education Program**

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## **Digest**

Preservation and stewardship of the earth are concepts that reach back to the authors of the Bible. Though the writers of the Bible never considered the possibility that humanity would have the ability to destroy that which God created, they did understand that humankind could affect their living environment.

Yet environmental education is a relatively new concept and even more so in the Jewish community, having just begun to emerge over the last twenty years. Given the relative novelty of Jewish environmental education, this thesis seeks to formulate guidelines and principles for a responsible Jewish environmental education program. In order to achieve this, the first chapter provides an overview of the history of general environmental education. Chapter Two reviews the history of Jewish environmental education, including the most recent and prominent literature in the field as well as a complete review of a Jewish environmental education curriculum. Chapter Three examines selected Jewish sources that have been appealed to in Jewish environmental curricula so as to unearth both their literal and homiletical meanings throughout the history of Jewish interpretation in order to ensure an authentic rendering of the texts. Chapter Four addresses the concern that environmentalism is taught in the confines of our sterile classrooms by setting forth a Jewish environmental education curriculum that makes use of both Jewish texts and the natural environment.

This thesis is intended for the Jewish environmental educator interested in teaching the Jewish view on environmentalism from a modern perspective that is grounded in the classical rabbinic tradition. It may also be valuable for all others interested in gaining insight into the workings of "Jewish" environmentalism, as well as those interested in teaching this subject of such vital concern.

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## Introduction

Preservation and stewardship of the earth are concepts that reach back to the authors of the Bible. Though the writers of the Bible never considered the possibility that humanity would have the ability to destroy that which God created, they did understand that humankind could affect their living environment, either positively or negatively.

This is no less true today. In 1967, Lynn White argued in her seminal article, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," that it has been the Judeo-Christian biblical ethic of "mastery" that has led to this "disastrous ecological backlash."<sup>1</sup> White's article caused both Christianity and Judaism to look inward both to defend their stance on the environment and to increase their support for environmental advocacy.

Environmental advocacy is a new concept. In the biblical framework, advocacy was reserved for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan as indicated throughout Jewish literature. Certainly the environment needed to be preserved or improved, but did not need an advocate for its own sake. When it comes to Jewish environmental education, we are not teaching environmentalism per se, but Jewish attitudes towards the environment. This includes the process through which these attitudes translate into advocacy (*mitzvah*), and how this may permeate familial concerns and interests.

This thesis has several goals. The first is to provide an overview of the history of general environmental education, that is, how environmentalism first evolved and how environmental education became an integral part of this movement (Chapter One). We will then review the history of Jewish environmental education, including the most recent and prominent literature in

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155/3767 (1967):1203.



the field as well as providing a complete review of a Jewish environmental education curriculum. In order for the literature and curricula to be considered valuable, they must not only teach the students how Judaism relates to the environment but also how these lessons continue outside and beyond the classroom, such as in their homes (Chapter Two).

Next, we will examine selected Jewish sources that have been appealed to in Jewish environmental curricula so as to unearth both their literal and homiletical meanings throughout the history of Jewish interpretation. Modern interpretations of Jewish texts are vital to a healthy dialogue on the environment. However, in order to have this dialogue we must recognize both the plain meaning of these texts (*pshat*) and of their rabbinic interpretations in order to ensure the legitimacy not only of our contemporary interpretations, but also of their use in creating a curriculum grounded in the Jewish textual tradition. We thereby align ourselves with our tradition and establish a firm foundation from which new interpretations may be grounded. Interpreting texts in an ad hoc manner has the potential instead to delegitimize a curriculum that claims to be grounded in the Jewish tradition. In this light, interpretation requires great meticulousness. Educators should assume the responsibility *not* to take this task lightly, so that the Judaism we teach is authentic and backed by our millennia of experience (Chapter Three).

Finally we will address the concern that environmentalism is taught only within the confines of our sterile classrooms by setting forth a Jewish environmental education curriculum that makes use of both Jewish texts and the natural environment. One premise of this thesis is that a Jewish environmental education program that is solely based on texts merely teaches Jewish values. The curriculum must additionally incorporate lessons that teach our symbiotic relationship with the environment. This allows the students to understand Jewish values on a

deeper level, enabling them to incorporate the lessons into their daily lives that include other members of their family (Chapter Four).

This thesis is intended for the Jewish environmental educator interested in teaching the Jewish view on environmentalism from a modern perspective that is grounded in the classical rabbinic tradition. It may also be valuable to all others interested in gaining insight into the workings of a “Jewish” environmentalism, as well as those interested in teaching this subject of such vital concern.

## Chapter 1

### Environmental Education

#### Introduction

Environmental education has universal application and is not limited or constrained by any particular religion. When Judaism modifies environmental education, its context changes but not its content. With this in mind, this chapter will examine environmental education's roots, and elucidate the primary terms. The methodology which various organizations use to disseminate their teaching will be outlined as will the strengths and limitations of incorporating an environmental educational program into an existing curriculum. Finally, the modes of research and assessment will be examined to illuminate what advances have been made in the field and whether environmental education, as an agent of change, is still a viable vision.

#### Towards an Understanding of Environmental Terminology

The term "environment" has, at a minimum, five primary considerations:

These include the following:

- A. One's surroundings;
- B. Ecology – the air, water, minerals, organisms, and all other external factors surrounding and affecting a given organism;
- C. The social and cultural forces that shape the life of a person or population;
- D. Computer configuration or mode of operation;
- E. Art that is designed to be site-specific.<sup>1</sup>

These considerations that encompass the term "environment" have caused mild confusion in the field of environmental education through its various possible permutations. In order to avoid confusion, this term will be more clearly defined later. Another word that must also be defined is "environmental." It connotes an association with the environment or relating to or *being*

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<sup>1</sup> environment. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.0.1)*. Retrieved September 28, 2006, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=environment>

concerned with the ecological impact of altering the environment.<sup>2</sup> It is the latter feature, the development of an ethical component (e.g. preservation of species, land, etc.) that provides a connection to religious institutions to become active in the area of environmentalism and more specifically environmental education as a religious imperative.

A brief account of the historical development of environmental studies will clarify its rationale and implications.

### **A Brief Summary of the History of Environmentalism and Environmental Education**

"In 1870, the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel first gave the word its broader meaning, the study of the natural environment and of the relations of organisms to each other and to their surroundings."<sup>3</sup> This definition has been expanded to include nitrogen cycles, energy budgets, food chains, pollination systems, mating calls, and predator / prey oscillations. Humanity's place within the eco-system became better understood. The process was slow and remains problematic. Ecology was a new field of study in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but it was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that environmental education began to be seen as an important and necessary consequence of ecology and environmental studies.

Sir Patrick Geddes was an early pioneer in environmental education. Near the latter part of the nineteenth century, he established the first nature studies / field survey center. His concern for education of the whole person anticipated and set the foundation for modern environmental education.<sup>4</sup> He was able to pass on his teaching to a great number of teachers through the Le Ploy society. Geddes was the first in this new, emerging field to disseminate his

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<sup>2</sup> environmental. (n.d.). *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Retrieved September 28, 2006, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=environmental> – emphasis mine.

<sup>3</sup> Robert E Ricklefs, *Ecology*. 3rd ed. (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1990), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Joy A. Palmer, *Environmental Education in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 1998), 4.

teaching to students. By taking into account the "whole person" in educating him / her, he set the stage for the development of an integrated curriculum. In 1902, the School Nature Study Union was founded, and by the 1940s this field of study had broadened to include rural areas as well.

"Environmental Studies" was first recorded as a legitimate source of academic inquiry in the early 1940s. In 1965 at Keele University in Staffordshire Britain, the term "environmental education" appears at a conference organized for the purpose of investigating conservation of the countryside and its implications for education.<sup>5</sup>

However, "environmental education" took on a more formal meaning at a convention held in 1970 by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The following definition of environmental education was proposed and then formally adopted:

Environmental education is the process of recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man, his culture, and his biophysical surroundings. Environmental education also entails practice in decision-making and self-formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality.<sup>6</sup>

This became the road map for future work in the field of environmental education.

Arguably, however, the conference that has been the seminal influence on the development of environmental education policies around the globe was the one in Tbilisi, Georgia, also held in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> As can be seen, its findings and recommendations would have a profound impact on global attitudes regarding environmental education. The following represent the more significant proposals:

Environmental Education:

- Is a life-long process;

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 8.

- Is inter-disciplinary and holistic in nature and application;
- Is an approach to education as a whole, rather than a subject;
- Concerns the inter-relationship and interconnectedness between human and natural systems;
- Views the environment in its entirety including social, political, economic, technological, moral, aesthetic and spiritual aspects;
- Recognizes that energy and material resources both present and limit possibilities;
- Encourages participation in the learning experience;
- Emphasizes active responsibility;
- Uses a broad range of teaching and learning techniques, with stress on practical activities and first hand experience;
- Is concerned with local to global dimensions, and past/present/future dimensions.
- Should be enhanced and supported by the organization and structure of the learning situation and institution as a whole;
- Encourages the development of sensitivity, awareness, understanding, critical thinking and problem-solving skills;
- Encourages the clarification of values and the development of values sensitive to the environment;
- Is concerned with building an environmental ethic.<sup>8</sup>

These recommendations set the stage for environmental education that remains to this day. The Tbilisi Conference also established specific objectives for the dissemination of environmental education. These were:

- 1) To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological inter-dependence in urban and rural areas.
- 2) To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment.
- 3) To create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups and society as a whole, towards the environment.<sup>9</sup>

These objectives have guided how environmental education has been taught ever since. The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), established in 1971, is on the forefront of integrating environmental education into various settings. The members of the NAAEE realized that they needed to do more than consciousness-raising. In their vision statement about what the objective of environmental education is, they write, "It must prepare

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

people to think together about the difficult decisions they have to make concerning environmental stewardship, and to work together to improve, and try to solve, environmental problems.”<sup>10</sup>

This statement, their vision, is not just the culmination of one organization’s cumulative knowledge. It is the result of a global community working together to change the world. This statement is representative of how environmental education is disseminated in North America and it is representative of the advances environmental education has made.

### **Methodology**

Environmental education is complex, and requires much forethought before it is brought into any school’s curriculum. There has to be considerable planning by the teachers and the school to make it work. Judy Braus and David Wood in their book, *Environmental Education in the Schools – Creating a Program That Works*, have outlined how to do this effectively. It begins with the survey of the community and its local environmental problems. The teacher, principal and colleagues then outline objectives that address these problems. Assessment of the school system follows, through teachers, students, parents and community members. So when thinking about what type of program would work, it is also important to:

- ✚ Match the goals and objectives to the students’ developmental level
- ✚ Make sure the content is relevant to the students’ needs, interests, and backgrounds
- ✚ Build on what the students are learning in other classes
- ✚ Include a component that deals with the development of an environmental ethic
- ✚ Integrate thinking skills that tie directly to the type of behavior one hopes to promote<sup>11</sup>

After these preliminary steps have been taken, there are some common strategies that will make any environmental program work.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.naaee.org/about-naaee/mission>

<sup>11</sup> Judy A. Braus, and David Wood. United States. Information and Collection Exchange. Peace Corps. *Environmental Education in the Schools: Creating a Program That Works!* (Troy: North American Association for Environmental Education, 1994), 42.

Since most environmental programs are integrated into an already existing system, it is more effective to assess the "scope" and "sequence." Scope is the determination of how much material, which materials, and what values one can effectively include in a curriculum. This also includes prerequisite materials, and student skill level. Some necessary skills students might need to solve any environmental problem are: to recognize and define environmental problems; to listen with comprehension; to collect, organize, and analyze information; to generate alternate solutions; select a solution; and to develop, implement, and evaluate a plan of action.<sup>12</sup> Sequence outlines the order in which the content should be taught.<sup>13</sup> Sequencing involves ordering the objectives to fit the intellectual and moral development of the students. One should:

- ✚ Start with simple concepts and thinking skills and move to more complex as students get older
- ✚ Focus on concrete activities in early grades and move to more abstract ideas as students mature
- ✚ Keep prerequisite knowledge and thinking skills in mind
- ✚ Present topics chronologically and/or logically, where appropriate. (For example, you would probably want to cover some local natural history before discussing food webs so that everyone is familiar with the plants and animals being discussed.)<sup>14</sup>

When infusing environmental education into an already existing program, one needs to fit objectives into the curriculum.<sup>15</sup> This presents a problem when one then has to manage different scopes and sequences. Braus and Wood suggest these steps adapted from *A Guide to Curriculum Planning in Environmental Education* by David Engleson (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1987), ensuring that both objectives are compatible and achievable:

1. Select the topic to infuse into the existing curriculum outline.
2. Identify subject areas in the curriculum that relate to that topic.
3. Add the environmental education objective(s), based on that topic, to the existing objective and new content.
4. Describe new instructional techniques to teach the new objective(s).

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 60.



5. Identify any new skills that are needed to meet the objectives.
6. Identify new resources needed to achieve the environmental education objectives.
7. Describe any related activities and topics that could be taught with the new unit.<sup>16</sup>

It is through this process of scope and sequence that the objectives are able to be realized.

With this realization, the mode of integration needs to be selected. There are at least five different models of integration that can be utilized. First, there is the "Project" form, which, as its name suggests, uses a project as an 'interdisciplinary opportunity for real-world skill-building.'<sup>17</sup> Second, is the "Thematic" form, which is a multidisciplinary opportunity with real-world connections where each specific topic involves major research.<sup>18</sup> A third example is through "Content." This mode of integration uses current environmental issues which affect the student, while minimally changing the course content and maintaining the focus on a specific discipline. A fourth example is "Issue Investigation." This has a political objective that involves research, communication and decision-making with an emphasis on student skills and initiative. The fifth example is the "Interdisciplinary Team." This mode requires a diverse team with expertise in several subject areas. This is a theme approach which downplays discipline boundaries and requires planning and system support.<sup>19</sup> These different modes of integration enumerate how with creativity and planning one can incorporate environmental education into one's curriculum in many different ways. This methodology is not only able to be used in the secular sphere but also in Jewish religious education. This methodology will be used explicitly in chapter 4, when explaining how Jewish environmental education will be included in a religious school curriculum.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Martha C. Monroe, and David Cappaert. United States. EPA. *Integrating Environmental Education into the School Curriculum*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994), 53.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Yet, even with these developments, and the intensification of efforts of the international community in the area of environmental education, fewer than 10% (of the surveyed nations) had produced a specific environmental education curriculum, fewer than 25% had coordinated a cross-curricular approach, and geography and science were the main vehicles for environmental education.<sup>20</sup> It is indicative of a global culture that has yet to fully incorporate the values of environmentalism.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Environmental education is not universally accepted as a necessary component of everyone's curriculum for several reasons: a variety of opinions regarding the ecological crisis, apathy, ignorance, and varying priorities. What follows are various strengths and limitations that are created when attempting to integrate a wholly separate discipline.

### **Curriculum Designing and Redesigning**

When integrating environmental education into an already established curriculum, while keeping up with current trends in environmental education, problems will often arise. In curricula that are already overloaded due to statewide examination standards in addition to covering the subject matter at hand, integrating another subject quickly makes the problem manifest. This is even more relevant and evident in supplementary Hebrew schools which have a much more limited time and usually a very narrow focus.

### **Selection of Objectives and Content**

The selection of objectives and content in environmental education is problematic because every school everywhere has different values and local problems that affect it. Moreover, public opinion regarding the extent or nature of problems is also different. For instance, in Texas, in the Chisos Mountains, encroachment has led to increased mountain lion attacks, a problem that

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<sup>20</sup> Joy A. Palmer, *Environmental Education in the 21st Century*. (London: Routledge, 1998), 25.

affects different places in different ways. Other problems are urbanization, desertification, deforestation, polluted ground water, smog, landslides, flooding, etc. Each of these problems is particular to a place, making it a ripe topic for environmental education, which in turn makes it that much more difficult to have a set curriculum for environmental education. "Therefore our goal should be (the) production of an environmentally literate society, just in the same way we think of (a) scientifically literate society."<sup>21</sup> By teaching students about conservation and giving them the tools necessary to help them understand certain phenomena, they are able to address practical and relevant concerns about their local environment.

Environmental education is limited in that it must, by nature of its content, be approached in a cross-curricular approach. As explained earlier, it should not be restricted to the subject of science or biology. Unfortunately, these subjects are often limited in scope by strict curricular guidelines. This is also true in Jewish education that is often restricted to approaching the environment solely through ethics or a particular holiday. These restrictions limit the effectiveness of environmental education and its ability to have a lasting impact on students. When restricted to certain subjects, the environment is often contextualized as a single, autonomous subject rather than as an integral part of one's life. However, in a cross-curricular approach, environmental education can be an incredibly stimulating, engaging subject. By using environmental education in the cross-curricular approach, one can teach biology, English, and math while working on group dynamics and personal empowerment. This type of teaching is more reflective of a real-life setting which demands students to be citizens. This multidisciplinary, cross-curricular approach is much more difficult to do in a supplementary religious school setting where the two subject matters tend to be Judaism and Hebrew.

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Okebukola and Ben Akpan, eds. Nigeria. Science Teachers Association. *Strategies for Environmental Education - Focus on Desertification and Biodiversity Conservation*. (1999), 62.

## Curriculum Validity

"Curriculum validity is a construct that refers to (the) assessment of (a) curriculum (particularly its design) in terms of teachability and learnability. For a curriculum to be teachable, it must present the learners with opportunities, events, or phenomena which they can relate to the content of a curriculum to be learned. On the part of the teacher, he/she must have attained a reasonable level of competency in the subject matter content."<sup>22</sup> Thus, in order to teach the subject matter at hand the learning should be based upon the students' prior knowledge, focusing on hands-on experiences, while taking into account the students' interests and abilities. In the arena of curriculum validity, the key is evaluation. This is where one can determine the effectiveness of a program from the viewpoint of teacher and student.

Environmental education is limited by its own agenda. The fact that there is controversy over whether or not we are in an environmental crisis limits its acceptance as a potential curriculum and detracts from its effectiveness. There are "conflicting opinions about the state of the environment, the consequences of environmental degradation, and the role of education."<sup>23</sup> These distinctions are critical when discussing the role of environmental education but they in no way should stymie the efforts of educators. Just as this is a limitation of environmental education, so too can it be turned into a strength. Environmental education can be taught in such a way that the students can come to their own understanding of whether the environment is in jeopardy by doing thorough research. As environmental education is presented here, it crosses several subject boundaries and teaches "how to solve problems, make decisions, weigh options,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>23</sup> Braus and Wood, *Environmental Education in the Schools*, 3.

and align values with personal actions.”<sup>24</sup> These are lifelong skills that are critical to creating self-actuating individuals.

### **Pedagogy**

How environmental education is disseminated is critical to its effectiveness. Some issues that arise as a result “include teacher/teaching effectiveness, teaching style, teaching confidence, classroom management, time management and the task of encouraging learner’s interest and strengthening learner’s ability.”<sup>25</sup> Teachers may be limited in their understanding of how to incorporate an unfamiliar subject into their curriculum. This means that they have to then orient themselves around a new subject while paying attention to all of the other pedagogical issues that arise in the normal course of teaching. This is even more apparent in supplementary Jewish education where the teachers are often also limited in their general knowledge of the subject matter that they are teaching.

### **Curriculum Needs – Personnel and Material**

In general, it is often difficult to find qualified personnel to teach environmental concepts. Materials are also at a premium as this subject is often introduced in addition to all of the other curriculum requirements, as well as requiring more intensive on-site needs and additional training for teachers.

Another limitation of environmental education pertains to the teacher knowledge base. For instance, in Jewish supplementary schools teachers may understand the ethics of environmentalism, but find it difficult to teach it as presented here in a cross-curricular approach. Often the teachers in Jewish supplementary schools come from a diversity of backgrounds that makes it very difficult for them to teach a subject about which they have very limited experience.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

In public schools, this same problem appears when one teacher is well versed in their subject of expertise but is unable to approach environmental education from the cross-curricular approach because of their limited exposure to the other subjects.

### **Assessment**

Assessment is a critical part of any program. Most programs are only as strong as their assessment tools. This will be discussed more thoroughly in the following section. Although environmental education is not one of the general subject matters examined in any of the high school testing formats, its inclusion as an integral part of a school's curriculum has proven to raise standardized test scores.<sup>26</sup>

### **Values and Beliefs**

"The culture of a society embodies the knowledge, values and beliefs of a people."<sup>27</sup> Though environmental education has been increasing nationwide, even worldwide, it is still not an accepted norm. The legislatures have not made it a priority in schools as evidenced in the environmental education *Report Card* put out by the Environmental Education Association of Washington. This is also evidenced by the lack of a unified approach, supportive structure, and adequate funding.<sup>28</sup> These actions of legislatures tend to reflect the general trend of society.

These strengths and limitations are characteristic of the status and nature of environmental education. The whole process is dynamic and indicative of the challenge implicit in implementing an environmental education program. It is exactly this challenge, the confluence of multiple disciplines, that has made environmental education so enriching while having such positive results in the schools in which it has been integrated.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.audubon.org/chapter/wa/wa/userdocuments/EEReportCard.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Okebukola and Akpan, *Strategies for Education*. 64.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.audubon.org/chapter/wa/wa/userdocuments/EEReportCard.pdf> ,23.

## Research / Assessment

This section will look at what research has been done over the last few decades regarding environmental education and what assessment tools and outcomes have been utilized. The mode of research used through the 1970's and 1980's was the "quantitative paradigm." This research is typified by presenting results in statistical form, reflecting the tradition of scientific or positivist inquiry that truth is observable; it looks for a causal relationship in observable patterns; researchers remain detached to avoid bias, etc.<sup>29</sup> In recent years the trend has been shifting to a more qualitative approach in which one looks to identify a number of critical components for an educational program aiming to change students' behavior toward the environment:

- The teaching of environmentally significant ecological concepts and the environmental interrelationships that exist within and between these concepts;
- The provision of carefully designed and in-depth opportunities for learners to achieve some level of environmental sensitivity which will promote a desire to behave in appropriate ways;
- The provision of a curriculum that will result in an in-depth knowledge of issues;
- The provision of a curriculum that will teach learners the skills of issue analysis and investigation as well as provide the time needed for the application of these skills;
- The provision of a curriculum that will teach learners the citizenship skills needed for issue remediation as well as the time needed for the application of these skills;
- The provision of an instructional setting which increases learners' expectancy of reinforcement for acting in responsible ways, i.e. attempts to develop an internal locus of control in learners.<sup>30</sup>

These phenomena were measured in an in-depth study and it was found that many environmental programs did not incorporate investigation and analysis, or responsible citizenship into their curriculum.<sup>31</sup> Another form of research utilized is interpretive and/or constructive, where the "central endeavor... is to understand the subjective world of human experience."<sup>32</sup> This field of research is more interested in the ability of participants to retain concepts, develop

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<sup>29</sup> Palmer, *Environmental Education in the 21st Century*. 103.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 108.

meaning and reflect on their experience of the environment. These various forms of assessment follow the evolving trends in education.

One of the outcomes of the research is that the implementation of environmental education in the schools has not lived up to the ideals set forth in the *Tbilisi Report*, that environmental education should be inter-disciplinary and cross-curricular. "In reality we see a very strong emphasis on the grounding of environmental education within the scientific domain."<sup>33</sup> Instead of developing a curriculum around environmental education, it has been incorporated into an existing subject restricting its scope.

As the assessment of students' acquisition of knowledge is crucial to realizing the success of a program, so too is the assessment of the materials. As was noted peripherally above, many schools receive their environmental education programs from organizations that offer their programs for free. Many of these organizations have agendas, clearly stated, while others have ulterior motives. One of the major problems with some of these programs is their not very scientific 'doomsday' theories. It is for this reason that one must be able to appropriately critique any curriculum. In the appendices are two questionnaires: Appendix A has questions to ask about potential resources for young students and Appendix B sets criteria for educational resources. Evaluations such as these will help ensure that the environmental education programs are grounded in the science of environmentalism while not advocating a specific ideology.

It is in this way that general environmental education can be a guide for Jewish environmental education. These evaluative techniques supply a framework which is easily transferable to the religious curriculum.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 98.



## **Conclusion**

It is extremely relevant that general environmental education has been on the forefront longer than Jewish environmental education. This fact is unmistakable in light of the dearth of environmental education curriculums available in the Jewish sphere. This fact is further bolstered by the way in which environmental education is brought into the Jewish community. Environmental education is usually restricted to Tu B'Shvat, considered the Jewish Earth Day. Environmental programs, in Jewish supplementary religious schools, are often taught as separate classes, not as part of the general curriculum. This is not a devious ploy aimed at isolating a very important topic but rather is representative of the difficulty in integrating environmental education in a very limited curriculum that is already strapped for time and limited in scope. At this point, the situation may seem dire, for the incorporation of environmental education into the curriculum seems nearly impossible. Yet, it is the objective of this thesis to overcome this looming obstacle. The guidelines outlined above will be used to show how Jewish environmental education can be infused into a curriculum effectively. This process takes diligence and courage from all who seek to change the way the environment is currently perceived by our Jewish religious institutions. This is the real difference between isolated topics and an integrated curriculum. Isolated topics may seem as if they don't affect us entirely because they are taught completely separate from everything else. However, in an integrated curriculum, one is directly confronted with the integral nature of the environment, in much the same way as people have an integrated relationship with the environment. Simply changing the definition of environment isn't enough. The change in definition must also be experienced. This can happen in the classroom and this can happen in the Jewish classroom as well.

## Chapter 2

### **Jewish Environmental Education: Enumeration and Evaluation**

Environmental education in general, and Jewish environmental education in particular, seek to inform and motivate, albeit from differing perspectives and approaches. This observation is most pronounced in the teaching of the bio-sphere, the world-as-organism, which calls upon us to transcend our individual needs by acknowledging our dependency upon the whole.<sup>1</sup> The concept of stepping back from our normal anthropocentric viewpoint is found in both secular culture and religious traditions. Where they differ is in their concept of the future. Jeremy Benstein writes,

Given the role of our economy and consumer culture in the creation of environmental problems ranging from global warming to species extinction, our society indeed rejoices in acts whose end results are the destruction of the world. Both public and private sectors have difficulty in articulating and protecting the long-term public good. Religious tradition, though, is used to thinking in terms of eternity, and that concern with posterity, with the ongoing well-being of Creation, is exactly one of the strong messages that religious environmentalism can bring to the fast-paced (and short-sighted) industrial world.<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish tradition not only looks to see how our actions affect the people around us now, but also how these same actions might affect future generations. Judaism, in its idea of an ongoing covenantal relationship, as expressed in Deuteronomy 29:13-14: "I make this covenant not with you alone, but... [also] with those who are not with us here this day", takes on "commitments in

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Benstein, *The Way Into Judaism and the Environment*, (Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2006), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 101.

the name of future generations.”<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik writes eloquently on this responsibility:

Within the covenantal community, not only contemporary individuals but generations are engaged in a colloquy and each single experience of time is three-dimensional, manifesting itself in memory, actuality and anticipatory tension. This... results in an awesome awareness of responsibility to a great past which handed down the divine imperative to the present generation in trust and confidence and to a mute future expecting this generation to discharge its covenantal duty conscientiously and honorably.<sup>4</sup>

Jewish environmental ethics are influenced by the possible and unknown future inhabited by future generations whose voice must be heard in today's world.

### History

The formal Jewish environmental movement only began many years after the secular one. In 1988, Ellen Bernstein founded Shomrei Adamah, the first Jewish environmental organization. Four years later, COEJL, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, was established. There had been inklings earlier on after the publication in 1967 of Lynn White, Jr.'s seminal article "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis." He criticized the Judeo-Christian theology that "it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."<sup>5</sup> In response to this attack, theologians from many denominations responded vigorously. Articles and books began to be written on environmental ethics and the writings of authors such as Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav were cited in the context of the emerging environmental movement.

Even so, environmental consciousness must necessarily be distinguished from environmentalism. With the founding of Shomrei Adamah, Jewish environmental education became a prominent part of the movement's ethos. COEJL in 1992 focused equally on both

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," in *Tradition* 7:2 (1965), 47.

<sup>5</sup> Lynn White, Jr., *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, (Science 155, 1203 – 1207, 1967), 6.

environmental advocacy and education. It is in this way that Jewish Environmentalism differs from general secular environmentalism. The secular conferences on the environment in the 1970's, referred to earlier, focused on education, particularly for children, rather than advocacy. COEJL never articulated one as being superior to the other. Hence both education and advocacy hold equal sway.

In 1994, the Teva Learning Center opened its doors as the first residential Jewish environmental education program. By 2001, this program was providing multiday Jewish environmental outdoor education programs to approximately fifteen hundred students a year.<sup>6</sup> By 1995, Shomrei Adamah ceased functioning and the name was co-opted by the Teva Learning Center, which had integrated Shomrei Adamah's curricula. The development of programs and curriculum materials fell to COEJL and the Teva Learning Center. Two other organizations and their founders were the Shalom Nature Center in Malibu, CA, and the Jewish Nature Center, organized by Dr. Gabriel Goldman. "These organizations focused on integrating Jewish study with experiences of the natural world. As one could imagine, there was considerable overlap in staff and curricula among them."<sup>7</sup>

The history of Jewish Environmental Education described above is limited to North America. The Jewish environmental education movement abroad, particularly in Israel, has a different history. Israeli environmentalism is perhaps the most interesting and the most challenging. It could be said that Israeli environmental education began in the 1800s with the *halutzim*, the pioneers. They yearned to go back to the land, specifically, the land of Israel. Their love for Israel and their desire to reap the fruit of the land by the sweat of their brows created a culture of quasi-environmentalists who knew very little about the environment. With

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Jacobs, *Jewish Environmentalism: Past Accomplishments and Future Challenges*, (Judaism and Ecology, Harvard University Press, 2002), 453.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 461.

the establishment of the State of Israel, this group became conscientious about land use and even hosted an environmental education conference in the seventies that corresponded to the general environmental education conferences. Israeli environmental education stayed as part of the national ethos, such that it became difficult to distinguish nationalism on the one hand and environmentalism on the other. This blurring of the lines becomes quite significant later in this thesis when evaluating specific texts, as many of the texts are Israel-centered, which laid the foundation for these blurred lines.

### **Enumerating and Evaluating the Educational Curricula, Resources and Materials Available.**

Jewish environmental education often blurs the traditional boundaries between those materials that are specifically educational materials, programs and curricula and those materials that teach and explore how Judaism approaches the environment. For now, we will look at those materials that specifically espouse a Jewish environmental ethic and those materials that are programmatic in design. There are those that fall under both rubrics and will be dealt with as a third category.

Another area in which this thesis is going to differ from traditional reviews of materials is in its effort to distinguish between the technical merit of a specific book and its merit as a resource for environmental education. This approach is multi-layered. The books and materials are viewed from the perspective of their effectiveness, clarity and methodology. We will also look into how these materials allow Jewish environmental education to be integrated into an existing curriculum. Moreover, this chapter is going to focus specifically on methodology and NOT on content. Content critique will be done on a limited basis in the following chapter.

The study of Jewish texts has been going on for millennia. Jewish texts have been plumbed for their meaning through the eyes of our sages. Traditional Jewish text-study involves

encountering a specific text, which is then examined in a number of ways. Traditionally, a text is studied in one of four methods represented by the Hebrew acronym "PaRDeS":] (*Pshat*) the plain / literal meaning of the text; (*Remez*) the allegorical meaning, which includes cross-referencing other texts as well as the rational and philosophical meanings; (*Drash*) the moral or homiletical meaning, which can include midrashic; and (*Sod*) the mystical meaning of the text.

This traditional way of looking at texts is in contrast to the educational model espoused by the Tblisi Conference and many modern educators. (To see an example of this look at Appendices A and B) This distinction is important, for it allows us to better understand the books and materials that have adopted the Tblisi Conference's approach and this new-found interest in the environment. Many follow the tradition of our ancestors and approach environmental education through the lens of text-study. Other materials fall under a more innovative and integrative approach.

The materials that fall under the rubric of those following the textual tradition can be divided into three main categories, though there is some measurable degree of overlap. They are the anthology, the story, and the exposition. The anthology includes books such as *Trees, Earth and Torah – A Tu B'Shvat Anthology*, *A Person is Like a Tree – A Sourcebook for Tu BeShvat*, *Listen to the Trees* and *Torah of the Earth* (Vols. 1 &2). The first two books, anthologies about Tu B'Shvat are not unique in that nearly every Jewish holiday has a book about it in an anthology format, so that information that might be pertinent to that holiday might then be included in the book. Philip Goodman does this in his books on the holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, etc. In this way the anthology of Tu B'Shvat becomes an anthology of Jewish nature themes. This approach subsumes environmentalism within the context of a Jewish

holiday. Though it is somewhat surreptitious in its emphasis upon the environment, it does allow for Tu B'Shvat to become the Jewish Earth Day within the normative tradition.

In contrast, in Molly Cone's anthology *Listen to the Trees* and Arthur Waskow's *Torah of the Earth* (Vol. 1 & 2), there is no subterfuge. These books clearly are anthologies of quotes and stories which positively express Jewish values towards the natural environment. Molly Cone's work uses both Jewish quotes and stories to show how the Jewish people treat nature. The chapters include "Care for the Trees", "Care for the Birds, Beasts and Fish", "Care for the Earth", "Do Not Destroy", and "All Things are Connected." It need not be read in its entirety, for it must accompany the companion guide that is included in the section on curricula. By itself, the book is usable as an anthology, for the educator, to help teach about the environment but cannot be used alone.

Arthur Waskow's *Torah of the Earth* is also difficult to read in its entirety. Instead, its most promising use is that of a source text, to be studied either independently or from different perspectives about many different periods, or to be used in connection with a lesson plan that is not included. This work is better used as a resource to assist an educator when teaching about either Tu B'Shvat or about the environment in general. However, for the general congregant, it is unwieldy and cumbersome.

While these five books could certainly be included in the second category, books using stories, their structure is best categorized separately, as above. Three good representatives of books using stories are *Sammy Spider's First Tu B'Shevat*, *Solomon and the Trees*, and *The Seven Species*. These books teach environmental ethics through the use of narrative, and are thereby accessible to both congregant and educator alike. The stories vary in age appropriateness. The use of story is a powerful tool in teaching about the environment. Much

like ancient *midrash*, these stories are meant to teach an ethical precept. These books necessarily remain under the rubric of "text study" because the story becomes the text from which the students learn.

The last category here is that of exposition. Here the book *is* the text-study. Each of the titles explains the entirety of the text study; *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet*, *Jewish Attitudes about Nature*, *The Torah and the Stoics on Humankind and Nature*, *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word*, "Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It", and *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*. Certainly all of the books listed above could be considered answers to the question of whether or not Judaism is an "environmental" religion. These books however are arranged in such a way that they make coherent arguments in a linear fashion, even in the anthologies.

One such example is Ellen Bernstein's book, *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit*. Like an anthology, each of the chapters is written by a different author. The work is divided into three sections; sacred place, sacred time, and sacred community. The premise of the book is how one's outlook on the environment creates each of these sacred portals. Far from a critique, this is the nature of the text study. Ellen Bernstein is looking to see how the environment informs the reader regarding sacred place, time and community. If one was looking for resources or curricula, these books would not be able to adequately inform the educator as to the underpinnings of Jewish ethics regarding the environment.

Yet, each of these books, unlike the anthologies, can be accessed by the general reader or educator, as they are thematic and linear. In fact, one of the aims of these books is to defend the Jewish religion and its perspective on the environment, arguing against its image as human / ego-



centered and teaching instead our integral part in the entire eco-system. Jeremy Benstein, in *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, writes,

It is the underlying questions, however, that have remained unchanged over millennia of human culture and religious thought: what is the appropriate relationship between humanity and the rest of creation, between the material and spiritual in our lives? What are our responsibilities to future generations regarding the world we shall bequeath them?<sup>8</sup>

These are the questions the authors confront through the lens of tradition. He continues,

Torah and traditional sources are crucially relevant, yet their meaningful application to our lives is far from automatic and therefore requires creative interpretation on our part. We become an integral and active part of the process of creating the complex interface between world and world.<sup>9</sup>

Benstein argues that Torah and traditional sources must be used in order to remain authentic, but that their interpretation need not remain rigid and in fact must stretch in order to incorporate modern teachings. These teachings are influential in their own right and are an expression of an ancient tradition. It is from here that we now turn to those books and materials that represent a more modern educational approach.

### **Curriculum / Lesson Plans**

There are certain materials that are presented in such a way that they are conducive to Jewish environmental education. Though these materials in general do not articulate a particular methodology like their secular counterpart, they do offer both lesson plans and curricula. Some of the materials available in books include: *A Teacher's Guide to Listen to the Trees*, *Who Renews Creation*, *Spirit in Nature: Teaching Judaism and Ecology on the Trail*, *To Till and to Tend*, and *Let the Earth*. There are also available internet sites and programs that offer extensive lesson plans and curricula. These are: [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org), and Dr. Gabriel Goldman's curriculum for the Jewish Nature Center. Each of these materials is unique, for they offer concrete lesson plans

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<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism*, (Jewish Lights, 2006.), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

and curricula about the environment. A comprehensive list of materials, however, is impractical, as many Jewish environmental curricula are unpublished. The materials presented here demonstrate greater access to environmental educational resources than in previous decades.

### **Curriculum Evaluation**

One curriculum in particular demonstrates the principles outlined above regarding what I believe to be the optimum approach to teach Jewish environmental education. In this section, we will analyze this curriculum using the criteria outlined in appendices A and B. This was written by Gabriel Goldman, titled, *A Teacher's Guide to Listen to the Trees*. (He is also the author of a curriculum for the Teva Learning Center, which is more of a resource to be incorporated into a broader curriculum at the discretion of the instructor) *A Teacher's Guide to Listen to the Trees* addresses the criteria of a concrete example of a Jewish environmental education curriculum. It is divided into 5 lesson plans, each of which may be used as its own separate mini-unit. The teacher's guide includes a word bank, a set induction activity, a story synopsis, a brief overview of select quotes, and teaching activities that address family education.

The word bank lists and defines important terms the teacher and learner need to recognize and understand in order to fully comprehend the lesson ahead. The set induction activity engages the learner, preparing them for the lesson ahead and planting the seed of anticipation. The story synopsis suggests ways in which the actual narrative might be presented to the students as well as what values the story teaches and the questions it raises. The teaching activities are "a variety of questions and creative learning activities for classroom and outdoor use."<sup>10</sup> The overall structure of the lessons is educationally sound and the other "outdoor lessons" that are suggested in each mini-unit could easily be adapted to fit into the general structure outlined in the beginning of each unit.

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<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Goldman, *A Teacher's Guide to Listen to the Trees*, (UAHC Press, 1996), vii.

An issue that arises is whether the selected stories of each curriculum unit adequately address the ethic addressed at the beginning of each unit. The stories, for the most part, are excellent. The morals contained within them are set forth clearly. The actual narrative is easy to follow and includes follow-up questions that serve well to elicit comment and critique while gaining an understanding of the overarching values that are presented.

Yet, in Chapter 2, the moral presented in the introduction deals with compassion toward all living things. Specifically, it states that, “we do not have the right to cause animals unnecessary pain or ignore their needs...”<sup>11</sup> The rooster story that follows, however, teaches that there is much we can learn from animals. There is a “disconnect” between the introduction and the actual narrative, as learning from animals and having compassion toward them are two very different things. Even though the story does not teach about compassion, the quotes and teaching activities that follow do. This speaks to the overall cohesiveness and integration of the lesson plan itself. This lack of overall cohesiveness is an important concern. The moral lesson to be taught must be reflected in the actual narrative, so that the intended lesson and the actual lesson are congruent.

Having examined the curriculum structure, we now turn our attention to appendices A & B and examine their usefulness in developing a Jewish-oriented environmental education curriculum.

### **Does this Resource Speak to Children?**

This curriculum is intended for fourth and fifth graders. While old enough to understand intended consequences and to think concretely, they have not yet mastered abstract thought. The stories presented in the book do not lend themselves to such abstract learning. The reflective questions offered are straightforward and allow the students to draw their own conclusions. The

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 11.

teaching activities are integrative, fun and engaging. One of Goldman's strengths is that he understands that the success of an activity depends almost entirely on the teacher, and their strengths and interests. The activities presented are all at the appropriate age level and can speak to the students.

Examples include the outdoor walk, what makes an animal kosher, the zoo visit, the Earth Day celebration, examining the life cycle of a tree, and the blessings art project: all can be fascinating adventures for the young at heart. Each of these examples appeals to the curious-minded as well as the adventurous spirit. Each child is turned into a detective who, with each new discovery, can be championed as a hero. They can help "save the day" by writing letters to their congresspersons about the endangered animals that they have studied. Learning is proactive and engaging.

#### **Do the Activities Speak to All Children?**

Specifically, do the materials represent or respond to the diversity of children in classrooms in terms of ethnicities, heritage, experiential backgrounds, worldviews, and gender?<sup>12</sup> Obviously, in the Jewish educational setting, the level of diversity of heritage or ethnicity will be less than in the general public, nevertheless, these factors may still come into play. The activities presented are mostly designed for the student who comes to the classroom with little experiential knowledge of nature. However, should one of the students come to class with an extensive knowledge of nature and related activities, such learners could be co-opted to help teach / tutor the other students. For instance, many students by this time will have learned how to count the rings in a log. What can make the activity exciting is by marking the dates on the log according to when people were born or other culturally/religiously significant events (e.g. when their own synagogue was founded).

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson and Mappin, eds. *Environmental Education and Advocacy*, 203.

The students could then proceed onto the synagogue grounds and apply their knowledge to the approximate age of these plants. This is but one example of the many activities contained in the curriculum that respond to students from differing backgrounds and experiences. As for worldviews, much of this depends on the effectiveness and ability of the teachers. The curriculum favors the open-ended question, thus allowing for a diversity of views.

Certainly, the curriculum "advocates" that endangered animals must be protected, that all things on earth are connected, and that compassion for animals is important. It avoids the pitfalls of quantifying the amount of pollution happening (which is always a point of contention), placing blame, or preaching an "end of days" scenario. For instance, the curriculum doesn't talk about logging practices or deforestation. Such issues, of course, are laden with biases and, for this age group, could present some level of difficulty for teaching the curriculum in a balanced manner. As a result, the work carefully avoids these types of thorny issues, and instead focuses on teaching a love for growing things and a deep concern for the environment that the next generations will inherit.

One difficulty is that it fails to account for gender. Nearly all of the stories selected are about boys and men; few are about young women or girls. Instead, we are told of an old woman, and the keeper of the earth who is drawn as a woman but not even referred to as a female. The girls exposed to this curriculum are not given a role model to identify with. This is not unusual, especially in classical Jewish literature, for there is a dearth of stories about women. This curriculum reflects this unfortunate trend and it should be addressed in future editions. Though there are many ways in which the curriculum is accessible to all students, in this way it fails.

### **Are There Wide Ranges of Learning Possibilities?**

Young people have a wide range of interests and learning-style preferences. Does this resource provide learning options, a variety of direct experiences, a rich combination of textual information and visuals, and high interest elements such as games, puzzles, or stories?<sup>13</sup> Additionally, using a more modern learning evaluation, one must ask if it appeals to the seven intelligences developed by Howard Gardner.

The curriculum certainly incorporates stories and a rich combination of textual information and visuals. Visuals are most apparent when the activity combines blessings over fruit or activity. These two main activities use the verbal / linguistic and visual / spatial intelligences.

The other activities are direct, such as the log activity, the nature walk, nature observation, or the zoo visit. These and similar activities use the verbal / linguistic, interpersonal, visual / spatial, and body / kinesthetic intelligences. There are no activities listed that use puzzles, games or the logical / mathematical intelligence. The curriculum could easily have added activities that addressed this aspect of learning, such as adding a scavenger hunt, using map skills, and arts and crafts.

Another intelligence only found in the family activities is the musical / rhythmic. One of the activities uses blindfolds while on a nature walk and another activity involves a morning walk identifying the sounds of nature. Though it is important to mention that these activities are listed, none are part of the main curriculum that is emphasized in the classroom.

Finally, though many of the activities could lend themselves to being intrapersonal, they are not designed for personal reflection. As shown above, the curriculum meets some of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

various ways in which to teach students but falls short on engaging them in some of the critical aspects of the various intelligences and strategies as enumerated by Gardner.

### **Do the Learning Activities Emphasize Critical Thinking, Inquiry, Problem Solving, or Use of Information Over Memorization of Facts?**

Some of the most critical aspects of the curriculum are the research into environmental organizations and letter-writing campaigns that are emphasized. Critical thinking comes into play in the research into the organizations and the issues they try to address. There is little or no emphasis on memorization of facts, which makes this curriculum very student-friendly.

### **Are the Activities Safe and Simple?**

When determining whether the learning activities are safe and simple, they must not be overly complex with risky procedures and must be able to be finished using the materials found in the classroom. For example, the school waste audit is complex. Students collect garbage from throughout the school, dumping it onto a drop cloth, and then determining what can be recycled. This could prove difficult, though the activity is not overly complex and makes use of the resources available. Time allotment is also appropriate.

### **Can the Teacher Understand the Material?**

The introduction to each chapter explains the concept and morals to be taught. The story is summarized and possible questions for the students are presented clearly. The lessons evidence a free-flowing discussion, which doesn't require special knowledge. Learning activities are carefully laid out, seemingly self-contained, so that the instructor need not refer to other materials to understand the concepts or methodology of the curriculum. For example, there is the learning activity, "the nature walk: good and bad effect." In this lesson, the students and teacher go on a nature walk to identify how people have had either a good or bad effect on the world. This lesson is in conjunction with how we fulfill the command, "Do Not Destroy." A

teacher with minimal knowledge of environmental studies can present this lesson. Examples of this kind abound throughout the work.

### **Is it Fun?**

One of the most important keys to success for any curriculum is its ability to reach the student; either because it is fun, or provokes interest or wonder.<sup>14</sup> Humor is often an underutilized tool that can be essential in drawing students in to learning. Though the curriculum itself does not provide any jokes or bizarre facts, the companion book on which it was based makes effective use of comic strips and "attention-grabbing illustrations." One such example is a provocative lesson called "Waste in Packaging." The lesson calls for the teacher to bring in a box of Crystal Light as a prime example of waste and asks the students to brainstorm ideas about ways in which to use the "waste." This lesson is a good example of something eye-catching that can stimulate interest in the students. Though many of the lessons may be somewhat provocative and appealing in and of themselves, a great deal of success in "reaching the student" depends on the presentation, energy, enthusiasm, and passion of the teacher.

Appendix B offers a critical analysis of how resources may be evaluated to present knowledge, develop skills and shape attitudes. This same evaluation technique is useful in summarizing the above evaluation of the curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

This curriculum presents an approach for the learner to encounter the environment through Judaism. The stories (though adapted for purposes of the curriculum) and the quotes found therein are taken from Jewish sources. The general theme of each lesson is intended to connect the story to the underlying values within the Jewish context.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



The various learning experiences about the environment promote general knowledge about nature and humanity's influence and effect upon it. For example, one of the learning experiences teaches about the effects of pollutants on the food cycle. This helps the learner recognize some of the symptoms and causes of environmental problems that include socioeconomic and political impacts.<sup>15</sup> A critical approach to problem-solving is done through the lesson plan itself, as is clearly demonstrated in the unit on researching environmental groups and the letter-writing activities.

A good curriculum should encourage both a critical approach and the avoidance of any one particular course of action. For example, the criteria for evaluation of any curriculum suggest that one provide suggestions for action but NOT a single course of action. However, in the curriculum of this work, that is precisely what is done, i.e. letter-writing campaigns. Of course, this can easily be modified to draw out ideas from the students on possible courses of action instead of directing them to a single course of action.

These evaluation techniques serve as a helpful guide when reviewing a curriculum in order to determine its possible effectiveness. The questions are comprehensive and evidence a well thought-out critical guide to both environmental education and curriculum planning. Yet even evaluation pieces can miss an important step. This curriculum offers something that the evaluation piece was unprepared for but which fits very much with the Jewish educational setting. One of the capstones of this particular curriculum is that it offers family activities designed to be done at home with the family. This section offers many ideas for the students to bring their learning home and continue learning in one's own environment, not limiting oneself to the classroom. This allows for the lessons about Judaism and the environment to be taken out

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 204.

of the confines and isolation of the school, by literally driving the lesson home and permitting both the student and her or his family to engage in learning.

In the Jewish educational setting this type of guide is critical in approaching environmental education. Considering that there are many more curriculum resources as books, texts, media, than there are fully articulated curricula, this was the most comprehensive, expansive, and concrete.

A final evaluative piece that simply could not be a part of the secular evaluation tool asks how well the Jewish piece is integrated with environmental education. This remains one of the most formidable tasks of Jewish environmental educators in this emerging field of study.

This curriculum does a very good job of integrating Jewish learning, Jewish stories and Jewish texts with studies about the environment. As indicated earlier, the lessons include stories from the Jewish tradition (usually in an adapted format) that are often followed by quotes that exemplify a similar ethos. The learning activity then makes it "real" for the student. The task of the educator is to integrate the story and the learning experience, especially since some of the learning experiences do not seem to directly teach the particular Jewish value, ethic, or moral.

Even though this curriculum has room for growth, it is successful and could be a very effective tool in the classroom to teach about Jewish environmental education.

Let us now turn to some of those Jewish texts which modern readers have used to illuminate Jewish environmental education.

## Chapter 3

### **Jewish Sources: Are They Authentic Representations of Jewish Environmentalism?**

#### **Introduction**

In the prior chapters, our focus has been to examine Jewish environmental education within the context of the development of secular environmental education. In this chapter, we examine Jewish source material that provides the religious basis for environmental education.

An exhaustive study and analysis of such source material is beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, we will analyze those sources that are most frequently cited in current curricula and other materials, such as books and articles that serve to justify or authenticate a "Jewish" approach to the study and protection of the environment, consistent with the secular approach. The criteria for selection were based on frequency of citation in the most relevant materials. This was determined by reviewing the materials presented in the previous chapter. The anthologies give a broad base of the range of source material available, but it is the books that are like text studies that offer a more critical approach to Judaism and the environment. These are the ones that were reviewed.<sup>1</sup>

The selected texts will then be examined in situ to see how such concepts were utilized and/or evolved in the rabbinic literature. The analysis will address the issue of whether these texts actually advocate an environmental ethic or whether the proof text has been manipulated in such a way so as to comport with modern sentiment.

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<sup>1</sup> These books are: Ellen Bernstein, *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998); Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, ed., *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word* (Cambridge: Harvard University Publishing, 2002); Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006); Jeremy Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It* (Ithaca: Cornell University Publishing, 1989); Jan J. Boersema, *The Torah and the Stoics on Humankind and Nature* (Boston: Brill, 2001).

The selected texts are **Genesis 1:28 / 2:15** (which includes treatments in BT *Yebamot* 65b, *Genesis Rabbah* 8:12, *Guide to the Perplexed* 3:13, and *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 11:5); **Deuteronomy 20:19-20** (which includes treatments in BT *Kiddushin* 4:3, BT *Shabbat* 67b, 129a, and 140b, BT *Kiddushin* 32a, BT *Chullin* 7b, *Mishneh Torah* – Laws of Mourning 14:24, and Laws of Kings and Wars 6:8,10, *Sefer Ha-Hinukh* #529, and *Horeb* #56); **Deuteronomy 22:6-7** (which includes treatments in M. *Chullin* 12:5, BT *Chullin* 142, *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 6:1, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Prayer, *Guide to the Perplexed* 3:48); **Psalms 24:1** (which includes treatments in BT *Berakhot* 35a, BT *Rosh Hashanah* 31a, BT *Chullin* 139a, *Midrash Aggadah* Exodus 23:5, and *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* 50:1); **Leviticus 19:23** (which includes treatments in *Midrash Tanhuma Kedoshim* 8:15, *Leviticus Rabbah* 25:5, and BT *Kiddushin* 36b-37a); and **Ecclesiastes 7:13** (which includes treatments in *Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:20, and *Midrash Zuta* 7:5) The following section will utilize scriptural citations and then trace their utilization in the selected rabbinic literatures.

### **Genesis 1:28 / 2:15**

The following two verses from Genesis have been at the center of the modern environmental movement.

**1:28** ויברך אתם אלהים ויאמר להם אלהים פרו ורבו ומלאו את-הארץ וכבשה ורדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובכל-חיה הרמשת על-הארץ

1:28 "God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.'"

**2:15** ויקח יהוה אלהים את-האדם וינחהו בגן-עדן לעבדה ולשמרה

2:15 "The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to till it and tend it."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> JPS Tanakh, (Bibleworks) 1985.

On one hand, the first verse seemingly promotes human dominancy over the earth, sanctioning human use of the land as a king would over his dominion. In the second verse, the human is gardener and caretaker of the land set aside for him. Although these verses are often seen in juxtaposition to one another, it is necessary to view them separately.

In what has often been seen as one of the most detrimental sources for environmental awareness, Genesis 1:28 seemingly advocates that humanity has absolute dominion over the world. In fact, taken in isolation, there is no other conclusion that could be drawn. The verse says that God told both man and woman to fill the land with their offspring, to be masters of the earth and rule over all of the animals just created. By itself, this is a simple conclusion to draw. However, there are a few verses that come before and after, that paint a slightly different picture.

In verse 26, we read that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, *so that they may* rule the fish of the sea..." The italicized words though in accord with the Hebrew are not usually translated as such. The slightly different meaning translated here implies that by making man and woman in the image of God, they are granted the right of suzerainty. In this way, they might rule as God would. This is the first step in understanding the literal meaning of this verse. The next verse defines who will rule the earth and the following verse explains how they will rule it, by propagating the human race and being master over the earth and all living things. Though mastery remains nearly undefined, the following verse opens a window of understanding. It says, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant... and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food." If human beings were complete masters, why would they need God to grant them food, and only plants and fruit at that? Not only that, but animals, as food, are not mentioned here at all.

In the following verse God continues to show His mastery over all living things by giving green plants to all of the animals. Mastery, here, then does not include consumption. What kind of mastery is it, then? It remains unclear. One might surmise that mastery includes husbandry, fulfilling the command to be fertile and increase. But if mastery is divine in origin, the way in which we are created in God's image, then mastery is more indicative of the process of Creation, where the world is set in order. It is then humanity's mandate to continue the act of Creation by having dominion over the earth and all living things to ensure that Creation continues; no small task for man and woman made in God's image. Even so, the harshness of the terms, master and rule, or have dominion and subdue, have been used as justification for humanity's profligate waste of resources.

Throughout the rabbinic period, the command, "Be fertile and increase" was the subject of much writing. Moreover throughout the literature, this is the main focus. When the Rabbis of the Talmud referenced the Hebrew word כבשה they didn't look at how humanity might master the earth, rather they looked at it relative to the relationship between man and woman and how it was the man's nature to dominate but not a woman's (*Yebamot* 65b), or how man must master his wife (*Genesis Rabbah* 8:12). Otherwise, dominion is viewed not as a right, but as something to be earned. If dominion is not merited, then the humans are lower than the "beasts" (*ibid*). Only in the later commentaries is dominion over the earth discussed more thoroughly. Here, human superiority over the entire earth is promulgated. Saadya Gaon is the first medieval commentator to take up this argument. He writes, "The word, 'they shall rule' includes the entire range of devices with which man rules over the animals."<sup>3</sup> He includes in this argument not only the fish, the sea, boats, birds, time, cattle, and the whole earth, but also every kind of construction, mining, sowing, plowing, and craft. Here, "they shall rule," means ruling over

<sup>3</sup> Saadya, *Commentary on Genesis*, 53, 257, as translated in Jeremy Cohen's, *Be Fertile and Increase*, 184.

everything. Nahmanides offers a similar argument about humanity's right of dominion and use of the earth and its resources. On the other hand, Maimonides argues against this notion of dominion in his *Guide to the Perplexed*. He writes, "It should not be believed that all the beings exist for the sake of the existence of [humanity]. On the contrary, all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes and not for the sake of something else" (3:13). Though this does not directly reference the verse under consideration, its explicit meaning is apparent. Dominion is not included in the *halakha* and there is a rabbinic source "that construes this too as a Mosaic commandment; procreation continued to overshadow the conferral of dominion as the primary message of the verse."<sup>4</sup>

The issue has been taken up again in modern commentaries and *midrash* arguing against the simplistic notion of dominion. The reason פרו ורבו is granted a higher status and understood as Mosaic Law is because it is commanded more than once. When concepts are repeated in the Bible, it is the theology of the commentators to highlight the fact that something important was being said, perhaps more than what was simply written. Mastery of the earth by humanity is never mentioned the same way again in the Bible. Without this kind of special emphasis and with the many other instances in the Bible that indicate that the earth is the Lord's and everything therein, the idea of human dominion does not take precedence. Jeremy Benstein sums this up succinctly:

...the common vegetarian diet, the joint blessing of fecundity, even the creation of humans on the same day with all other mammals, bespeak a fellowship, a continuity with the rest of the created world that is a powerful counterpoint to the usual assumption of the uniqueness of the human being implied in having been the only creature to be explicitly created in the image of God.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase*, 219.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Benstein, *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*, 46-7.

A careful analysis of the many layers in this text is necessary. It must go beyond focusing on this one verse and should include an understanding of this verse in its context. Moreover, this verse, which emphasizes dominion and mastery, has a fitting counterbalance in the second creation story. Now we return to the second verse indicated at the beginning.

### **Genesis 2:15**

“The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.”

Just as the previous quote is believed to have much to do with justifying humanity's unregulated use of the earth, this verse has been the modern environmentalists' clarion call for justifying conservation and preservation. Once more, we must look at this text in its place. In Gen 2:8, we learn that “God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed.” This logistical information is important because much of it is repeated in verse 15. This repetition is often indicative of an editing of the text, which is evident by the near exact repetition of a verse after a break in the narrative, effectively book-ending the text. This is important because there is a slight difference in the repetition. In the former, the place where man is sent is the Garden in Eden, which is in the east of Eden. This implies that in this verse, the garden is *one part of* Eden. In contrast, in the latter verse, it is referred to *as* the Garden of Eden. Though it is a minor difference that could easily imply the same strategic placing of the garden in Eden, it also has the added implication that Eden is a garden, and not just one part of the whole of Eden. The differentiation in the location of the Garden of Eden is important in understanding this verse, because “Adam” was placed in this garden, לעבדה ולשמרה.

Jan Boersema does a wonderful philological analysis of the two words, לעבדה ולשמרה:

The use of עבד, to till, indicates that the purpose was to serve, by working the garden. This is the most usual meaning of this very common verb: to serve, as the people of Israel were to serve God, but also as a slave serves his master, since the word for a male slave is derived from the stem. In the HB serving implies acting. A number of texts indicate that



עבד can also certainly denote agricultural labour such as tilling, ploughing, sowing and so on. To what extent the author had such farmwork in mind as concrete activities for the human species cannot be judged from the passage alone. The text speaks only of "eating trees", i.e. their fruit. Even if some kind of farming is indicated, which seems plausible, given the name "Adam" and projected back from Gen 3:17,18, then it is at any rate farming without "toil". There is an unmistakably functional flavour to the passage: there is clearly a "human purpose" within the garden.<sup>6</sup>

This notion of tilling then is juxtaposed against toiling; the latter is part of the curse placed upon man by God later in the story. How they differ has been debated for many years. The next word is לשמרה:

"To keep" occurs very frequently in the Hebrew Bible and generally has the meaning of (conscientiously) "keeping" the commandments and ordinances of God. It is a verb of implicit activity. A second meaning is "to guard over", with the connotation of being on the lookout for any threats to items of value... "Keeping" is the passive sense of "conserving", or "keeping as it is" is a less plausible translation. Translation as "to guard over" also poses problems, however, as it is by no means clear what the threats to the garden exactly are that man must "keep" (from happening).<sup>7</sup>

Though much of what Boersema says with regard to the analysis of לשמר is on target, and the questions raised are pertinent, there does seem to be a "threat" that man must keep from happening. Perhaps the "threat" is the unruliness of nature, and the potential for certain actions one might do to prevent and guard such events. In modern parlance, this would be known as caretaking. Many wilderness areas are kept by caretakers who maintain trails not only from the danger caused by ignorant hikers but also by the ravages of nature. Caretakers are the modern tillers and tenders of our gardens in Eden. There is much debate over what "Adam" was doing in the Garden, and it is this continuing debate and commentary that is essential to understanding the significance of this passage in relation to environmental education.

The Rabbis also wrestled over the terminology, לעבדה ולשמרה. In *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 11:5, "Adam" was to work by studying Torah, doing the positive mitzvot, and guarding himself

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<sup>6</sup> Jan Boersema, *The Torah and the Stoics*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

by not doing forbidden activities. In this way, Rabbi Eliezer saw this verse, and in particular those two words, in the allegorical sense, that the Garden of Eden would be preserved by "Adam" faithfully following the *mitzvot* and studying Torah. In Ibn Ezra's commentary on this passage, he too was troubled with the literal sense of the verse that, "Adam" would be tilling the ground that he would soon be cursed to toil. He understood tilling the ground to be setting up an irrigation system. Ibn Ezra also looked into what it meant to guard or keep watch over the Garden and understood that to mean that "Adam" would keep out the "beasts" so that they would not trample the garden. Nahmanides revisits the allegorical interpretation of this passage as related in *Genesis Rabbah*. He argues that לעבדה ולשמרה refers there to the sacrifices, and that the Garden was not a typical garden, but rather it was a garden of trees, from which "man and woman" were assigned to eat. It was only after the expulsion that they would till the ground and eat the produce thereof.

The determination that this text was an allegorical narrative about man's obligation to study Torah and do *mitzvot* exemplifies the rabbinic mindset, that the Torah is the word of God, and everything means something, even if it is not readily apparent. The next logical question might be why the Rabbis didn't deduce an environmental ethic from this quote. Though their minds on this matter can no longer be searched, environmental conservation, preservation, and caretaking, were not terms that had any significance during their time of reference. With no perceived environmental crisis for them during their lives, and no interpretation of the text evidencing humanity's role as caretaker, it would be difficult to interpret this text as a viable environmental ethic, reflective of Jewish tradition.

How then do these two verses affect us now? One of the things this thesis is actively trying to do is understand if a particular text or texts avows a particular environmental ethic so

that, in correlation, Judaism would also avow that particular environmental ethic. These two texts, Gen 1:28 and 2:15, do not clearly promote an environmental ethic, neither by themselves nor in the culminating tradition. Mastery with conditions, contrasting with tilling and tending a garden, does not make a global environmental ethic. Modern commentaries that reanalyzed the text with an eye to the environment can use the text to formulate an environmental ethic that may be rich and deep, but it would not be rooted in the Jewish tradition. Judaism is not solely a biblical tradition but is a culmination of many centuries of rabbinic thought. The lack of exegesis on these verses that specifically promotes an environmental ethic speaks volumes on how these verses express a positive environmental ethic. The modern reinterpretation of these verses is not invalid, but because of this lack, their use as a positive environmental ethic must surely be held suspect.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Deuteronomy 20:19 – 20**

The most popular proof text used today to prove that preserving the environment is reflected in the Bible is from Deuteronomy 20:19-20.

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? 20 Only trees which you know do not yield food may be destroyed, you may cut them down for constructing siege works against the city that is aging war on you, until it has been reduced.<sup>9</sup>

Contextually, this verse is part of the larger construct of laws on how the Israelites are to conduct themselves during war. According to Gunther Plaut, this is considered one of the casuistic laws, which he defines as those passages that provide conditions under which the law is to be operative as opposed to laws that have no preconditions (apodictic). In this instance, the law seems to be

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<sup>8</sup> A caveat needs to be placed here. Were this statement taken out of context, it might indicate that I believe that Judaism does not have an environmental ethic, especially as it concerns the Creation stories. This would be a misunderstanding as I only covered a single quote in each of the Creation stories, and not the whole of either story.

<sup>9</sup> JPS Tanakh, (BibleWorks) 1985.

casuistic, for it begins "When you are at war." Moreover, the war appears to be offensive, as opposed to defensive, as it deals with an enemy city that is under siege by the Israelites. In addition, the "protected" trees are only those that bear fruit.

If one were left only with this passage, it would seem that in a case where the Israelites were not engaged in an offensive warlike act (e.g. laying a city under siege) or that the tree itself did not bear fruit, there would be no violation of this particular commandment if one were to cut down such foliage.

On the one hand, "Do Not Destroy," has a pre-conditional status that, should one of those conditions not be met, then the trees may be destroyed. However, the next part of the verse offers an unusual emotional argument to support this particular law, "Is a tree human that it could withdraw?" The text explicitly states that the trees are not human, endowed with legs to use to protect themselves by fleeing, and so we humans who have these abilities must realize the unfortunate circumstance of nature's inability to protect itself from war. Thus, special care must be demonstrated.

By itself, in its context, this verse is differentiated from the other casuistic laws by the argument that supports it. This implies that there is more to it than is easily discernable on the surface. One must not destroy trees (that bear fruit) during an offensive war. What about a defensive war? On the one hand it seems implied that if it is a defensive war, preservation of self (community) supersedes the hapless trees' inability to uproot and hide. What if there is no war? One argument is that if it is a violation during war, a time of great need for essential resources, then how much the more so during times of peace, when the need is not so great and one has time to find other means with which to build. Yet, there is a flaw to this argument. When resources, as well as means, are limited, destroying fruit trees may become the only viable

option. Of course, this is flawed as well, because of the nature of produce and society's need for this very important resource. Finally, what is the nature of the law and who does it protect? Not the widow, orphan or stranger, who are oft in need of protection, nor the people besieged or the Israelites. It is mostly certainly the tree, whose only protection is God's command.

### **The Talmudic Approach**

The conventional term *bal tashchit*, "Do Not Destroy", is most likely derived from the Mishnah in *Kiddushin* 4:3, when talking about an obligation that is not required for both men and women, referencing a verse in Leviticus about not rounding one's beard. As one of two mentions of this term in the Mishnah that has absolutely nothing to do with the topic at hand, it is the first recorded mention of *bal tashchit* after the Tanakh. This is noteworthy in that it shows the development of the term *bal tashchit* from the biblical term *lo tashchit*. The conventional term *bal tashchit* starts to take on the meaning restricting wanton destruction and defining appropriate boundaries to this in the Talmud. Shabbat 67b provides that that one should not cover an oil lamp causing it to burn more quickly. Doing so would violate the prohibition of *bal tashchit*. In BT *Kiddushin* 32a we learn that one should not tear clothing for an unnecessary reason. This violates the prohibition against wanton destruction as well. Unnecessary destruction, caused by the wasteful use of these items, is a violation of *bal tashchit*.

The Talmud also discusses the limitations of *bal tashchit*. In Shabbat 140b, R. Hisda and R. Papa assert that when people eat extravagantly, when other more simple foods are available, then such gluttony may be regarded as wanton destruction. However, the *halakhah* is that excessive use in this regard is not a violation of *bal tashchit*. Shabbat 129a provides further that although *bal tashchit* extends beyond warfare to items that are considered useful, when one destroys in order to preserve one's own life, then it is not wanton destruction. This is rather

significant because the Talmud has extended the application of *bal tashchit* beyond its contextual biblical casuistic formulation and thus provides a precedent for modern-day environmental considerations.

BT *Chullin* 7b contains a midrashic tale about Rabbi, who hoped to escape the angel of death by killing some white mules. He was admonished by R. Phinehas that this would be a violation of the prohibition against wanton destruction. The Talmud would seem to permit wanton destruction where there is some causal relationship between the destruction and saving one's life. However, if it is on the basis of some "magic" or superstition, the Talmud admonishes against such action, though it does not seem to prohibit it, perhaps due to the argument, not stated here, but in Yoma, that in case of *safek pikuah nephesh*, a case in which it is doubtful whether a human life could be saved by violating a halakhic stricture, nevertheless we permit this because of the priority of saving human life as overriding any and all such prohibitions.

#### **Codificatory Literature: Maimonides' Mishneh Torah**

Maimonides expands the prohibition of *bal tashchit* to include giving the clothing of the deceased to one who is poverty stricken, rather than having it lay on the deceased in a grave just to be eaten by worms.<sup>10</sup> He further illuminates the extent to which *bal tashchit* affects other aspects of our lives by extending the prohibition to forbid the smashing of household goods, tearing clothing, demolishing a building, stopping up a spring, and destroying food with destructive intent.<sup>11</sup>

Yet Maimonides does permit the cutting down of even a fruit tree "if it causes damage to other trees or to a field belonging to another man or if its value for other purposes is greater if it

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<sup>10</sup> Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Mourning 14:24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Laws of Kings and Wars 6:10.

were to be cut down."<sup>12</sup> This would seem to imply that it might be permissible to cut down trees if this were to result in a greater economic benefit. Though wanton destruction is prohibited as a general rule, if the situation allows for other possibilities, such as the prevention of harm to other trees, or that there would be a greater economic value if removed, then the destruction is no longer wanton and the commandment not violated.

### ***Sefer Ha-Hinnukh: A Stunning Advance***

In the *Sefer Ha-Hinnukh*, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century anonymous work on the 613 commandments, Rambam's notion is expanded considerably, if not reformulated altogether in a way never before considered. First, the principle of *bal tashchit* teaches us a path towards righteousness. Second, *bal tashchit*, according to this work, warns that "nothing, not even a grain of mustard, should be lost to the world..."<sup>13</sup> Not only is one responsible for oneself but one should also prevent any destruction that one may see, even if it is not of one's own making.

What we see here is a continuous expansion of the rule prohibiting wanton destruction. Now firmly invested in the legal codices, expanded by rabbinic exegesis, codified, and then further expanded in other medieval rabbinic literature, *bal tashchit* can now legitimately serve as a traditional basis upon which to establish a curriculum for the modern Jewish environmental movement. We see it rooted in one's private activities as well as those of the community. From the biblical source of Deuteronomy 19:19-20, the concept of destruction has been expanded from casuistic to arguably apodictic through rabbinic exegesis within the context of dramatic and changing historical circumstances.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 6:8.

<sup>13</sup> *Sefer Ha-Hinukh*, #529.

### **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: The Early Modern Rabbinic Period**

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodox rabbi who tried to harmonize modernity with tradition from an Orthodox perspective in his work *Horeb*, examines the underlying values and ethos of the Toraitic laws. It is in this way that he analyzes *bal tashchit*. Following the approach of *Sefer Ha-Hinukh*, Hirsch exhorts the reader be “a *mentsch*,” for through the destruction of nature, “you are not a human but rather an animal and have no right to the things around you. I lent them to you for wise use only; never forget that I lent them to you.”<sup>14</sup>

Destroy is the operative word. If one destroys, then one is utilizing an aspect of creation for one’s blind ambition or selfishness. That is why he begins this section, “Do not destroy *anything* (my emphasis).” The word “anything” emphasizes the all-encompassing nature of the command. All aspects of creation (not just trees) should be used wisely, not with contempt, for doing the latter is akin to idolatry. He argues that “one who can disregard the fact that things are the creatures and property of God, and who presumes also to have the right, having the might, to destroy them according to a presumptuous act of will is acting against the Torah.”<sup>15</sup> Hence, our right to dominion over the earth is based on the wisdom that we are granted as part of our nature. In the exercise of wisdom over our world, we become a *mentsch*. Rabbi Hirsch’s commentary is a deeper expansion of *bal taschit* for it focuses on human nature and our place on this earth.

### **Conclusion: Deuteronomy 20:19-20 and *Bal Taschit***

The development of the mitzvah of *bal tashchit* is a considerable expansion of Deuteronomy 19:20. The use of *bal taschit* as opposed to its biblical contextual counterpoint of

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<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb*, #56.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



*lo taschit* seems to allow for such expansion, over a considerable period of time, such that its use seems more apodictic than casuistic.

As such, its broad use can serve as a legitimate foundation upon which to develop a Jewishly based curriculum that addresses the enormous and complex problem that the world confronts today relative to the environment.

Let us now consider a second biblical passage, often cited by modern Jewish curricular materials, Deuteronomy 22:6-7.

#### **Deuteronomy 22:6 – 7**

This is the second most frequently cited text on the environment in rabbinic literature, stressing compassion towards animals. It provides:

If along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, either in a tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother is sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. 7 Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.

Contextually, it is a normal, every-day circumstance. If you happen upon a bird's nest and desire the eggs, you must first remove the mother. Gunther Plaut categorizes such commandments as "Social Weal." They exemplify what it means to be a part of the congregation of Israel. These social laws are to serve as a guide for living within the land of Israel. If you were walking along and saw breakfast in the form of a bird and her eggs, take only the eggs. The reason given is so that "you may fare well and have a long life." Strictly speaking, *יטב לך* connotes a general blessing of good tidings, while *הארכת ימים* is clear in its reckoning of a lengthening of one's temporal existence.

However, there is a contradiction. If you send away the mother, you are sending away a meal that you could have had with the eggs, which on the surface might shorten your life because

of hunger. One implication may be that God will help you fare well and extend your days. However, from experience, fulfilling a commandment and receiving its reward as so stated may be two different matters altogether.

The text raises more questions than it answers. The statement that one would receive a reward or benefit for taking care not to kill both the mother and her "potential" children at the same time implies that our actions towards God's creatures, especially in the instance where one is harvesting God's creation, have a direct effect on the type of life we will have.

The exegetes and commentators have discussed the underlying meaning of the text. The Mishnah provides in *Chullin* 12:5:

A man may not take the dam and her young even for the sake of cleansing the leper. If regarding such a light precept, especially that which is worth just an *issar*, the Law has said, "that you may fare well and have a long life," how much more [shall be the reward] for fulfilling the more stringent commandments.<sup>16</sup>

This commandment cannot be broken, even to purify another soul, which would be for little cost. Since the Torah emphasized such a reward for a "light" commandment, how much the more so must there be a reward for the more stringent commandments. The Mishnah is trying to explain how the reward, "that you may fare well" is also written in connection to the fifth commandment. This law, the shooing away of the mother bird, which appears to be a "light" law, enjoys the same reward as that of honoring one's parents.

In the Babylonian Talmud, this notion of reward for performing this mitzvah is challenged. In brief, a man sends his son to retrieve some young birds making sure to leave the dam. Unfortunately on the way down he falls and dies. What's the moral? While the Bible asserts that one should do this in order to lengthen one's days, the Rabbis use this example to

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<sup>16</sup> Danby, *Mishnah*, p529

explain that this does not mean in this world, rather it refers to the resurrection of the dead and the world to come, and in fact, there is no reward for precepts in this world.<sup>17</sup>

Rashi explains in his commentary the importance of this precept especially in regards to lack of monetary compensation, and its implication regarding more stringent commandments. If with no monetary compensation one's days will be extended, how much the more so with a difficult mitzvah that incurs no monetary compensation. One then needs to do the mitzvah even though there is no financial gain. This makes it that much more important to fulfill this mitzvah.

*Deuteronomy Rabbah* 6:1 looks at this same text, Deuteronomy 22:6-7, and takes a different approach. The *midrash* says:

Why is it a law (*halakha*) to circumcise an infant who has been born without a foreskin? This is so, in order that blood may be drawn from the infant showing enduring devotion to the Covenant of Abraham. How did the sages determine this? In the Torah it is written, "they must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting Covenant." (Gen 17:13) [The repetition is understood here to connote both an infant with a foreskin and one without.] In another opinion, the expression "they must be circumcised" in Hebrew is written using the same word twice [in two different ways, accentuating a double emphatic.] This repetition of the word implies two operative parts to the circumcision process; circumcision and uncovering. Circumcision is required of every male on the eighth day. However, when the male is born without a foreskin, he too is still obligated to be circumcised by uncovering, so that he may still be considered a part of the Covenant of Abraham, and so that no one might question his status as a member of the House of Israel.

Now why is it commanded that an infant be circumcised on the eighth day? Because God had compassion upon him in delaying the circumcision until he should have gained strength. And just as God shows mercy to man, so too does God show mercy to cattle. How do we know this? In Leviticus 22:27 it is written, "When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as an offering by fire to the LORD." Moreover, it says in the following verse, "However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young." Therefore, in the same way that God had compassion upon the cattle, so too was God filled with mercy for the birds as it is said, "If along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest... Let the mother go and take only the young."

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<sup>17</sup> BT Chullin 142

While talking about circumcision and the eight-day delay, the Rabbis remark that God showed compassion upon the infant. So too, was this compassion extended to cattle, and so too was the compassion extended to birds, citing the above verse. Thus it is God who shows mercy to "man," and it is God who shows mercy on cattle and birds by commanding these prohibitions. It is then incumbent upon us to be God-like by following these commandments by showing mercy and compassion on these creatures. Although we must slaughter animals to survive, we must also retain our humanity while doing so; we must act in a way that is both compassionate as well as life-sustaining.

Maimonides argues against this interpretation of the biblical text in his *Mishneh Torah*. He argues that prayers which petition for compassion like that shown the mother bird and others should be silenced because "such commandments are mere decrees and are not compassionate... for if they were truly based on being compassionate, it would not be permitted for us to slaughter [animals] at all."<sup>18</sup> Rambam is not arguing against compassion, he is arguing that in the reading of the text, these decrees are not based on a *mitzvah* of compassion.

However, in the *Guide to the Perplexed*, Maimonides argues that animals are like humans in that they experience the same love and tenderness, and that we can sense this through use of our imaginative faculty, which is found in most animals just as it is found in man.<sup>19</sup> Slaughtering the young in front of its mother is prohibited because of the pain it would inflict on the mother, the same pain any mother would have for her young, be they human or animal. The two texts are not contradictory, rather one elucidates the plain meaning and interpretation of the Hebrew, whereas the latter informs on the quality of the text and its possible intent.

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<sup>18</sup> Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Tefillah*.

<sup>19</sup> "Guide to the Perplexed." 3:48

Moses ben Nahman also known as Ramban or Nahmanides, a 13<sup>th</sup>-century rabbi and scholar, offers an interesting commentary in contrast to Rambam's assertion that the command was given because the mother feels the same pain as a human mother. In his view, the command would only prohibit the killing of the young before killing the mother, but the Torah forbids this either way. Generalizing, Ramban reasons that the prohibition is to prevent us from acting cruelly and that it is taught in order to "refine a person" and that he/she would be led in the "paths of compassion even during the process of slaughtering." The underlying basis for the commandment is to teach compassion towards animals in general and lead us away from cruelty towards other creatures. This generalization, of course, has been prevalent since then.

The interpretation Nachmanides arrives at is the culmination of hundreds of years of exegesis. So, when *tza'ar baalei chaim* (causing pain to any living thing) is quoted as a biblical imperative, it is from this source that it is derived. The biblical text indeed makes a law against hurting birds in the particular case at hand, but it was the Rabbis of later periods who extended this to encompass all animals.

Yet, this "commandment" reflects the nature of Jewish law as one not dependent on any singular source. Rather it is one that evolves over a millennium, and is continuously enhanced and enriched

Let us now turn from particular toraitic sources that are legalistic in tone to sources that relate more generally to the environment and explore its relationship to the Divine and to human endeavor.

#### **Psalm 24:1**

"The earth is God's (possession) and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants."

By itself, this one psalm verse has been a major force in understanding humanity's relationship with the earth. However, before we examine the history of its interpretation, first we must look at the verse in its context. Psalm 24 is considered an "entrance liturgy" for those pilgrims about to enter the Temple. "The implied references to the ark entering the gates of the Temple... and the theme of the kingship of God... suggest that this may belong to some processional liturgy, possibly at the turn of the New Year, in pre-exilic Temple."<sup>20</sup>

Understanding its origins implicitly helps our understanding of the verse. Verse one (and verse two) is the opening groundwork for the psalm, thanking God for everything, ascribing possession to God alone, with no other person or deity in competition with God. In this setting we see its rhetorical function. Moreover, we see that when viewed by itself or taken out of the context of the liturgy, it is difficult to transform its meaning to anything other than a hymn praising God's possession and/or an emphatic statement of this fact.

It is in this manner that the Rabbis in the post-biblical period would use the verse to explain certain phenomena. The first two lines of Psalm 24 are used in a variety of contexts. They are used as a general rule when explaining why one should say a blessing before enjoying anything from this world (*Berakhot* 35a). This is further developed in the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* 50:1, that everything is like a הקדש, something dedicated to, or belonging to, God, and just as it is forbidden to partake of the הקדש until after it has been redeemed, we cannot benefit from the הקדש, without (first) acknowledging God's ownership of the produce and gift of it to us. Therefore it is forbidden to benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing.

At BT *Rosh Hashanah* 31a, the Rabbis explain that this psalm should be intoned on the first day of the week for God took possession and gave possession to the people of the world on the first day the world was created. The Talmud doesn't explain what this means, as human

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<sup>20</sup> S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 226).

beings could only take possession on the sixth day, after they had been created. Samuel Eliezer Ben Judah Ha-Levi Edels, also known as the MaHaRSHa, an early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Talmudic scholar, explains that God made something which could subsequently be acquired. This is fitting for the first day of the week, celebrating the creation of the world and acknowledging that we are but squatters in God's glorious abode.

This psalm is also applied with regard to the matter of tithes allocated to God. When someone allocates something to God, like an animal or money, and while in the Temple treasury it is lost or stolen, the question arises as to whether the initial donor is responsible for what is lost. If the donation that is consecrated to God has been lost or stolen, the donor is not responsible for restitution because "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Even though the item is lost, it is still within God's domain, as the entire earth is God's treasury (*Chullin* 139a).

*Midrash Tehillim*, the *midrash* on Psalms, interprets Israel as God's *terumah* (special offering) in an unusually poignant analysis.<sup>21</sup> In the *midrash*, the earth still belongs to God, but just as we set aside a part of the field for a tithe, so too has God set aside Israel. It is a powerful statement into how the Rabbis viewed Israel's mission and status in the world. Not only is the nation of Israel God's elect, but the Land of Israel retains an elevated place even during our dispersion.

Another lesson that is drawn from this psalm is expressed in *Midrash Aggadah* Exodus 23:5. The first fruits of your land are to be set aside. Why? In order that the *Cohanim* might

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<sup>21</sup> When the Holy One, blessed be He, created days, He set aside the Sabbath. When He created months, He set aside the festivals. When He created years, He chose Sabbatical years for Himself. When He created Sabbatical years, He chose the years of Jubilee for Himself. When he created the nations of the earth, He chose the nation of Israel for Himself. When He created the Levites, He chose the priests for Himself. When He created countries, He set aside the Land of Israel out of all the countries as a *terumah*, as is said, 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.' Here fullness alludes to *terumah*, as in the verse, 'Thou shalt not delay to offer of the fullness of thy harvest, and of the outflow of thy presses' (Exodus 22:28). So it said, 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.' – *Midrash Tehillim*, 337-8.

enjoy them? Rather, that you might know that the “earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof!” So that you don’t become arrogant and say that this is mine and this is mine. You are not here forever, rather you are like the stranger or the traveler who stops only for a night. (Jeremiah 14:8) It is this theme that has persisted throughout the generations.

More than any other, this quote has quietly expressed an environmental ethic that assigns the world and its fullness to God. What follow is a treatise on one aspect of what our obligations are while we are here on earth.

#### Leviticus 19:23-25

וְכִּי־תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ וְנִטְעַתֶּם כָּל־עֵץ מִאֲכָל וְעֵרְלֹתֶם עֵרְלֹתוֹ אֶת־פְּרִי שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים יִהְיֶה לָכֶם עֵרְלִים לֹא יֵאָכֵל: <sup>24</sup> וּבִשְׁנָה הָרְבִיעִית יִהְיֶה כָּל־פְּרִי קָדֵשׁ הַלֵּוִיִּם לַיהוָה: <sup>25</sup> וּבִשְׁנָה הַחֲמִישִׁתַּתְּאָכְלוּ אֶת־פְּרִי לְהוֹסִיף לָכֶם תְּבוּאָתוֹ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

“When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. <sup>24</sup> In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before the LORD; <sup>25</sup> and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit -- that its yield to you may be increased: I the LORD am your God.”

This text was selected, not because it was the most frequently cited in modern discussions but because it was “the tree that produced the finest apples.” So, it must be here that the exegesis begins. This law appears as part of the holiness code. The only reasoning behind this law is that in order to be holy one must follow these laws. Though no clear reasoning is made evident, the verse does hint at a few important things. The first is the location. The opening lines set the place and time by saying, “when you come to the land.” This refers to “the land that I will give you,” the land of Israel. The following phrase, “and you plant any tree for food”, implies an expectation that planting would be one of the first things on the agenda, and then one must wait. One might deduce that the produce of a tree is not immediately used for the benefit of man, and instead, man must wait years before making the appropriate offering to God. All of this would happen before he could consume even a single fruit. Especially since the very “first



fruits" were not acceptable offerings to God. They are not acceptable for at least two possible reasons: first, that they are still immature; or second, that harvesting within the first three years will damage the tree or its long-term productivity. Finally, only after the fourth year may the fruit be taken for human consumption and, even then, the first produce goes to God as an act of thanksgiving. By itself, it is a powerful statement regarding our obligation to the land and to future generations.

It is on the basis of this biblical source that we encounter some of the most beautiful *midrashim*. The following is one of these stories, often redressed in modern Jewish literature.

*Midrash Tanhuma, Kedushim 8*

כי תבואו אל הארץ ונטעתם (ויקרא יט כג). אמר להם הקב"ה לישראל, אעפ"י שתמצאו אותה מליאה כל טוב, לא תאמרו נשב ולא נטע, אלא הו' זהירין בנטיעות, שנאמר ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל, כשם שנכנסתם ומצאתם נטיעות שנטעו אחרים, אף אתם נטעו לבניכם, שלא יאמר אדם אני זקן ולמחר אני מת, ולמה אני יגע בשביל אחרים, אמר שלמה את הכל עשה יפה בעתו גם את העולם [נתן בלבם] (קהלת ג יא)

"When you enter the land and plant" (Lev. 19:23) The Holy One blessed be He said to Israel, even though you may find it (the land) full of every beneficence, do not say, "we shall sit and not plant." Instead be diligent planters, as it is said, "You shall plant all kinds of trees for food." (ibid) Just as you entered and found plantings that others had planted, so too shall you plant for your children. Nor should man say, "I am old and tomorrow I may die, so why should I toil for others?" King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes (3:11), "He brings everything to pass in its season; he also places eternity in his heart."

As our Rabbis are trying to understand this verse of Torah, they break it down into some of its essential parts and try to explain the plain meaning of the verse. Here they are explaining why the Israelites had to plant upon entering the land of Israel. Is not the land already full of trees and produce ripe for the picking? Surely when the scouts came back from their mission into the land and found food, the land had already been planted? The Rabbis are then explaining why the Israelites are supposed to plant as soon as they enter the land of their inheritance. The beneficence, which is there today, needs also to be prepared for tomorrow and for future

generations of children. The other part of the explanation is that not only do we plant because we may reap what we sow, but also we plant so that we might reap what we sow when we spend eternity with God. The implication is that setting aside for others for the future would help set aside our own place in the world to come. Hence, this text is the fruit of a rich exegesis. The crux of the text says plainly and forcefully that just as you found this world full of good things, so must you prepare the world for the next generation. Obedience is enforced by using fear of the world to come.

The Rabbis were well aware that preparation for the next generation was, sometimes, not enough of a motivation to move people to act conscientiously.

In *Leviticus Rabbah* 25:5 we come across an allegory that helps drive the point home. To summarize, it is the story of an old man planting a fig tree, when the king happens by. The king laughs at the old man, saying, "Grandpa, grandpa, if you had got up early (to do the work) you would not have to stay up late." The old man responded that he both got up early and stayed up late... The repartee continues, reiterating the point made above that his forbearers had prepared things for him and so was he now doing so for his children. The story should be read in its totality because of the many lessons imbedded therein. It is no simple reiteration of the text in *Midrash Tanhuma*. It presents the point of the legal exegesis in story form, which makes it more accessible to a wider audience. Certainly the same points are made, but they have nuanced differences.

It is no large step to imagine other stories derived from the biblical text, which have similar lessons imbedded, even though the narratives may differ. These stories are some of the most poignant environmental texts in the Jewish tradition.

Another relevant tradition (BT *Kiddushin* 36b – 37a) teaches that normally, those laws that are dependent upon the land of Israel are only practiced in the land. However, there are some laws which are not dependent on the land, like *orlah*, the above-mentioned requirement not to harvest a fruit tree during its first three years. The same root, 'arl, is used to refer to an uncircumcised male. Because this same word was used in both of these cases, the Rabbis determined that just as one (circumcision of males) was not confined to the land of Israel, neither was the other (the fruit tree). By not being relegated to just the land of Israel, this rule (that is, waiting three years to offer the first fruits to God and, only then allowing them to be eaten) becomes a universal law applying to everyone, everywhere. Unrestricted in its scope, it becomes one of the strongest statements toward an environmental ethic.

Ramban looks back to the original text offering a reason as to why one must wait until the fourth year to bring the fruit of the tree as an offering to God. He explains that ordinarily the first fruits are given to God. Yet, since the fruits in the first few years of a tree's life aren't mature enough, and aren't worthy as an offering to praise God, the Torah ordains waiting until the fourth year to offer the fruit of the tree to God. Ramban shows the understanding of a farmer who realizes that if the first fruits are not good enough for human consumption, then how much the more so are they not good enough as an offering to God, until the fourth year.

The Jewish textual tradition presented here, which is the biblical text along with the ensuing commentaries, is a source for environmental teaching of unusual depth and richness. The following text is often utilized as an all-encompassing environmental text teaching humanity's need to care for the earth.

מדרש רבה קהלת פרשה ז סימן כ

א י"ג ראה את מעשה האלהים כי מי יוכל לתקן את אשר עותו בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריו ולא עוד שאת גורם מיתה לאותו צדיק משל משה רבינו למה"ד לאשה עוברה שהיתה חבושה בבית האסורים ילדה שם בן גדלה שם ומתה שם לימים עבר המלך על פתח האסורים כשהמלך עובר התחיל אותו הבן צווח ואומר אדני המלך כאן נולדתי כאן גדלתי באיזה חטא אני נתון כאן איני יודע אמר לו בחטא של אמך כך במשה כמו שכתוב הן האדם היה כאחד כתוב הן קרבו ימך למות:

Behold, God's work! Who can straighten what he has twisted? (Eccl 7:13) When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him, "Behold My works, how beautiful and commendable they are! All that I have created, for your sake I created it. Pay heed that you do not corrupt and destroy My universe; for if you corrupt it there is no one to repair it after you. Not only that, but you will cause death to befall that righteous man [Moses]." To what may our teacher Moses be likened? To a pregnant woman shut up in a prison. She gave birth there to a son, reared him there and died there. After a while the king passed by the entrance of the prison, and as he passed the son began to cry, "My lord king, here was I born and here I grew up. For what sin I am kept here I do not know." He answered, "For your mother's sin." So was it with Moses, as it is written, The Lord God said: Behold, the man is become as one of us (Gen. 3:22), and it is written, Behold, your days approach that you must die (Deut. 31:14).

A reprint of the entire text here highlights the significance of understanding the quote. This oft-quoted first half has been used extensively in modern literature to exemplify man's obligations toward nature. However, a careful reading of the text indicates that modern environmentalists may be a little too quick to use this passage to further their cause. Even so, the first part of the text, by itself, is a profound statement about God's works and our responsibility towards them along with the consequences of not taking care of them. The problem with this interpretation is that it ignores the context of the entire passage. The text is very literally referring to "Adam", the first man and his violation of God's command not to eat of the fruit. It is this violation which caused Moses to die, for prior to this, death was unknown. *Midrash Zuta* (7:5) has this same *midrash* with one important addition. It adds that Moses died because of the sin of the first man.

Where the above text only hints at this, *Midrash Zuta* is unequivocal in its condemnation of "Adam rishon". What then is the implication regarding the environment? It is a prime example of a facile reading of the text. The sense of the first half may be a phenomenal message regarding man's obligation towards the environment, but ultimately, if it is used separate from its whole, it does not do justice to the source from which it was gleaned. Used in its entirety, it can still become an excellent text promoting the environment. The text comes to the conclusion that death is now a part of our lives because "Adam" sinned in the Garden. It is because of this sin that the Israelites lost Moses, the only one who could talk with God face to face. Such was the consequence of corrupting God's beautiful works! Though we may not be able to straighten that which is crooked in that death cannot be recalled, we can care for God's beautiful works so that nothing else becomes crooked which cannot be straightened.

### **Conclusion**

The above material is only a small sampling of the sources used to promote the environment. As is evidenced by the analysis, some verses used for promoting a Jewish environmental ethic are not necessarily the best sources for doing so. If the Jewish environmental movement wants to remain at the cutting edge of both Judaism and the environment, then the source materials which are used to engage learners must be top-notch and not just convenient. Even though the message may be of the highest importance, and related in a very poignant way, it must be buttressed by a clear history of Judaic interpretation that remains authentic to its source and context.

## Chapter 4

### ***Midrash and the Environment through Classical Rabbinic Texts***

One major project of this thesis is to develop a curriculum that utilizes the best materials promoting the environment as well as simultaneously remaining authentically Jewish, as well as being engaging. The recommendations and insights found in the first three chapters are helping guide the development process in this chapter. One of the key recommendations was to integrate environmental studies into an already existing curriculum. This thesis will create a ninth grade, post-*b'nai mitzvah* curriculum. Often, the challenge with this age group is to teach both Judaism and environmentalism in an effective and engaging manner. This thesis proposes to address this issue by developing an age-appropriate and meaningful curriculum. In Judaism, there are many aspects from which to choose for integrating into an environmental program; however, *midrash* seems most suitable for a few reasons:

- 1) In post-*b'nai mitzvah* studies, it is traditional to learn about the rabbinic texts that came after the Bible. *Midrash* allows one avenue into this.
- 2) Engaging these older students in both an authentic and engaging Jewish environmental education program can be a very difficult task, one that has been explored mostly with the younger grades. This thesis grapples with the challenges associated with this age group.
- 3) *Midrash* is typified by stories, and the story is a very powerful avenue into learning about the environment.
- 4) *Midrash* is more versatile in its ability to be presented to students who lack the Hebrew knowledge, in a way that the students may still understand it. (Though lack of Hebrew

fluency is still a hindrance, especially with regard to philological interpretations and the nuanced midrashic style, adaptation is feasible.)

5) Integrating environmental studies into a Jewish studies program, while remaining authentic, is a difficult task. *Midrash* provides the means to do so effectively. Whereas in secular education, the environment may be integrated into the curriculum of multiple disciplines, Judaism is typified by text study, a single discipline with multiple entry points. Integration may be accomplished through the weekly *sidra*, the study of the Talmud or the Mishnah. In order to be authentically Jewish, text study and learning about the textual history of Judaism must be an important part of any Jewish environmental education program.

In this way *midrash* becomes not only a way into Jewish tradition but also a lens through which to see and experience the environment. The *midrash* teaches how the Rabbis interpreted their world and provides sound and true methods for interpreting our world. Thus, just as *midrash* gives us an avenue into the environment, so too is the environment a lens through which to see ourselves.

### Overview

The following curriculum will employ source material to present the different aspects of *midrashim*. These will be excerpts of passages providing an easier method of understanding for students. At the same time, the source material will provide opportunities for a fuller understanding of the historical relationship between Judaism and the environment, and its modern-day connections.

In order to learn about both *midrash* and the environment, much of what will be learned will parallel each other. For instance, the first lesson, "Introducing *Midrash* and Jewish

Environmental Connections,” will be purely an introduction into *midrash* and the environment. The second lesson, “Understanding the Midrashic Problem,” will talk about how *midrash* approaches the biblical text and defines problems there. In the same lesson we will look into problems that occur in the environment and how to approach solutions. Next, the third lesson entitled, “An In-Depth Understanding of Midrashic Literature and its Connections to the Environment,” will launch the students’ development of an understanding of the different genres of midrashic literature. In addition, students will begin a first-hand look at their environment to facilitate their abilities to make connections between the *midrash* and modern environmental issues.

With the introductions to several important concepts completed, Lessons 4 through 7 employ creative activities and *hevruta*-study groups in the analysis of midrashic text. Students continue in Lesson 4, “Tannaitic *Midrash* – Its Message and the Implication of ‘Do Not Destroy,’” to develop an understanding of the different genres of midrashic literature. Here, students will begin research on a modern environmental issue in preparation for its presentation in the final lesson. Likewise, Lesson 5 – “An Introduction to Homiletical *Midrash* Through the Importance of Trees,” Lesson 6 – “An Introduction to Exegetical *Midrash* Through a Jewish Understanding of Our Relationship With Animals,” and Lesson 7 – “An Introduction to Narrative *Midrash* Encompassing an Environmental Awareness,” continue the objective of furthering the students’ understanding of the genres of midrashic literature. However, this group of lessons simultaneously integrates important environmental lessons through creative activities and *hevruta*-study groups, thus bringing the students’ ability to connect Jewish environmentalism and midrashic stories full circle.



Then, the final lessons provide culminating activities for students to display the knowledge gained through the previous lessons. In particular, Lesson 8 – “Creating *Midrash*” does exactly what its title implies by allowing students to use their understanding of *midrash* to create their own individual *midrash*. Ultimately, student knowledge is displayed and celebrated in Lesson 9 – “Final Project Presentations” where students share their original *midrash* and present their environmental projects.

Therefore, as stated in Ecclesiastes 5:8, “The abundance of this earth is for everyone...” and through these important Jewish environmental lessons and the lessons learned through the stories of midrashic literature, students will gain insight and an understanding of these connections. Finally, students will hopefully gain a deep respect for the process of understanding these issues within the context of the modern world.

#### **Enduring Understanding:**

While life rarely provides easy answers, it is more important to know the right questions. In light of this, classical rabbinic literature can still be relevant to our study of the environment today, guiding us towards the right questions to ask.

#### **Objectives:**

1. Students will gain an understanding of the rabbinic approach to Scripture in midrashic texts.
2. Students will develop an understanding of Judaism’s relationship to the environment.
3. Students will gain an appreciation for the midrashic problem and rabbinic ingenuity.

#### **Concepts**

1. To provide a curriculum that utilizes the best materials promoting the environment as well as simultaneously remaining authentically Jewish and engaging to students.

2. To use *midrash* in a Jewish environmental curriculum for the power of its stories and its ability to integrate Jewish tradition into the students' experience with the environment.
3. For students to be able to describe and analyze the oral tradition of *midrash*, its analogies, and the different genres of midrashic literature.
4. For students to be able to understand and draw conclusions from midrashic literature to the extent that they are able to create their own original *midrash*.

#### **Attitudes**

1. To foster growth and understanding among students about the interconnectedness and relationship between the *midrash* and Jewish environmental studies.
2. To develop an appreciation for the laws and interpretations of Jewish text in regard to our interactions with the environment.
3. For students to relate midrashic and Judaic environmental concepts to their daily lives.

#### **Curriculum Overview:**

**Lesson 1:** Introducing *Midrash* and Jewish Environmental Connections

**Lesson 2:** Understanding the Midrashic Problem

**Lesson 3:** An In-Depth Understanding of Midrashic Literature and its Connections to the Environment

**Lesson 4:** Tannaitic *Midrash*: Its Message and the Implication of "Do Not Destroy"

**Lesson 5:** An Introduction to Homiletical *Midrash* Through the Importance of Trees

**Lesson 6:** An Introduction to Exegetical *Midrash* Through a Jewish Understanding of our Relationship with Animals

**Lesson 7:** An Introduction to Narrative *Midrash* Encompassing an Environmental Awareness

**Lesson 8:** Environmental Dilemmas and Creating Original *Midrash*: The Looking Glass

**Lesson 9:** Final Project Presentations

**Length of Study:** Half a school year

**Time Sequence:** Nine 1 ½ hour lessons

**Age/Grade Level:** Post Bar/Bat Mitzvah, with an emphasis on 9<sup>th</sup> grade

**Handouts:** All handouts are located at the end of each lesson and are referenced for usage within the lesson itself. An additional handout, "Glossary of General Environmental Terms," is included at the end of this section for use throughout the entire curriculum.

## **Glossary of General Environmental Terms<sup>1</sup>**

**Abiotic** – non-living

**Adaptation** – any characteristic which helps an organism survive in its particular environment

**Animal** – any living thing that gets its food from plants or other animals, living or dead

**Balance in Nature** – tendency of living things to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between themselves and their environment

**Community** – all the plants and animals in a given area, interacting with one another

**Competition** – two organisms of the same species, or two different species, both requiring the same resource(s), such as light, water, or food

**Conservation** – wise use of the environment

**Consumer** – an animal that gets its food energy by eating another plant or animal

**Decay**- reduction of the materials of plant or animal bodies to simple compounds through the action of bacteria or other decomposers

**Decomposer** – bacteria, mold, fungi and other organisms that obtain their energy from dead plants or animals, or their waste products

**Ecology** – study of the relationship of living things (including man) to each other and the environment

**Ecosystem** – a community of plants and animals interacting with the abiotic components of the environment

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Goldman, *Foundation for Jewish Camping, Inc.* (A Complete Jewish Environmental Camping Curriculum).

**Energy** – the ability to do work

**Environment** – all of the biological and physical components of any given place

**Food Chain** – transfer of energy through an ecosystem through the action of food producers, food consumers, and decomposers; consists of at least three different kinds of organisms in which one organism is eaten by another, which is in turn eaten by a third

**Food Web** – a series of inter-linking food chains

**Habitat** – the physical place where a plant or animal can find the right food, shelter, water, temperature, and other things it needs for life

**Interaction** – relationship of organisms (or populations) to each other and/or the environment

**Interrelationship** – the interaction between plants, animals and their environment

**Niche** – an organism's functional role in the community, usually described in terms of how it obtains energy (producer, consumer, decomposer)

**Organism** – a living plant or animal

**Pesticides** – chemicals which are used to kill insects, weeds, etc.; they are extremely toxic

**Pollution** – defilement of the environment by people; uncleanness and /or impurities in things such as air, groundwater, etc.

**Population** – all the organisms of the same kind in a specified area

**Predator** – an animal that preys on, kills and eats another animal

**Prey**- an animal that is killed and eaten by another animal, the predator

**Recycle** – to use something over and over again by removing and reusing a substance from waste

**Species** – all the organisms of the same kind that exist on Earth

**Weather** – condition of the atmosphere, determined by air pressure, heat, wind, and water

## **Lesson 1**

### **Introducing *Midrash* and Jewish Environmental Connections**

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

#### **PART ONE (45 minutes)**

##### **Definitions:**

*Midrash* - A Jewish story that "explains, clarifies, or elaborates on an event or passage in the Bible." *DeRaSH*, the root word, means "'to search out,' 'to expound,' or 'to examine.'"

##### **Objective(s):**

1. Students will be introduced to the topic of Judaism and the environment, through its relationship to the *midrash*.
2. The lesson will highlight oral tradition and how *midrash* used to be handed down from generation to generation.

##### **Activities:**

**Introduction:** Lay out course objectives and define *midrash*.

##### **Set Induction:**

The teacher will introduce this section by first talking about the childhood game, "Telephone." The game "Telephone" shows how information given on one end can quickly transform on the other. Though the oral tradition tries very hard not to change the words as they are passed on from generation to generation, nevertheless it still happens. In this class, they are going to get a brief inculcation into the transmission of oral teaching transformed into written law.

The teacher will read aloud the following story and the students will work in pairs to write down the story from what they heard. Students will be instructed about the history of oral

tradition which included the use of scribes who would write down the stories word for word, as best as they could report it. (Have the verses of Torah at hand to help them with this understanding of oral tradition.) Students will be provided with an opportunity to read their versions aloud and make comparisons and contrasts to the original *midrash* story working as a large group. (handout)

### ***Midrash Tehillim, 337-8***

On the Psalm verse 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created days, He set aside the Sabbath. When He created months, He set aside the festivals. When He created years, He chose Sabbatical years for Himself. When He created Sabbatical years, He chose the years of Jubilee for Himself. When he created the nations of the earth, He chose the nation of Israel for Himself. When He created the Levites, He chose the priests for Himself. When He created countries, He set aside the Land of Israel out of all the countries as a *terumah*, as is said, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." Here fullness alludes to *terumah*, as in the verse, 'Thou shalt not delay to offer of the fullness of thy harvest, and of the outflow of thy presses' (Exodus 22:28). So it said, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

### **PART TWO (45 minutes)**

#### **Objective(s):**

Students will be introduced to the relationship between the environment and Judaism. In particular, students will gain an understanding of how the environment will be used as a lens into *midrash*. In exploring the nuances of *midrash*, the environment will now be a helpful tool to realize how *midrash* is made.

#### **Activities:**

The teacher will lead the students in the completion of the following modern *midrash* activity.



## One Square Foot of the World<sup>2</sup>

Students will be sent out into the woods (should be somewhere nearby that has already been checked for the usual hazards. Behavioral expectations should be reviewed with students prior to leaving for the outdoors, and all school policies should be followed regarding outdoor activities) to find a one square foot spot for them to observe for 15 minutes. Prior to their nature observations, students should be instructed to make mental notes of what is there and make sure they have in their mind the question, "What happened here?"

When they return, students will orally give the history of their piece of land to the entire class. The teacher will lead a large group discussion on how the student's explanations affected their story.

The teacher will explain that this is modern *midrash*. There are clues on the ground that tell a story and how one puts together that story, adding details and embellishing is all a part of the process.

Finally, the teacher will ask if students made any assumptions when telling their story. How did the assumptions they made affect the story they relayed to the large group? (Assumptions in this instance come in the form of an agenda related by the participant, that specifically identifies a moral or ethic. This can be realized by the participant's use of words like "good," "bad," "beautiful," "ugly," etc.)

### Conclusion

The midrashic consciousness is all around us. We use this consciousness when understanding stories, when decoding texts whether they are complicated or simplistic. Finally, we do *midrash* every day of our lives. We make assumptions and fill in the gaps of

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<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Goldman, *A Teacher's Guide to Listen to the Trees*. (UAHC Press, 1996), 20-1.

conversations of which we only hear portions. This is the agenda we bring to any interpretation of text of which we must always be aware.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**You are a Scribe**  
**The Oral Tradition of Recording Midrash**

Part I: Use the space below to write down the story read aloud in class. Try your hardest to record it word for word.

Part II: Use the actual midrashic text below to make comparisons and contrasts to the version you have completed as a "scribe."

***Midrash Tehillim, 337-8***

On the Psalm verse 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created days, He set aside the Sabbath. When He created months, He set aside the festivals. When He created years, He chose Sabbatical years for Himself. When He created Sabbatical years, He chose the years of Jubilee for Himself. When he created the nations of the earth, He chose the nation of Israel for Himself. When He created the Levites, He chose the priests for Himself. When He created countries, He set aside the Land of Israel out of all the countries as a *terumah*, as is said, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." Here fullness alludes to *terumah*, as in the verse, 'Thou shalt not delay to offer of the fullness of thy harvest, and of the outflow of thy presses' (Exodus 22:28). So it said, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

Compare and Contrast:

## **Lesson 2**

### **Understanding the Midrashic Problem**

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

**Definition(s):** Synectic – is the blending of dissimilar ideas or objects to produce new ideas, products or solutions.<sup>3</sup>

**Objective(s):**

The teacher will introduce *midrash* through the use of “Synectics – An Approach to *Midrash*” by Rabbi Alvan Kaunfer. (Melton Research Newsletter, 11, Fall, 1996).<sup>4</sup> The techniques therein are very useful and will help draw out the midrashic process.

Rabbi Kaunfer’s objectives are applicable to this lesson and are as follows:

1. To introduce the child to the metaphorical way of thinking while encouraging him/her to initiate creative comparisons.
2. To encourage the child to make metaphoric comparisons to biblical situations.
3. To prepare the child to read and understand midrashic analogies.
4. To develop the child’s use of synectics as an interpretive device for literary texts in general.

**Activities:**

**Warm-up and Stretching Exercises (20 Minutes)**

The teacher will lead the class in this activity. The teacher will tell the class that, “Today we are going to stretch our imaginations. We’re going to see if we can compare some strange

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<sup>3</sup> “synectic.” *Webster’s New Millennium™ Dictionary of English, Preview Edition (v 0.9.6)*. Lexico Publishing Group, LLC. 28 Jan. 2007. <Dictionary.

<sup>4</sup> [www.jtsa.edu/davidson/melton/bestof/midrash.shtml](http://www.jtsa.edu/davidson/melton/bestof/midrash.shtml)

things. I want you to let your imaginations go and pretend. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers." Students should be assigned to small groups of three to four students to answer the following questions. (The teacher may use all or selected questions for the purposes of this exercise – see Handout.) Each small group should select a "reporter" who will share their answers with the entire class.

### **Direct Analogies**

1. How is a beaver chewing on a log like a typewriter?
2. A steam roller is like what animal? (first ask several students to explain their answers, then ask one student for the animal and another student to explain why the first student chose that animal).
3. A blade of grass is like \_\_\_\_\_ because.
4. A snow-topped mountain is like \_\_\_\_\_ (again ask several students to explain their classmate's choices of answer.)
5. What fruit is like you? Why?

Now let's try some strange ones:

6. Which is louder, a smile or a frown? Why?
7. Which is heavier, a mountain or an ocean? Why?
8. What color is sleep? Why do you see it as that color?
9. Which is softer, a whisper or a kitten's fur?
10. Which is angrier, the kitchen or the living room? Why?

### **Personal Analogies**

Now I want you to pretend that you are different things (use the same small group format followed by large group sharing and discussion):

1. You're ice cream! Do you ever get used to your body temperature? When you

are in danger? If you are left in the hot sun, how does your body feel? How do you feel about being made into so many different flavors?

2. Be a fish. How do you feel? What do you do?
3. You're a balloon. What do you feel like?
4. Imagine that you are a spider, trying to spin a web on a rainy, stormy day. Be the thing! As the spider, what does the storm do to you, and how do you feel about it?
5. Imagine that you are a boomerang. An Australian savage throws you at a kangaroo. He wants it for supper. He snaps his powerful wrist and hurls you into the air. Be the thing. What do you do and how do you feel?
6. Imagine you are a metal spring. What does it feel like? Would you rather be squashed or stretched?

#### **Comparing a Biblical Verse to a Direct Analogy (15 minutes)**

The teacher will lead the following large group discussion: We might understand Adam, and maybe even God, better if we compared him to some strange things. When God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden we learned:

**Genesis 2:15** The LORD God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; <sup>17</sup> but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."<sup>5</sup>

**Question 1:** "What thing (object, machine) was Adam like then?"

Call on individual students for their responses and record their answers on the board. Use probing questions to encourage students to explain why they made the comparisons they

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<sup>5</sup> JPS Tanakh, 1985.



chose to make. Use further probing questions to ask another student to explain why he thinks that the first student made that comparison. Write the analogies on the board as you go.

**Question 2:** Which one from our list is the strangest comparison?

Students will be provided an opportunity to discuss their answers and then the class will vote to select the strangest comparison.

**Question 3:** Now, let's be the thing that you chose. How do you feel? What do you do?

(You may want to repeat the personal analogy with another example from the list.)

### **Investigating Midrashic Direct Analogy (15 minutes)**

The teacher will read aloud the following comparison that the Rabbis made in their *midrash*.

"'Beauty is an illusion.'(Proverbs 31:30) From this verse we learn that, Adam's heel outshone the sun. Thus, Adam was made to illuminate God and the sun was created to illuminate his creatures. So, if the orb of Adam's heel outshone the sun, then how much the more so was the shining of his face. Thus, we learn that it is 'his fear of the Lord that should be praised.'(ibid.) (*Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 12:1)

You may think that this is unusual, but the Rabbis in olden times liked to compare things in the Bible to some strange things, because it helped them to understand the Bible. They called these explanations *midrash*. In this specific example, they compared Adam's heel to the orb of the sun.

The teacher will lead a large group discussion of the following questions:

1. How was Adam's heel like the orb of the sun?
2. Imagine your heel was like the orb of the sun. What do you do? How do you feel?
3. According to the Rabbis in the *midrash*, why did Adam outshine the sun?

3. Beauty is illusory and that is why Adam fell from grace. How did his vanity cause this fall from grace?

### **Investigating Indirect Midrashic Analogy (15 minutes)**

*Midrash* is also characterized by Rabbis wrestling with the meaning of text and 'filling in the gaps'. They would search the texts centering on ideas, values, or the story and characters of the Torah.

Using the same verse in Genesis 2:15-17, the Rabbis thought that there were some things missing that needed to be said.

#### **Questions: (For large group discussion)**

1. What happened in the Garden of Eden?
2. How did it all transpire?

### **Explaining the Midrash (15 minutes)**

Now we will look at how the Rabbis interpreted another verse that directly related to the events here in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:13 –

Behold, God's work! Who can straighten what he has twisted? (Eccl 7:13) When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him, 'Behold My works, how beautiful and commendable they are! All that I have created, for your sake I created it. Pay heed that you do not corrupt and destroy My universe; for if you corrupt it there is no one to repair it after you. Not only that, but you will cause death to befall that righteous man [Moses].'

To what may our teacher Moses be likened? To a pregnant woman shut up in a prison. She gave birth there to a son, reared him there and died there. After a while the king passed by the entrance of the prison, and as he passed the son began to cry, 'My lord king, here was I born and here I grew up. For what sin I am kept here I do not know.' He answered, 'For your mother's sin.' So was it with Moses, as it is written, The Lord God said: Behold, the

man is become as one of us (Gen. 3:22), and it is written, Behold, your days approach that you must die (Deut. 31:14).<sup>6</sup>

The teacher will lead a large group discussion of the following questions:

**Question 1:** According to the Rabbis, what happened as a result of Adam giving in to vanity? (Before this Death was not an issue, and now because of Adam, our great leader, Moses, would have to die.)

**Question 2:** According to the Rabbis, what does this text inform us about God's creation? How is this drawn from the text?

### **Scavenger Hunt or the Rav Kook Mystery Hunt in *Spirit in Nature* (25 minutes)**

This activity is focused on the search for the problem in *midrash* through the environment. Break the students down into groups of three and hand out a clean list of things they are to find; a list of ten things that affect the natural world positively; a list of ten things that affect the natural world negatively; 5 different trash items; 5 different natural items that can be removed without affecting the area negatively. When the students return to class, have each member of the group pick an item from both the positive and negative lists and tell its story. (Ask for reactions from other students. Teacher should process this activity with an eye toward identifying particular problems, as well as those parts of the natural world that do not need our help. Wrap up of this discussion should focus on how *midrash* must first identify a particular problem and then work out a resolution.)

### **Conclusion**

*Midrash* can be experienced in many different ways. The students started creating their own *midrashim* from items found in the natural world. These items are more than just discarded

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<sup>6</sup> Translation from *The Soncino Midrash*, Ecclesiastes.

trash, or detritus, they have a history that is virtually unknown. It was up to each individual student as a midrashic commentator to fill in that gap. That is what the Rabbis were doing when commenting on the Bible, they were filling in the gaps that were not readily apparent in the text.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### **Direct and Personal Analogies**

**Directions:** Work as a group to answer the following questions. Each small group should select a "reporter" who will share their answers with the entire class.

#### **Direct Analogies**

1. How is a beaver chewing on a log like a typewriter?
2. A steam roller is like what animal? (First, ask several students to explain their answers, then ask one student for the animal and another student to explain why the first student chose that animal.)
3. A blade of grass is like \_\_\_\_\_ because.
4. A snow-topped mountain is like \_\_\_\_\_. (Again ask several students to explain their classmate's choices of answer.)
5. What fruit is like you? Why?

Now let's try some strange ones:

6. Which is louder, a smile or a frown? Why?
7. Which is heavier, a mountain or an ocean? Why?
8. What color is sleep? Why do you see it as that color?
9. Which is softer, a whisper or a kitten's fur?
10. Which is angrier, the kitchen or the living room? Why?

#### **Personal Analogies**

Now I want you to pretend that you are different things:

1. You're ice cream! Do you ever get used to your body temperature? When you are in danger? If you are left in the hot sun, how does your body feel? How do you feel about being made into so many different flavors?
2. Be a fish. How do you feel? What do you do?
3. You're a balloon. What do you feel like?
4. Imagine that you are a spider, trying to spin a web on a rainy, stormy day. Be the thing! As the spider, what does the storm do to you, and how do you feel about it?
5. Imagine that you are a boomerang. An Australian savage throws you at a kangaroo. He wants it for supper. He snaps his powerful wrist and hurls you into

the air. Be the thing. What do you do and how do you feel?

6. Imagine you are a metal spring. What does it feel like? Would you rather be squashed or stretched?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Explaining the *Midrash*

Now we will look at how the Rabbis interpreted another verse:

*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:13 –

Behold, God's work! Who can straighten what he has twisted? (Eccl 7:13) When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him, 'Behold My works, how beautiful and commendable they are! All that I have created, for your sake I created it. Pay heed that you do not corrupt and destroy My universe; for if you corrupt it there is no one to repair it after you. Not only that, but you will cause death to befall that righteous man [Moses].'

To what may our teacher Moses be likened? To a pregnant woman shut up in a prison. She gave birth there to a son, reared him there and died there. After a while the king passed by the entrance of the prison, and as he passed the son began to cry, 'My lord king, here was I born and here I grew up. For what sin I am kept here I do not know.' He answered, 'For your mother's sin.' So was it with Moses, as it is written, The Lord God said: Behold, the man is become as one of us (Gen. 3:22), and it is written, Behold, your days approach that you must die (Deut. 31:14).<sup>7</sup>

Question 1: According to the Rabbis, what happened as a result of Adam giving into vanity? (Before this Death was not an issue, and now because of Adam, our great leader, Moses, would have to die.)

Question 2: According to the Rabbis, what does this text inform us about God's creation? How is this drawn from the text?

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<sup>7</sup> Translation from *The Soncino Midrash*, Ecclesiastes.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### **Natural World Scavenger Hunt**

**Directions:** As you find items which fit the following criteria record them on the lists provided in the appropriate section.

#### **Things That Affect the Natural World Positively**

- |    |     |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6.  |
| 2. | 7.  |
| 3. | 8.  |
| 4. | 9.  |
| 5. | 10. |

#### **Things That Affect the Natural World Negatively**

- |    |     |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6.  |
| 2. | 7.  |
| 3. | 8.  |
| 4. | 9.  |
| 5. | 10. |



Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Items That Would Be Considered Trash**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**Natural Items That Can be Removed Without Affecting The Area Negatively**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

### **Lesson 3**

#### **An In-Depth Understanding of Midrashic Literature and its Connections to the Environment**

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

**Definitions:**

Genre – a category of music, art, literature, etc.

**Objective(s):** At the completion of this lesson, students will be able to do the following -

1. Provide an understanding of the different genres of midrashic literature, while gaining an understanding of the underlying reasoning behind these approaches and developing an ability to distinguish between them.
2. Introduce the different modes of *midrash*: exegetical, homiletic, and narrative.
3. Describe each mode and show an example of the first two, and how particular books are divided.
4. Explain that *midrash* is further divided into *halakha* and *aggadah*. Describe the function and place of each.
5. Be able to identify and explain rhetorical style.
6. Begin to recognize similarities between *midrash* and the environment.

**Activities: (45 minutes)**

**Set Induction: (Handouts)**

Ask students to get in small groups and to brainstorm a list of different genres of music. Teacher will bring in clips of music from many different genres and play short pieces from them, asking the students to identify what type of music it is. (Different genres of music are country, rap, rock, jazz, classical, new age, R&B, heavy metal, etc.) Ask them what aspects of the

particular clips identified them as one individual genre over another. Explain that music comes in many different forms but is still music (at least to someone). Continue that *midrash* also comes in a few different forms and that just as there are key components in music that identify a particular category, so too is this applicable with *midrash*.

### **Literary Definitions**

Students will become familiar with ways in which to approach literature like fiction and non-fiction, prose and poetry, biography, and documentary, narrative in the first, second or third person, sermon or analysis.

The teacher will ask the students to name these different forms and define how they differ. Definitions and examples will be provided in a handout.

Students will work in groups to figure out if certain texts meet the criteria of whether the material is exegetical, homiletical, or narrative. Each group will be given a certain text and figure out whether it conforms to certain criteria. When they are finished they will present their findings to the whole group.

(Teacher should note that some particular characteristics to an exegetical text are a focus on a particular word or phrase and other places where same word or phrase appears. Exegesis is used to interpret a verse when there is something unclear, especially when it concerns the use of certain words or phrases in unusual contexts. Some characteristics of a homiletical text will include a focus on an idea or subject instead of a particular word or phrase. A homily will often moralize, espousing a particular right course of action that should be followed. A narrative text tells a story based on the text. These are generally much longer than an exegetical or homiletical text.)

The three texts are:

**Exegetical Text**

***Genesis Rabbah 13:2***

On the verse Genesis 2:5

וְכָל־שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם  
יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם אֵין  
לְעִבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה:

**Genesis 2:5** when no tree (*siah*) of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil,

*The midrash questions the use of the Hebrew word **siah** and notes that it correlates to another meaning: to converse.*

**The Midrash Says:**

"No *siah* (tree) of the field, etc." All the trees, as it were, conversed (*masihim*) with each other; all the trees, as it were, conversed with mankind; all the trees were created for man's companionship. A man once gathered in the fruits of his vineyard and spent the night in it; then the wind blew and caused him hurt. All the conversation of mankind concerns the earth: 'Has the earth produced, or has the earth not produced?' And all mankind's prayers (hear *siho* is understood as prayer, as translated in Psalm 102:1) concern the earth: 'Lord! May the earth yield [fruit]'; or 'Lord, may the earth be successful!' All the prayers of Israel, however, are for the Temple: 'Lord, may the Temple be rebuilt!' and 'When will the Temple be rebuilt?'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *The Soncino Midrash in Judaic Classics Library II*

## **Homiletical Text**

### ***Leviticus Rabbah 22:1***

(What does it mean when Scripture says that,)

**Lev 17:3-4:** "If anyone from the House of Israel were to kill an ox, lamb or goat, in or outside the camp and doesn't bring it to the tent of meeting as an offering to God, he would be guilty of shedding blood. That man shall be **cut off** from his people."<sup>9</sup>

When it is written that:

**Ecclesiastes 5:8-9:** "The abundance of the earth is for everyone, even the king is a servant of the field. One who loves money will never have his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth his fill of income. That too is futile."

This verse bears on the one in Leviticus. How so? Even the king, who is subject to the field, must make an offering to God when slaughtering an animal. Otherwise, even he, the king, would be cut off from his people. R. Judah and R. Nehemiah have different interpretations of this verse. R. Judah explains that even things that seem superfluous in the world are also included among the things that are beneficial to the world, like bast for making sails or twigs for hedging gardens.

So, "a king who is servant to the field", even though he is a king and reigns from one end of the world to another, is still a "servant of the field". If the earth does not produce food, the king can accomplish nothing, for if the earth does not produce, he is of no use whatsoever.

Similarly, "one who loves money will never have his fill of money" This means that someone who loves money will not be satisfied with having money, nor someone who loves abundance with increase. This too is vanity. For anyone who is covetous and greedy for money but has not the fruit of the land, what benefit is he?

Now "the king" is comparable to one who is a great scholar in Mishnah and Talmud and this learning may be compared to money. R. Eleazar son of R. Abba in the name of R. Aha taught that if someone has learned but not taught others, there can be no greater vanity than this.

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<sup>9</sup> JPS Tanakh, 1985.

## **Homiletical Text**

### ***Leviticus Rabbah 4:6***

The biblical text referenced in this *midrash* is the following:

**Leviticus 4:2** Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a person unwittingly incurs guilt in regard to any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does one of them –

#### **The *midrash* says:**

Hezekiah taught: It is said, Israel is a scattered sheep (Jer. 50:17). Why are Israel likened to a sheep? Just as with a lamb, when it is hurt on the head or on any other limb, all its limbs feel it, even so is it with Israel: if [only one] of them sins, all of them feel it. It is said, should one man sin, and You be angry with the entire congregation? (Num. 16:22). R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: This may be compared to the case of men on a ship, one of whom took a borer and began boring beneath his own place. His fellow travelers said to him: 'What are you doing?' Said he to them: 'What does that matter to you, am I not boring under my own place?' Said they: 'Because the water will come up and flood the ship for us all.' Even so did Job say, And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself (Job 19:4), and his friends said, He adds transgression unto his sin, he extends it among us.' [They said to him:] 'You extend your sins among us.' R. El'asa said: A certain heathen asked R. Joshua b. Karha: 'In your Law it is written, It is proper to incline after the many (Ex. 33:2). We are more numerous than you, why then do you not become like us in respect of idolatry?' Said R. Joshua b. Karha to him: 'Have you children?' 'You have reminded me of my trouble,' said the Gentile. 'Why?' asked the former. 'I have many children. When they sit at my table, one blasphemes the god of the other, and they do not rise from the table before they have cracked each other's skulls.' Said he to him: 'And do you bring about agreement among your children?' 'No,' answered the other. 'Well then' said he, 'before you make us agree with you, go and bring about agreement among your children.' Being thus rebuffed he [the heathen] went away. After he had gone, his [i.e. R. Joshua b. Karha's] disciples said to him: 'Rabbi, him you pushed away with a broken reed; but what answer do you give us?' Said he to them: 'In the case of Esau's six souls are mentioned by Scripture, and yet the word used of them in Scripture is "souls", in the plural, as it is written, And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the souls of his house, etc. (Gen. 36:4). Of Jacob, on the other hand, there were seventy souls, and yet the word used of them in Scripture is "soul", as it is written, And all the *nefesh* [sing., soul] that came out of the loins of Jacob, etc. (Ex. 1:5). The reason is that in the case of Esau who worshipped many deities the word used by Scripture is

"souls" in the plural, but in the case of Jacob who worshipped one God, the word used by Scripture is "soul", in the singular, [viz.] "And all the *nefesh* [soul, sing.], etc."<sup>10</sup>

**Set Induction: (5 minutes)**

The teacher will lead a large group discussion on the environment's many different settings (snow, tropics, mountain, valley, ocean, forest, desert, etc. Not only can this be associated with different places, it can also be associated with different weather conditions.) So, too, are there different ways for us to encounter those environments. How? (Clothed, bathing suit, sandals, inside a house, through a car window, also, with one's five senses and one's attitude: happy, sad, frustrated, peaceful, etc.) This discussion should be used to peak students' interest in awareness of one's environment and as an attention-getting device to transition into the actual nature walk that follows. (This type of discussion is meant to broaden the student's understanding of the different types of environments and how we as human beings have adapted to them.)

**Blindfold Walk – Meet Your Environment (40 minutes)**

**Activity:**

When leading students on a blindfolded nature walk, the teacher should discuss safety concerns ahead of time. Also, depending on the comfort level of both the teacher and the students, this activity may be modified to meet varying comfort levels. (For example, instead of blindfolds, students could close their eyes or sit periodically along the trail and complete the activity blindfolded.) However, the purpose of a blindfolded nature walk is not simply to focus on the sounds or smells of the environment. The true purpose is to become acclimated and able to maneuver oneself in our own environment relying comfortably on senses other than vision.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Soncino Midrash* in Judaic Classics Library II

To maintain the integrity of this activity this purpose should be endorsed even if the activity is modified.

Students should be blindfolded and taken for a walk down a trail. On the first walk down they should pay attention to the different sounds. On the walk back, have them pay attention to all the different smells. Then, remove the blindfolds and repeat the nature walk for a third time down the same trail. Ask them about the things they saw and which of these things are living. Ask them whether they saw everything they had heard and smelled. Have students record their responses on the handout provided. The teacher will then lead a large group discussion on their findings, preferably in an outdoor location.

### **Conclusion**

There are many different ways in which we encounter both the living world and the written word. By being open to the varied ways of both, our lives will be richer for it. In addition, our understanding of the environment and its relationship to Judaism will be broadened and our ability to apply these precepts to our daily lives will be heightened.

### **Homework**

Bring in three items that were going to be thrown away at home.



## Glossary of Midrashic Literature

### **Midrash –**

A Jewish story that “explains, clarifies, or elaborates on an event or passage in the Bible.” *Derash*, the root word, means “‘to search out,’ ‘to expound,’ or ‘to examine.’” *Midrash* and Talmud are considered Oral Law, whereas the Bible is considered Written Law. The midrashic stories were written during the time of the Talmud as well as in the post-Talmudic period which include works such as *Midrash Rabbah* and *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*.<sup>11</sup>

### **Homiletic Midrash –**

These are written in the form of a literary homily which sermonizes in written form about an idea or subject. This form of literature “mainly aims to educate the public toward moral and religious behavior in everyday life and during times of crisis.”<sup>12</sup> It is typified by a devotional commentary on individual verses or on the main theme of the weekly reading from the Torah or Prophets.<sup>13</sup> Books that fall under this category are the *Leviticus Rabbah* and *Midrash Tanhuma*.

### **Exegetical Midrash –**

This is the science of biblical interpretation. This involves very particular rules of interpreting texts, including word repetition, offering simple explanations of words and sentences... short or elaborate... interpretations... often only loosely tied to the text.<sup>14</sup> It is typified by a commentary on the biblical text verse by verse and often word by word.<sup>15</sup>

### **Narrative Midrash –**

This is *midrash* in the narrative form. The narratives tell a story that is based on an interpretation of the text. One book that falls under this category is *Tanna devei Eliyahu*.

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Diamond Godin, *A Child's Book of Midrash* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc. 1990).

<sup>12</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “Homiletical Literature” CD-ROM.

<sup>13</sup> Hermann Strack and Gunther Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Fortress Press, 1992), 240.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 240.

**Halakhic *Midrash* –**

This is an exegetical *midrash* on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers or Deuteronomy. It is usually legal in form and derives its authority from the Bible. For example, *Sifra*, *Sifre*, and the *Mekhilta*.

**Aggadic *Midrash* –**

These are often sermonic, interpretive texts that are NOT legalistic, like its counterpart halakhic *midrash*.

## Text #1

**Leviticus Rabbah 22:1**

(What does it mean when Scripture says that,)

**Lev 17:3-4:** "If anyone from the House of Israel were to kill an ox, lamb or goat, in or outside the camp and doesn't bring it to the tent of meeting as an offering to God, he would be guilty of shedding blood. That man shall be **cut off** from his people."<sup>16</sup>

When it is written that;

**Ecclesiastes 5:8-9:** "The abundance of the earth is for everyone, even the king is a servant of the field. One who loves money will never have his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth his fill of income. That too is futile."

This verse bears on the one in Leviticus. How so? Even the king, who is subject to the field, must make an offering to God when slaughtering an animal. Otherwise, even he, the king, would be cut off from his people. R. Judah and R. Nehemiah have different interpretations of this verse. R. Judah explains that even things that seem superfluous in the world are also included among the things that are beneficial to the world, like bast for making sails or twigs for hedging gardens.

So, "a king who is servant to the field", even though he is a king and reigns from one end of the world to another, is still a "servant of the field". If the earth does not produce food, the king can accomplish nothing, for if the earth does not produce, he is of no use whatsoever.

Similarly, "one who loves money will never have his fill of money" This means that someone who loves money will not be satisfied with having money, nor someone who loves abundance with increase. This too is vanity. For anyone who is covetous and greedy for money but has not the fruit of the land, what benefit is he?

Now "the king" is comparable to one who is a great scholar in Mishnah and Talmud and this learning may be compared to money. R. Eleazar son of R. Abba in the name of R. Aha taught that if someone has learned but not taught others, there can be no greater vanity than this.

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<sup>16</sup> JPS Tanakh, 1985.

## Text #2

**Genesis Rabbah 13:2**

On the verse Genesis 2:5

וְכָל־שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם  
 יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם אֵין  
 לְעַבֵּד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה:

**Genesis 2:5** when no tree (*siah*) of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil,

*The midrash questions the use of the Hebrew word siah and notes that it correlates to another meaning, to converse.*

"No *siah* (tree) of the field, etc." All the trees, as it were, conversed (*masihim*) with each other; all the trees, as it were, conversed with mankind; all the trees were created for man's companionship. A man once gathered in the fruits of his vineyard and spent the night in it; then the wind blew and caused him hurt. All the conversation of mankind concerns the earth: 'Has the earth produced, or has the earth not produced?' And all mankind's prayers (hear *siho* is understood as prayer, as translated in Psalm 102:1) concern the earth: 'Lord! May the earth yield [fruit]'; or 'Lord, may the earth be successful!' All the prayers of Israel, however, are for the Temple: 'Lord, may the Temple be rebuilt!' and 'When will the Temple be rebuilt?'

## Text #3

**Leviticus Rabbah 4:6**

The biblical text referenced in this *midrash* is the following:

**Leviticus 4:2** Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a person unwittingly incurs guilt in regard to any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does one of them –

**The Midrash Says:**

Hezekiah taught: It is said, Israel is a scattered sheep (Jer. 50:17). Why are Israel likened to a sheep? Just as with a lamb, when it is hurt on the head or on any other limb, all its limbs feel it, even so is it with Israel: if [only one] of them sins, all of them feel it. It is said, should one man sin, and You be angry with the entire congregation? (Num. 16:22). R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: This may be compared to the case of men on a ship, one of whom took a borer and began boring beneath his own place. His fellow travelers said to him: 'What are you doing?' Said he to them: 'What does that matter to you, am I not boring under my own place?' Said they: 'Because the water will come up and flood the ship for us all.' Even so did Job say, And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself (Job 19:4), and his friends said, He adds transgression unto his sin, he extends it among us.' [They said to him:] 'You extend your sins among us.' R. El'asa said: A certain heathen asked R. Joshua b. Karha: 'In your Law it is written, It is proper to incline after the many (Ex. 33:2). We are more numerous than you, why then do you not become like us in respect of idolatry?' Said R. Joshua b. Karha to him: 'Have you children?' 'You have reminded me of my trouble,' said the Gentile. 'Why?' asked the former. 'I have many children. When they sit at my table, one blasphemes the god of the other, and they do not rise from the table before they have cracked each other's skulls.' Said he to him: 'And do you bring about agreement among your children?' 'No,' answered the other. 'Well then' said he, 'before you make us agree with you, go and bring about agreement among your children.' Being thus rebuffed he [the heathen] went away. After he had gone, his [i.e. R. Joshua b. Karha's] disciples said to him: 'Rabbi, him you pushed away with a broken reed; but what answer do you give us?' Said he to them: 'In the case of Esau's six souls are mentioned by Scripture, and yet the word used of them in Scripture is "souls", in the plural, as it is written, And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the souls of his house, etc. (Gen. 36:4). Of Jacob, on the other hand, there were seventy souls, and yet the word used of them in Scripture is "soul", as it is written, And all the *nefesh* [sing., soul] that came out of the loins of Jacob, etc. (Ex. 1:5). The

reason is that in the case of Esau who worshipped many deities the word used by Scripture is "souls" in the plural, but in the case of Jacob who worshipped one God, the word used by Scripture is "soul", in the singular, [viz.] "And all the *nefesh* [soul, sing.], etc."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *The Soncino Midrash in Judaic Classics Library II*

Name\_\_\_\_\_

**Guiding Questions to Determine Whether a Particular Text is:**

**Exegetical, Homiletical, or Narrative**

**The following questions should be answered using the glossary of midrashic terminology.**

**Questions:**

- 1) What is exegesis (in your own words)?**
- 2) What characteristics make a text an exegetical text?**
- 3) What is a homily (in your own words)?**
- 4) What characteristics make a text a homiletical text?**
- 5) What is a narrative?**
- 6) What characteristics make a text a narrative text?**
- 7) Is your group's text exegetical, homiletical, or narrative? Why?**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### **A Lesson in Genres**

**Directions:** A **Genre** is a category. It can be a category of music, art, or literature. For the purpose of this activity, you will be focusing on genres in music.

1. With a partner, brainstorm a list of all the different genres of music you can think of. Record your ideas in the space below.

2. Listen to the music clips and as they are played try to identify which genre of music you think they belong to. Record your answers in the space below. As you listen to the music clips, think about what particular aspects of the music identifies it as one particular genre over another.

Music Clip #1

Music Clip #2

Music Clip #3

Music Clip #4

Music Clip #5

Music Clip #6



## **Lesson 4**

### ***Tannaitic Midrash: Its Message and the Implication of "Do Not Destroy"***

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

**Objective(s):**

1. Students will learn the importance of "Do Not Destroy" in relation to both the environment and Judaism
2. Students will be able to identify tannaitic *halakhic midrash*.
3. Students will complete a text study of tannaitic halakhic *midrash* and gain a better understanding of interpretation of such text.
4. Students will learn how to use the *hevruta* method of study groups in a productive manner.
5. Students will identify and research a modern-day environmental problem.

**Set Induction: (5 minutes)**

Present trash (homework) in pairs and have students brainstorm ways in which the trash could have been used better and ways in which it still might be used effectively.

**Activity: *Hevruta*-Study Groups (40 minutes)**

Students will be assigned *hevruta*-study groups in which they will work together to study the verse and bring their findings back to the main group. Students will work in pairs or threes to read the text below and answer some guiding questions. Afterwards the groups will come back and relay their answers back to the main group.

**Text:** *Sifrei Deuteronomy* #20 (Handout – with guiding questions)

**Deuteronomy 20:19-20**

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time (lit. many days) in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them.

You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? <sup>20</sup> Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.<sup>18</sup>

“To war against it to capture it” and not to return. “Do not destroy the trees wielding the ax against them” **I know only (from the preceding verse that) an ax (may not be used). From where (do I learn that) diverting water from its proper course also (pertains)? Scripture states, “do not destroy the tree” in any manner.**

**Another opinion,** “When in your siege against a city (for *many days*)”, this indicates that one seeks peace for two or three days before one makes war, and thus it states (in Scripture – 2 Samuel 1:1) “After the death of Saul, David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.” One does not besiege a city at the beginning of Shabbat, rather (one should do so) three days prior to Shabbat. If one surrounds it and it happens to be Shabbat, one does not turn back, interrupting the war. This is one of the three things that is interpreted by the Heavenly Father... a ship only sets sail on the Great Sea three days prior to Shabbat. This was said regarding instances of long journeys but in the case of a short journey, they would set sail for it. **Thus, “from it you may eat,” is a positive commandment. “You must not cut it down” is a negative commandment.**

#### **Brainstorming Environmental Issues For a Final Project (45 minutes) (handout)**

##### **Internet use and Research Overview:**

In an effort to facilitate students’ use of the internet in their research for the final environmental project, the classroom teacher should first refer to Hebrew school computer use policy. An internet and computer use agreement is attached at the end of this lesson, in the event

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<sup>18</sup> JPS Tanakh, 1985.

that there is not policy in place. In addition, please refer to the handouts titled, "Resources for Environmental Action," for written resources to complement internet research. Finally, the handout, "Glossary of General Environmental Terms," found in the introduction, may be given to students to assist in the research of environmental issues.

Students will independently brainstorm a written list of potential environmental issues (locally and / or nationally) for their final projects. Students should be encouraged to produce ideas that advocate for, help, or improve the environment. A round-robin sharing will follow with students each taking turns to share one idea aloud as a master list is created by the teacher. Sharing will continue until all individual ideas are heard. Students should be instructed to check off duplicate ideas during the sharing process.

#### **Topic Selection:**

The teacher should instruct students that there is a connection between Jewish law and modern environmental issues, in particular with air pollution, preservation of endangered species, and the management of natural resources. Close attention is paid "to the balance of nature and the needs of human progress."<sup>19</sup> Students should be encouraged to simultaneously keep these precepts in mind, while maintaining a broader focus on environmental issues as they select a topic. Ultimately, students need to select a topic with the following criteria in mind.

- 1) Is this topic of personal interest to me as a modern Jew?
- 2) Will I be able to successfully present this topic in a cohesive final project?
- 3) Will I be able to implement this topic both authentically and realistically?

#### **Implementation:**

The student and teacher are to work in partnership in this aspect of the final project.

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<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Goldman, *Foundation for Jewish Camping, Inc.* (A Complete Jewish Environmental Camping Curriculum).

Teacher will serve as mentor over the next five weeks, checking in with the students' progress on their environmental projects. Students will be reminded of established standards and guidelines. Teacher will guide the students in helping connect their research to a realistic means of implementation. Students should adhere to the following guidelines:

- 1) Implementation should be realistic and doable in the time allotted to complete the final project.
- 2) Students have the responsibility to keep records of how their final project is implemented and the results of implementation on the environment.
- 3) Students will follow the teacher's recommendations, with parent's permission, for established safety standards.

Students will then select a topic for their final projects and begin internet research on their topic. Research should be continued as homework for the next class.

### **Conclusion**

As students enter deeper into their research of modern environmental issues, the midrashic texts will both inform and guide this process. In particular, their research should be filtered through an understanding of "Do Not Destroy" in its direct implications for the environment and in light of the Jewish understanding both past and present. Students should ask themselves, "Does this topic and project fit with the midrashic understanding of the verse?" and "Is it a path to original *midrash* or the next logical step in the solution of an environmental problem?" Students will have the privilege and freedom to choose their own topic. However, they must also uphold the responsibility to select a topic which fits their new understanding of *midrash* and Judaism in general.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## **What is a *Hevruta*-Study Group?**

### **Background**

The word *hevruta* means "pairs." *Hevruta*-study groups are a traditional Judaic method of study where individuals come together with a partner to work on some type of literary analysis, typically Talmud. *Pirkei Avot* (1:6) says that "one should appoint themselves a teacher, and get a friend/ companion," and this "friend/companion" is typically identified as a study partner. The hope is that more may be achieved by working with a partner rather than by working in isolation.

### ***Hevruta*-Study Group Guidelines**

During the school year, you will continue to work in the same *hevruta*-study group to analyze and discuss various midrashic excerpts. As the year progresses, you will hopefully develop a relationship with your partner that allows a more comfortable ability to discuss the literature you are asked to review and, therefore, a more in depth analysis of that literature.

### ***Hevruta*-Study Group Expectations**

While you are working in your groups you should use the following ground rules:

1. Good listening skills.
2. Use your time wisely, focusing on the work to be done and keeping time limits in mind.
3. Start by reading the verse or text assigned to your group. You may decide with your partner if one person will read aloud or if you will read independently.
4. Next, discuss the verse or text with your partner and begin to make an analysis. Use the guiding questions to direct your study group's work.
5. Record your answers in writing and be prepared to share your ideas with the larger class group.

***Sifrei Deuteronomy #20 Text and Guiding Questions***

**Directions:** Read the following text and answer the guiding questions.

**Text:** *Sifrei Deuteronomy #20* (Handout – with guiding questions)

**Deuteronomy 20:19-20**

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time (lit. many days) in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? <sup>20</sup> Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.<sup>20</sup>

“To war against it to capture it” and not to return. “Do not destroy the trees wielding the ax against them” **I know only (from the preceding verse that) an ax (may not be used). From where (do I learn that) diverting water from its proper course also (pertains)? Scripture states, “do not destroy the tree” in any manner.**

**Another opinion,** “When in your siege against a city (for *many days*)”, this indicates that one seeks peace for two or three days before one makes war, and thus it states (in Scripture – 2 Samuel 1:1) “After the death of Saul, David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.” One does not besiege a city at the beginning of Shabbat, rather (one should do so) three days prior to Shabbat. If one surrounds it and it happens to be Shabbat, one does not turn back, interrupting the war. This is one of the three things that is interpreted by the Heavenly Father... a ship only sets sail on the Great Sea three days prior to Shabbat. This was said regarding instances of long journeys but in the case of a short journey, they would set sail for it. **Thus, “from it you may eat,” is a positive commandment. “You must not cut it down” is a negative commandment.**

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<sup>20</sup> JPS Tanakh, 1985.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### **Final Environmental Project**

**Topic Selection:** You have the privilege and freedom to choose your own topic. You have the responsibility to select a topic that you can handle effectively. Use the list generated in class to select a topic that is of interest to you. In addition, select a topic that will allow you to produce ideas that advocate for, help, or improve the environment. Finally, your topic should be in line with the Jewish concepts and teachings about environment. Students should ask themselves, "Does this project fit with the midrashic understanding of the verse?" and "Is it a path to original *midrash* or the next logical step in the solution of an environmental problem?"

**The Project:** Your project should include a written component, a visual component, and a component of environmental improvement that can actually be implemented. Your teacher will provide a timeline for completion of the various portions of research.

**Project Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Research:** Your research should begin on the internet. Please complete and bring to the next class the attached Internet Use Permission Form. Also, your teacher will provide a list of appropriate research sources available in your school library. As you enter deeper into your research of modern environmental issues you should do so under the guise of the implications of the midrashic text. In particular, your research should be filtered through the understanding of "Do Not Destroy" in its direct implications for the environment and in light of Jewish understanding.

### **Internet and Computer Use Agreement**

\_\_\_\_\_ Hebrew School is pleased to offer its students use of electronic information resources. Our purpose in providing this service is for the completion of your class final project on the environment and Judaism. All use of school technology must be in support of this goal and consistent with class expectations for research of your final project.

Use of the school technology network is a privilege, not a right. All users must agree to abide by all established rules and regulations. The classroom teacher or school administrator may deny, revoke, or suspend any individual's network privileges as a consequence for noncompliance.

Prior to gaining access to Internet and other computer uses, all students must have a signed Internet and Computer Use Agreement on file with their teacher and school administrator.

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### **Internet and Computer Use Agreement**

Please sign and return this form to your teacher.

I agree to abide by the rules and expectations for computer and Internet use as described in the Internet and Computer Use Agreement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature



Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Resources for Environmental Action

#### Books:

- 1) Earth Works Group, ed. *50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth and 50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save the Earth*. Kansas City, Andrews and McMeel Publishing, 1990.
- 2) Earth Works Group, *The Recyclers Handbook*. New York, Greenleaf Publishers, 1990.
- 3) Diane MacEachern. *Save Our Planet*. New York, Dell Publishing, 1990.
- 4) Global Tomorrow Coalition, ed. *Citizen's Guide to Sustainable Development*. Washington.
- 5) Global Tomorrow Coalition, ed. *Global Issues Education Set*. Washington.

#### Websites:

- 6) [www.epa.org](http://www.epa.org)
- 7) [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)

## **Lesson 5**

### **An Introduction to Homiletical *Midrash* Through the Importance of Trees**

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

#### **Definitions:**

Homiletical – of the nature of a homily, sermon, or discourse.

Literary homily – written sermon, usually moralizing or inspiring.

#### **Objective(s):**

1. Students will gain an understanding of homiletical *midrash*, literary homily and discourse, and be able to define these terms.
2. Students will develop an understanding of the importance of trees in the relationship between environmentalism and Judaism.

#### **Activities:**

**Meet The Trees** (Buber's text *I Contemplate a Tree* from his book *I and Thou*)<sup>21</sup>

**Length:** (45 min)

Prior to going out into the field to meet the trees, the teacher will read this excerpt from Martin Buber's, *I and Thou*. (See handout) Place students into pairs. One person is blindfolded and led by the other person to a tree. (This should be demonstrated before sending the students out on their own.) When the blindfolded people "meet" the trees, they should touch, smell, and become familiar with "their" tree so they will be able to distinguish it from other trees in the vicinity. Encourage hikers to spend at least two minutes at their tree. When they are ready, the guides lead the blindfolded people back to the starting place. The blindfolds are removed, and the people try to find their tree. Partners then switch roles. After all the hikers have found their

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<sup>21</sup>Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Walter Kaufman, trans., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 57.

trees, invite them to spend five minutes with their tree. During this time they can make a wish for their tree, or they can breathe with their tree, giving it the gift of carbon dioxide, which trees need, and breathing in the oxygen that trees give to us.<sup>22</sup> (handout)

**Questions:**

What are your feelings toward your tree?

What does your tree teach you about your life?

If trees are truly the torah of life, then what can we do to ensure the future of healthy forests?

***Hevruta-Study Groups – The Essence of Trees (45 minutes)***

Teacher should refer to Lesson 4 Handout on *hevruta*-study group. The teacher will distribute a handout with guiding questions for the following passages:

***Leviticus Rabbah 25:3***

“And when you shall come into the land, and shall plant all manner of trees for food...” Lev. 19.23

R. Judah b. Simon began his discourse by quoting “After the Lord your God shall you walk. “ (Deut 13.5) But can a man of flesh and blood possibly ‘walk after’ the Holy One, blessed be He, the One of whom it is written “Your way was in the sea and Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known” (Ps. 77.20). And yet you say, “After the Lord shall you walk... and unto Him shall you cleave.” (Deut. 13.5)

But can flesh and blood go up into heaven to ‘cleave’ to the *Shekhinah*, the One of whom it is written, “For the Lord your God is a devouring fire (Deut. 4.24) and of whom it is written “His throne was fiery flames” (Dan 7.9), and of whom it is written “A fiery stream came forth from before Him” (Dan. 7.10)? And you still say “Unto Him shall you cleave!”

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<sup>22</sup> Matt Biers-Ariel, *Spirit in Nature* (Behrman House, 2000), 43-44.

But in fact the Holy One, blessed be He, from the beginning of the creation of the world, was occupied before all else with planting, thus it is written "And the Lord God planted a garden at first in Eden" (Gen. 2.8), and so you shall also – when you first enter the land you should occupy yourselves first with nothing else but planting. Thus it is written, "And when you shall come into the land, you shall plant all manner of trees...."

Students will be assigned *hevruta*-study groups in which they will work together to study the verse and bring their findings back to the main group.

### **Conclusion**

This *midrash* and this activity are prime examples of how important trees were to the Rabbis and how they have remained important today. Through this lesson, students should gain an understanding of ways we can ensure that trees remain an important part of our religious-national ethos. (Much like the JNF forests in Israel!)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

*I and Thou*<sup>23</sup>  
By Martin Buber

I can contemplate a tree.

I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green traqversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground.

I can feel it as a movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with the earth and air, and the growing itself in its darkness.

I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life.

I can recognize it only as an expression of the law – those laws according to which a constant opposition of forces is continually adjusted, or those laws according to which the elements mix and separate.

I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers and eternalize it.

Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.

But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and three ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me.

This does not require me to forgo any of the modes contemplation. There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and instance, law and number included and inseparably fused.

What ever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its conversation with the stars – all this in its entirety.

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Walter Kaufman, trans., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 57.

### ***Hevruta-Study Groups – The Essence of Trees***

**Directions:** Read the following passages and answer the study group questions with your partner. Prepare written answers to the questions and be ready to share your ideas with the entire class.

#### ***Leviticus Rabbah 25:3***

“And when you shall come into the land, and shall plant all manner of trees for food...”  
(Leviticus 19.23)

R. Judah b. Simon began his discourse by quoting “After the Lord your God shall you walk. “ (Deut 13.5) But can a man of flesh and blood possibly ‘walk after’ the Holy One, blessed be He, the One of whom it is written “Your way was in the sea and Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known” (Ps. 77.20). And yet you say, “After the Lord shall you walk... and unto Him shall you cleave.” (Deut. 13.5)

But can flesh and blood go up into heaven to ‘cleave’ to the *Shekhinah*, the One of whom it is written, “For the Lord your God is a devouring fire (Deut. 4.24) and of whom it is written “His throne was fiery flames” (Dan 7.9), and of whom it is written “A fiery stream came forth from before Him” (Dan. 7.10)? And you still say “Unto Him shall you cleave!”

But in fact the Holy One, blessed be He, from the beginning of the creation of the world, was occupied before all else with planting, thus it is written “And the Lord God planted a garden at first in Eden” (Gen. 2.8), and so you shall also – when you first enter the land you should occupy yourselves first with nothing else but planting. Thus it is written, “And when you shall come into the land, you shall plant all manner of trees....”

#### **Questions:**

1. How were trees important to the Rabbis and how have they remained important to Jews today?
2. How can we ensure that trees remain an important part of our religio-national ethos?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Meet the Trees

**Directions:** Students will be placed into pairs. One person is blindfolded and led by the other person to a tree. When the blindfolded people “meet” the trees, they should touch, smell, and become familiar with “their” tree so they will be able to distinguish it from other trees in the vicinity. Spend at least two minutes with your tree. When you are ready, your guide will lead the blindfolded people back to the starting place. The blindfolds are removed, and the people try to find their tree. Partners then switch roles. After all the students have found their trees, you will be invited to spend five minutes with your tree. During this time you can make a wish for your tree, or you can breathe with the tree, giving it the gift of carbon dioxide, which trees need, and breathing in the oxygen that trees give to us.<sup>24</sup>

#### Questions:

1. What are your feelings toward your tree?
2. What does your tree teach you about your life?
3. If trees are truly the torah of life, then what can we do to ensure the future of healthy forests?

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<sup>24</sup> Matt Biers-Ariel, *Spirit in Nature* (Behrman House, 2000.) 43-4.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Meet the Trees

**Directions:** Students will be placed into pairs. One person is blindfolded and led by the other person to a tree. When the blindfolded people “meet” the trees, they should touch, smell, and become familiar with “their” tree so they will be able to distinguish it from other trees in the vicinity. Spend at least two minutes with your tree. When you are ready, your guide will lead the blindfolded people back to the starting place. The blindfolds are removed, and the people try to find their tree. Partners then switch roles. After all the students have found their trees, you will be invited to spend five minutes with your tree. During this time you can make a wish for your tree, or you can breathe with the tree, giving it the gift of carbon dioxide, which trees need, and breathing in the oxygen that trees give to us.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Matt Biers-Ariel, *Spirit in Nature* (Behrman House, 2000.) 43-4.



## **Lesson 6**

### **An Introduction to Exegetical *Midrash* Through a Jewish Understanding of our Relationship with Animals**

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

**Objective(s):**

1. Students will learn about exegetical *midrash*.
2. Students will be able to describe and analyze Judaism's idea of compassion for animals.

**Activities:**

**Oh Deer!** by Project Wild in Gabriel Goldman's *Foundation for Jewish Camping, Inc.* (45 minutes)

**Oh Deer! -- Teacher's Guide**

From Project Wild

**Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe food, water, and shelter as three essential components of habitat.
2. Describe the importance of good habitat for animals.
3. Define "limiting factors" and give examples.
4. Recognize that some fluctuations in wildlife populations are natural as ecological systems undergo a constant change.

During this activity, students become "deer" and components of habitat which will result in a reflection of how these components interact in a real life situation.

**Materials:**

1. An indoor or outdoor area large enough for students to run safely.
2. A flip chart and markers.

**Procedure:**

1. Handout "Oh Deer!" Student Guide and give students time to read the handout to themselves and ask questions.
2. Complete the "Oh Deer!" activity as described in the Activity Guide.

***Hevruta-study: (45 minutes)******Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah 6:1***

Teacher should refer to Lesson 4 Handout on *hevruta*-study group. Students will receive handout with guiding questions.

**Deuteronomy 22:6-7**

If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, either in a tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. <sup>7</sup> Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.

Why is it a law (*halakha*) to circumcise an infant who has been born without a foreskin? In order that blood may be drawn from the infant showing enduring devotion to the Covenant of Abraham. How did the sages determine this? In the Torah it is written, "they must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting Covenant." (Gen 17:13) In another opinion, the expression "they must be circumcised" in Hebrew is written using the same word twice in two different ways, accentuating a double emphatic. This repetition of the word implies two operative parts to the circumcision process; circumcision and uncovering. Circumcision is required of every male on the eighth day. However, when the male is born without a foreskin, he too is still obligated to be circumcised by uncovering, so that he may still be considered a part of the Covenant of Abraham, and so that no one might question his status as a member of the House of Israel.

Now why is it commanded that an infant be circumcised on the eighth day? Because God had compassion upon him in delaying the circumcision until he should have gained strength. And just as God shows mercy to man, so too does God show mercy to cattle. How do we know this? In Leviticus 22:27 it is written, "When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be

acceptable as an offering by fire to the LORD.” Moreover, it says in the following verse, “However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young.” Therefore, in the same way that God had compassion upon the cattle, so too was God filled with mercy for the birds as it is said, “If along the road, you chance upon a bird’s nest... Let the mother go and take only the young.”

Students will work in *hevruta*-study groups to discuss this passage and then present their findings to the large group.

### **Conclusion**

The “Oh Deer!” activity highlights a relevant point: “nature is never in ‘balance’ but is constantly changing.” The interconnectedness of animals and the environment go hand in hand with the students’ understanding of an exegetical *midrash* brought forth in this lesson. Furthermore, the lesson elaborates how Judaism extols compassion for animals.

**"Oh Deer!" – Student Guide****Background**

A variety of factors affects the ability of wildlife to successfully reproduce and maintain their population over time. Disease, predator/prey relationships, varying impacts of weather conditions from season to season, accidents, environmental pollution, and habitat destruction and degradation are among these factors. Some naturally, as well as culturally, induced limiting factors serve to prevent wildlife populations from reproducing in numbers greater than their habitat can support. An excess of such limiting factors, however, leads to threatening, endangering, and eliminating whole species of animals. The most fundamental of life's necessities for any animal are food, water, shelter, and space in a suitable arrangement. Without these essential components, animals could not survive.

Through this activity students will learn that:

1. good habitat is the key to wildlife survival,
2. a population will continue to increase in size until some limiting factors are imposed,
3. limiting factors contribute to fluctuations in wildlife populations,
4. nature is never in "balance" but is constantly changing.

Wildlife populations are not static. They continuously fluctuate in response to a variety of species, although one factor may affect many species. Natural limiting factors, of those modeled are factors in natural systems, tend to maintain populations of species at levels with predictable ranges. This kind of "balance in nature" is not static but is more like a teeter-totter than a balance. Some species cycle or fluctuate annually. Quail, for example, may start with a population of 100 pairs in early spring; grow to a population of 1200 birds by late spring; and decline slowly to a winter population of 100 pairs again. The cycle appears to be almost totally controlled by the habitat components of food, water, shelter, and space, which are also limiting factors in most settings.

This activity is intended to be a simple but powerful way for students to grasp some basic concepts:

- ✓ that everything in natural systems is interrelated,
- ✓ that populations of organisms are continuously affected by elements of their environment, and

- ✓ populations of animals do not stay the same static number every year after year in their environment, but rather are continually changing in the process of maintaining a dynamic equilibria in natural systems.

The major purpose of this activity is for students to understand the importance of suitable habitat as well as factors that may affect wildlife populations in constantly changing ecosystems.

### **"Oh Deer!" - Activity Guide**

1. Begin the game by telling students that they are about to participate in an activity that emphasizes the most essential things that animals need in order to survive. Review the essential components of habitat with the students: food, water, shelter, and space. This activity emphasizes three of those habitat components – food, water, and shelter – but the students should not forget the importance of the animals having sufficient space in which to live, and that all the components have to be in a suitable arrangement or the animals will die.
2. Ask the students to count off in four's. (This activity works best with groups of 15 or more students. Smaller groups will need modification to complete this activity properly.) Have all of the one's go to one area; all of the two's, three's and four's go together to another area. Mark two parallel lines on the ground or the floor 10 to 20 yards apart. (These markings may be done ahead of time.) Have the one's line up behind one line and the rest of the students line up behind the other line.
3. The one's become "deer." All deer need good habitat to survive. Ask the students what the essential components of habitat are again: food, water, shelter, and space in a suitable arrangement. For the purpose of this activity, we will assume that the deer have enough space in which to live. We are emphasizing food, water, and shelter. The "deer" (the one's) need to find food, water, and shelter to survive. When a deer is looking for food, it should clamp his hands over its stomach. (The teacher should demonstrate this gesture and each of the subsequent gestures.) When it is looking for water, it should clamp its hands over its mouth. When it is looking for shelter, it should form a roof over its head with its hands. A deer can choose to look for any one of its needs during each round of this activity; the deer cannot, however, change what it is looking for; e.g., when it sees what is available, during that round. It can change again what it is looking for in the next round, if it survives.
4. The two's, three's, and four's are food, water, and shelter – components of habitat. Each student gets to choose at the beginning of each round which component he or she will be during that round. The students depict which component they are in the same way the deer will show what they are looking for using the gestures demonstrated by the teacher, hands on stomach for food, etc.

5. The game starts with all the players lined up on their respective lines (deer on one side and habitat components on the other side), and with their backs to the students on the other line.
6. The teacher begins the first round by asking all of the students to make their signs, with each deer deciding which habitat component it is looking for, each habitat component deciding what it is, and all players making the correct corresponding sign. Give the students a few moments to get their hands in place.
7. When you see the students are ready, count, "1, 2, 3..." At the count of three, each deer and each habitat turn to face the opposite group, continuing to hold their signs clearly.
8. When deer see the habitat component they need, they are to run to it. Each deer must hold the sign of what it is looking for until getting to the habitat component person with the same sign. Each deer that reaches the necessary habitat component takes the "food," "water," or "shelter" back to the deer side of the line. This is to represent the deer's successfully meeting its needs and successfully reproducing as a result. Any deer that fails to find its food, water, or shelter dies and becomes part of the habitat. That is, in the next round, the deer that dies is a habitat and so is available as food, water, or shelter to the deer that are still alive. NOTE: When more than one deer reaches a habitat component, the student who got there first survives. Habitat components stay in place on their line until the deer needs them. If no deer needs a particular habitat component during a round, the habitat component stays where it is in the habitat. The habitat person can, however, change which component it is from round to round.
9. The teacher keeps track of how many deer there are at the beginning of the game, and records the number of deer at the end of each round. Continue the game for 10-15 rounds. Keep the pace brisk, and the students will thoroughly enjoy it.
10. At the end of the rounds, gather the students to discuss the activity. Encourage them to talk about what they experienced and saw.
11. Using a flip chart pad or an available chalkboard, refer to the data posted during the game. Create a bar graph with year coinciding to each round compared to the number of

deer left at the end of each round. (Deer may be posted by two's or five's depending on the size of the group involved in the activity.) The students will see this visual reminder of what they experienced during the game; the deer population fluctuated over a period of years. This is a natural process as long as factors which limit the population do not become excessive to the point where animals cannot successfully reproduce. The wildlife populations tend to continually peak, decline, and rebuild, as long as there is good habitat and sufficient numbers of animals to successfully reproduce.

12. In discussion, ask the students to summarize some of the things they have learned from this activity. What do animals need to survive? What are some of the "limiting factors" that affect their survival? Are wildlife populations static, or so they tend to fluctuate, as part of an "overall balance of nature?" Is nature ever really in "balance," or are ecological systems involved in a process of constant change?



**Hevruta-study Groups- Understanding Our Relationship with Animals****Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah 6:1****Deuteronomy 22:6-7**

If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, either in a tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. <sup>7</sup> Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.

Why is it a law (*halakha*) to circumcise an infant who has been born without a foreskin? In order that blood may be drawn from the infant showing enduring devotion to the Covenant of Abraham. How did the sages determine this? In the Torah it is written, "they must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting Covenant." (Gen 17:13) In another opinion, the expression "they must be circumcised" in Hebrew is written using the same word twice in two different ways, accentuating a double emphatic. This repetition of the word implies two operative parts to the circumcision process; circumcision and uncovering. Circumcision is required of every male on the eighth day. However, when the male is born without a foreskin, he too is still obligated to be circumcised by uncovering, so that he may still be considered a part of the Covenant of Abraham, and so that no one might question his status as a member of the House of Israel.

Now why is it commanded that an infant be circumcised on the eighth day? Because God had compassion upon him in delaying the circumcision until he should have gained strength. And just as God shows mercy to man, so too does God show mercy to cattle. How do we know this? In Leviticus 22:27 it is written, "When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as an offering by fire to the LORD." Moreover, it says in the following verse, "However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young." Therefore, in the same way that God had compassion upon the cattle, so too was God filled with mercy for the birds as it is said, "If along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest... Let the mother go and take only the young."

**Questions:**

1. What makes this passage exegetical *midrash*?
2. How is nature constantly changing according to this *midrash*?
3. How does Judaism extol kindness to animals?
4. How does this *midrash* exemplify the interconnectedness of animals and the environment?

## **Lesson 7**

### **An Introduction to Narrative *Midrash* Encompassing an Environmental Awareness**

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

**Objective(s):**

1. Students will gain an understanding of narrative *midrash*.
2. Students will develop an understanding that all plants and animals on earth are connected for Judaism.
3. Students will be able to analyze the connections that lead to Torah.

**Activities:**

**Genesis Web of Life Activity** (by Gabriel Goldman in the curriculum *Foundations for Jewish Camping, Inc.* (Handouts) (45 minutes)

Please refer to the Teacher's Guide Handout for instructions on how to complete this activity.

**Hevruta-Study:** (45 minutes)

***Tanna devei Eliyahu* ch 2**

Teacher should refer to Lesson 4 Handout on *hevruta*-study group. Students will receive handout with guiding questions. What follows is an abridged version of a narrative text. The environmental piece will be more fleshed out than the rest of the narrative. It is important to inform the students that the text that is in front of them is a reader's digest version (a summary) of the text. The actual text is much longer and would not be appropriate for this introductory course. The teacher should know that the main point of the story is to show God's decision to give Torah to the Jews was done to save the world. So, then, we must study the Torah, pass along the heritage to the next generation, and daily pray with devotion. Students may have

trouble identifying the classical rabbinic theology of Torah study. It is the understanding that God wrote the Bible, and everything (all knowledge, questions, and answers) can be found therein. Studying Torah is a supreme religious duty and Torah is identified as the Bible and the subsequent rabbinic literature. The ideal of Torah study had a two-fold aim. The first was that it would lead to a more ritually observant Jew and, second, it was itself a religious duty. Torah study is a *mitzvah* (in the commanded sense) in classical rabbinic theology and is meant for all people, even those who make their living through charity, and not just the scholar.<sup>25</sup>

### *Tanna devei Eliyahu* chapter 2

"The *day* which is to be wholly His" (Psalm 139:16), construed in the previous chapter as the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, and the day of Gog (the day of messianic judgment and fulfillment), respectively, is in this chapter understood as the world's seventh "day," a "day" lasting a thousand years. During this "day" mankind will be released from affliction and will be suffused with the spirit of holiness. To be sure, the coming of this "day" has been delayed, but come it will. In the meantime, we have had intimations of its character in the life of David. Indeed, every Jew who like David, digs deep into Torah may anticipate and savor the sweetness and power of that "day."

Eager for the song of praise which Jews utter as they occupy themselves with Torah, God changed His original plan of the order of creation and brought about His revelation of Torah earlier than He had intended. The narrative says explicitly:

As it is said, "A psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God," But since the heavens are incapable of narrating the work of creation, why does Scripture say, "The heavens declare the glory of God?" Rather they were created at the beginning and therefore they are capable of narrating praises of the one who spoke and the world came into being. Accordingly, the entire world and everything within it, man, beast, and fowl of the heavens are nourished by the confluence / interconnectedness of the heavens and the earth. In six months produce is grown for the winter. In six months produce is grown and ripened for the summer. Therefore, everything in the world, and all of His handiwork that was created in the world lives / thrives / survives as a result of them (heaven and earth).

Even a small part of the heavens overlooks all of mankind; the stars are arranged in them

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<sup>25</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 19:270-271.

with consummate beauty; the speed and silence of the sun in its course through them inspires awe; the variety of creatures they behold below them is infinite. By their mere presence, the heavens testify to God's glory. But, just as God had previously changed the order of creation in order to give the Torah earlier than He had planned, so, in order to help Israel achieve victory, on three different occasions God halted the course of the stars in the heavens and their praise of Him.

Still, God's glory which the heavens proclaim is not the creation's variety or the stars' beauty, but man's study of Torah and his obedience to its precepts, whereby God's great name will soon be hallowed among all peoples to the very ends of the world.

Until that day comes, nothing is spared the heat of God's anger; the righteous are punished in this world even for trivial offenses, while the wicked are punished in this world only for the most grievous ones.

Should Torah, God forbid, be completely neglected, the Holy One may spurn mankind and destroy the entire world. Such is the threat voiced at the beginning of Psalm 29, which goes on, according to *Eliyahu Rabba*, to plead that in order to prevent the world's destruction men should engage themselves in matters of Torah. Even before they worship, they should utter at least one precept of the Oral law or one verse of Scripture, making certain that either one is completely accurate, lest they who hear these words be led astray and assert something not in accord with Torah.

Even as in His utterance of Torah God thundered but at the same time was gentle, so in his study of Torah a man should be vigorous but at the same time gentle and unassuming.

As for him who, satisfied with his worldly achievements, does not concern himself with Torah, he will be broken. Likewise he who refuses to understand the meaning of chastisement will suffer doubly for his rejection of the instruction that chastisement intends.

Yet, severe as God is with people who in their prosperity become complacent or in obtuseness refuse to heed the meaning of chastisement, He is gentle with the man who is unable to study Torah himself, but sees to it that his child does; or with another man who is unable to study Torah, but mornings and evenings in the synagogue reads the *Shema* and devoutly recites the *Tefillah*. Such men as these will not be charged with neglect of Torah, whose flames of fire light up men's hearts in numberless ways.

It should be remembered, however, that Israel's acute suffering in the world as we know it is not altogether the result of chastisement, but also of the throes which attend the Messiah's coming into the world. Soon the nations will be agitated with fear of annihilation,

but God will reassure them that His intention is not to annihilate the world but rather to bring the Messiah and thus assert his sovereignty.<sup>26</sup>

Students will work in their *hevruta*-study groups to discuss this passage and then present their findings to the large group.

### **Conclusion**

There are bridges between the *midrash*, the environment and Torah, the environment is a bridge to reflect on our lives both figuratively and literally. "Turn it (Torah), turn it, everything is therein."

### **Homework**

Students will look in the newspaper for three pressing environmental dilemmas.

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<sup>26</sup> William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, trans., *Tanna devei Eliyahu* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1981), 51-52.

## **Genesis Web of Life Teacher's Guide**

### **Objectives:**

1. Students will learn that all plants and animals on earth are connected. Some are involved with others because they compete for the same needs. Some are food for others. Some work together to cooperate to meet their needs even if they don't know it.
2. Students will learn about the interconnectedness of the environment and various Judaic literary environmental references.

### **Materials:**

1. String or yarn long enough for the entire class to be holding at the same time.
2. Genesis Web of Life Playing Cards which should be prepared ahead of time by the teacher. (See Genesis Web of Life Playing Cards)

**Length:** 35-40 minutes

### **Procedure:**

1. Review the objectives of this lesson as an overview to the activity that will follow.
2. Complete the "Genesis Web of Life" activity as described in the Activity Guide.

## Genesis Web of Life Activity Guide

1. Have students sit in a circle on the floor or outside, with plenty of room to stand up and move around.
2. Tell students, "Jewish tradition teaches us that all of creation is important because we are all connected. Human beings are connected to plants and animals in ways that might not be obvious at first. In *midrash*, we read:

The entire world and everything within it, man, beast, and fowl of the heavens are nourished by the confluence / interconnectedness of the heavens and the earth. In six months produce is grown for the winter. In six months produce is grown and ripened for the summer. Therefore, everything in the world, and all of His handiwork that was created in the world lives / thrives / survives as a result of them (heaven and earth).

*Tanna devei Eliyahu*

3. Tell students, "We have been spending time discussing the greatness of nature. Let's say we could start all over and begin creation from scratch. Is there anything in creation you would not want to create?" (Possible answers may include creatures like bees, mosquitoes, or black flies.)
4. Tell students, "Let's see what would happen if we created a world from scratch and then removed some of the animals that we don't like. Let's begin by creating the world. How are we going to do that? Well, since it has already been done once, we don't have to reinvent the wheel. Let's just follow the way it was originally done. What was created on Day One? (Answer: light) We have light, so we don't have to create it for the activity."
5. "What was created on Day Two? (Answer: water) We need someone to be water. Handout the water card to the student who volunteers. Read aloud the Hebrew word for water.
6. "What was created on Day Three? (Answer: vegetation and trees) I need three volunteers to be different kinds of plants." Handout a tree card to each students and read aloud the Hebrew word for tree.

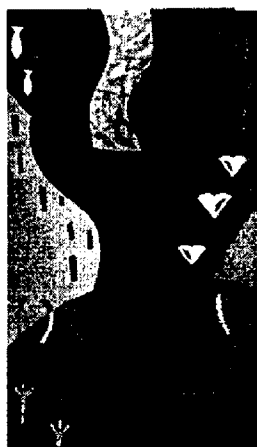


7. "What was created on Day Four? (Answer: the sun) Who would like to be the sun?" Handout the sun card to the student volunteer and read aloud the Hebrew word for sun. Since we are creating an ecosystem in the daytime, there is no need for stars and the moon.
8. "What was created on Day Five? (Answer: birds, fish, and insects) I need volunteers to be a bee, mosquito, fish, and bird." Handout the corresponding cards to each student volunteer and read aloud the Hebrew word for each one.
9. "What was created on Day Six? (Answer: wild beasts, cattle, and human beings) I need volunteers to be wild beasts, cattle, and human beings." Handout the corresponding cards to each student volunteer and read aloud the Hebrew word for each one.
10. After creation is complete and every student is a component of creation, take out the string or yarn. Give the string to the sun first. Explain that the string signifies the connections that exist between things in the environment. "For example, the sun is connected to that tree because I supply the tree with energy it needs to make food for itself." Then, have the sun hand the tree the string while the sun still holds onto the end. The process continues as each student explains how he/she is connected to some other component of the ecosystem. However, before the students begin with their connections, challenge them to come up with types of connections that are not food related. In other words, this game is not much of a challenge if students simply look around the circle and pick someone they eat or who eats them. Give them some examples of non predator-prey relationships: for example, how rabbits need foxes, mosquitoes pollinating blueberry bushes, or a dead log is nutrients for a new plant.
11. "Now, let's say we wanted to get rid of all the mosquitoes. Let's see what would happen to the rest of the ecosystem that we have created. Tell the mosquito that you have just sprayed pesticide on him/her. Death is signified by dropping the string. Then ask, "Who is connected to the mosquito? If the mosquito dies from the pesticide, how will it affect you?" Soon, the whole web collapses and the point is brought home. NOTE: An ecosystem rarely collapses from the extinction of one species, but rather the integrity of the ecosystem will be compromised.

12. Follow-up Discussion:

- a. What can we learn from what we witnessed here?
- b. What are some of the responsibilities that are placed on us as a part of this web?
- c. How are we part of the web?
- d. Could we figure out a way of killing mosquitoes without affecting the rest of the ecosystem?
- e. Share this quote from *midrash, Genesis Rabbah* 10.7, Land of Israel, c. 400CE  
“Even those things that you may regard as superfluous to Creation – such as fleas, gnats, and flies – even they too were included in Creation; and God’s purpose is carried out through everything – even through a snake, scorpion, a gnat, or a frog.” What does this teaching tell us? What does it mean that God’s purpose is carried out in everything? What does this tell us about the significance of each and every creature in this? (Possible answers may include that all creatures have the right to be here as they are a creative expression of the divine or even though we do not understand the purpose of certain creatures, they help keep an entire ecosystem together.)
- f. What are some of the ways Judaism offers us guidance for taking care of other creatures? (Possible answers may include *kashrut*, *tzar ba'alei chaim* – kindness to animals, feeding our animals before ourselves, not working two animals together of unequal size or strength, or *kilayim* – cross breeding.)

# Genesis Web of Life Playing Cards



WATER

מים



TREE

עץ



SUN

שמים



BEE

דבורה



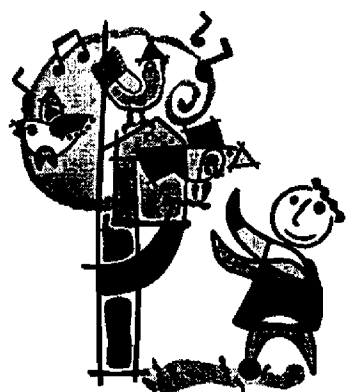
MOSQUITO

יתוש



FISH

דג



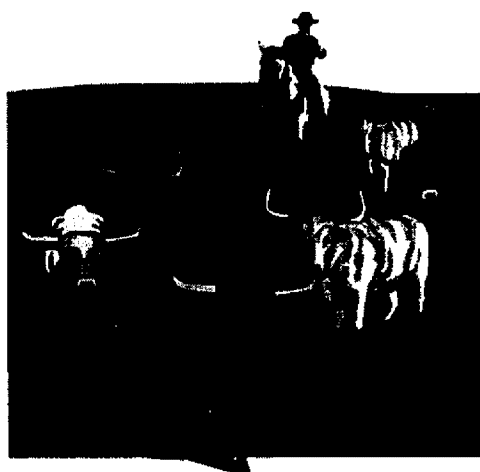
BIRD

ציפור



WILD BEAST

חיה רעה



CATTLE

בקר



HUMAN BEING

בן אדם

**Hevruta-Study Group*****Tanna devei Eliyahu chapter 2***

"The *day* which is to be wholly His" (Psalm 139:16), construed in the previous chapter as the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, and the day of Gog (the day of messianic judgment and fulfillment), respectively, is in this chapter understood as the world's seventh "day," a "day" lasting a thousand years. During this "day" mankind will be released from affliction and will be suffused with the spirit of holiness. To be sure, the coming of this "day" has been delayed, but come it will. In the meantime, we have had intimations of its character in the life of David. Indeed, every Jew who like David, digs deep into Torah may anticipate and savor the sweetness and power of that "day."

Eager for the song of praise which Jews utter as they occupy themselves with Torah, God changed His original plan of the order of creation and brought about His revelation of Torah earlier than He had intended. The narrative says explicitly:

As it is said, "A psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God," But since the heavens are incapable of narrating the work of creation, why does Scripture say, "The heavens declare the glory of God?" Rather they were created at the beginning and therefore they are capable of narrating praises of the one who spoke and the world came into being. Accordingly, the entire world and everything within it, man, beast, and fowl of the heavens are nourished by the confluence / interconnectedness of the heavens and the earth. In six months produce is grown for the winter. In six months produce is grown and ripened for the summer. Therefore, everything in the world, and all of His handiwork that was created in the world lives / thrives / survives as a result of them (heaven and earth).

Even a small part of the heavens overlooks all of mankind; the stars are arranged in them with consummate beauty; the speed and silence of the sun in its course through them inspires awe; the variety of creatures they behold below them is infinite. By their mere presence, the heavens testify to God's glory. But, just as God had previously changed the order of creation in order to give the Torah earlier than He had planned, so, in order to help Israel achieve victory, on three different occasions God halted the course of the stars in the heavens and their praise of Him.

Still, God's glory which the heavens proclaim is not the creation's variety or the stars' beauty, but man's study of Torah and his obedience to its precepts, whereby God's great name will soon be hallowed among all peoples to the very ends of the world.

Until that day comes, nothing is spared the heat of God's anger; the righteous are punished in this world even for trivial offenses, while the wicked are punished in this world only for the most grievous ones.

Should Torah, God forbid, be completely neglected, the Holy One may spurn mankind and destroy the entire world. Such is the threat voiced at the beginning of Psalm 29, which goes on, according to *Eliyahu Rabbah*, to plead that in order to prevent the world's destruction men should engage themselves in matters of Torah. Even before they worship, they should utter at least one precept of the Oral law or one verse of Scripture, making certain that either one is completely accurate, lest they who hear these words be led astray and assert something not in accord with Torah.

Even as in His utterance of Torah God thundered but at the same time was gentle, so in his study of Torah a man should be vigorous but at the same time gentle and unassuming.

As for him who, satisfied with his worldly achievements, does not concern himself with Torah, he will be broken. Likewise he who refuses to understand the meaning of chastisement will suffer doubly for his rejection of the instruction that chastisement intends.

Yet, severe as God is with people who in their prosperity become complacent or in obtuseness refuse to heed the meaning of chastisement, He is gentle with the man who is unable to study Torah himself, but sees to it that his child does; or with another man who is unable to study Torah, but mornings and evenings in the synagogue reads the *Shema* and devoutly recites the *Tefillah*. Such men as these will not be charged with neglect of Torah, whose flames of fire light up men's hearts in numberless ways.

It should be remembered, however, that Israel's acute suffering in the world as we know it is not altogether the result of chastisement, but also of the throes which attend the Messiah's coming into the world. Soon the nations will be agitated with fear of annihilation, but God will reassure them that His intention is not to annihilate the world but rather to bring the Messiah and thus assert his sovereignty.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, trans., *Tanna devei Eliyahu* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1981), 51-52.

**Questions:**

1. Describe how this text fits the criteria for a narrative *midrash*?
2. What is the main point(s) of the narrative?
3. How does this *midrash* understand the environment?

## **Lesson 8**

### **Environmental Dilemmas and Creating Original *Midrash*: The Looking Glass**

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

#### **Objective(s):**

1. Students will read and offer solutions to realistic environmental dilemmas drawing upon prior midrashic, Judaic, and environmental knowledge.
2. Students will use their understanding of *midrash* to create their own original *midrash*.
3. Students will gain a complete understanding of the midrashic process.
4. Through the midrashic process, students will be able to develop a personal response to an environmental issue.

#### **Activities:**

##### **Jewish-Eco Dilemma Cards – by Shamu Fenyvesi (45 minutes)**

It is helpful to put each dilemma on a card. (handout) Break the students into groups of 3 and hand each group a card. They should:

- 1) Read and discuss the dilemma.
- 2) Figure out what ecological and Jewish issues are involved.
- 3) Come up with a solution, or choose an answer to the dilemma. (the group does not have to agree)
- 4) After 10 minutes have each group present their dilemma and explain their decisions.

#### **Dilemma:**

Your brother has just received his driver's license and drives everywhere: to friends' houses which are 6 blocks away, to the corner store, to school which is ten blocks away. You know the problems associated with driving cars in relation to air pollution, the effects of oil drilling, and



the wars over access to oil. You also know that your brother is very excited about being able to drive. Would you?

- Tell him about the environmental effects of driving so much and let him decide?
- Tell your parents not to allow him to drive places which are walking or biking distance?
- Do nothing?
- Other?

**Dilemma:**

You are an American Zionist. The Israeli Council on the Environment has published a report which sets a population limit for Israel; the number of people the land can support without losing critical wildlife habitat and irreparably damaging soil, water and air. Once the limit was reached only Jews fleeing persecution could make *aliya*. What is your opinion on the proposed limit?

**Dilemma:**

You live in Arizona and your JCC has decided to build a golf course. Many members requested the course because the local gentile country club (with the only golf course in town) is hostile to Jews. You know that golf courses demand a tremendous amount of water as well as trapping and poisoning of moles and gophers. How would you vote on the proposal? Why?

**Dilemma:**

You are a rabbi. One of your congregants, a doctor at a research institute, asks you if it would be right (according to Jewish ethical standards) to do cancer research on monkeys. You are aware of the Jewish emphasis on saving human lives and the laws of *tzaar baalei hayyim*, the prevention of animal suffering. What is your advice to the scientist?

**Dilemma:**

You are a member of the environmental organization at your high school. One of your projects is setting up a garden in an impoverished urban neighborhood. The group decides that the work will be done on Saturdays. Would you participate?

**Dilemma:**

You live on an observant kibbutz with a kosher dining hall. The kibbutz forbids anyone from taking dishes out of the dining hall for fear of breaking *kashrut*. Thus the *kibbutzniks* use

disposable plates and cups for anyone who wants to take food out of the dining hall. You want to take dinner home to a sick friend. What would you do?

**Dilemma:**

Your mother is a geneticist for a large seed company. She has been given the job of developing an apple that resists rot by adding various animal and plant genes to the apple tree genes. She asks for your opinion on bioengineering. You know that there are Jewish laws (*kilayim*) against the mixing of species and environmental questions as well. Yet you are aware of the advantages of developing food products resistant to rot and disease. What would you tell your mom?

**Create Your Own Midrash (handout) (45 minutes)**

**Process:**

The teacher will distribute the handout and instruct the students to complete the process of creating a *midrash* as outlined in the handout. (Teacher will have Genesis narrative available for those students interested in the larger text.) Students will answer critical questions about the Creation story(s), specifically Genesis 1:28 and 2:15. The teacher will explain that there is a dearth of midrashic materials that explain these two verses in relation to the environment. It is up to the students to do so.

**Genesis 1:28**

"God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."<sup>28</sup>

**Genesis 2:15**

"The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it."<sup>29</sup>

Discuss the process of making the *midrash* together and finish it up to share for the next lesson.

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<sup>28</sup> JPS Tanakh, 1985.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion**

The students' work on realistic environmental dilemmas should support their understanding of the environmental portion of their final projects. Likewise, their creation of an original *midrash* should enhance their ability to utilize the midrashic process.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### **Create Your Own *Midrash***

**Directions:** The following two verses do not have any midrashic materials that directly advocate for preserving the environment. You will be creating this *midrash*!

#### **Verses:**

**Genesis 1:28** "God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.'"

**Genesis 2:15** "The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it."

#### **Creating Your Own Midrash:**

1. You will create an original *midrash* from one of the following perspectives: a reporter, a politician, a woman, and a Rabbi.
2. Use the process of making *midrash*, as described below, to complete this project.
3. You will share your *midrash* a part of your final class presentation.

#### **Process:**

- 1) Complete a reading of the text focusing on facts (i.e. a piece of information that is true to the story).
- 2) Name three important facts from the text?

Create your own *midrash*, p2.

- 3) Describe in your own words, why each fact is important to the text.
- 4) Read the text again focusing on how the text relates to your personal experiences with the environment.
- 5) Name three personal experiences that relate to the identified facts.
- 6) According to this text, what lesson is being taught and can be applied to our lives?
- 7) Now write the *midrash* using one of the above perspectives and show how the text teaches the moral or lesson that you have identified. Imagine that you are writing this *midrash* for your grandchildren.

## **Lesson 9**

### **Final Project Presentations**

**Length:** 1 hour, 30 minutes

#### **Objective(s):**

1. To celebrate and share both student final projects on modern environmental issues and their creation of an original *midrash*.
2. To showcase student learning about the midrashic process and the environment as it relates to Judaism.

#### **Activities:**

##### **Original *Midrash*: (45 minutes)**

Students will be provided an opportunity to share their *midrashim* from the previous week and their environmental projects. (See handout) Ask the students for their feedback and interpretations of their students' *midrashim*. (handout)

##### **Environmental Projects: (45 minutes)**

Present environmental projects and receive feedback from students and teachers.  
(handout)

#### **Conclusion**

As a result of the culmination of learning from this curriculum, students should emerge with a comprehensive outlook on both *midrash* and the environment from a multiplicity of Jewish perspectives. In addition, students will be able to extrapolate solutions to real-life environmental issues as well as being able to apply their learning to real life Jewish experiences.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### **Student Self-Evaluation of Final Projects**

#### **Part I: Your Projects**

1. How much time did you spend on the entire projects?
2. What was the most interesting fact you learned?
3. What could you have done differently in your research and in your final project itself?
4. What are some key elements of the process of *midrash* that you learned? How does that knowledge apply to our daily life? To Judaism? To the environment?

#### **Part II: Classmates' Projects**

1. What was the most interesting fact that you learned? Why?
2. What was the most significant issue that you learned? Why?
3. What was the most interesting topic you heard about? Why?
4. What was the most effective way that you experienced the midrashic process and the environment?

## Teacher Evaluation of Final Projects

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Was the research thorough?
2. Does the written work cover the topic?
3. Does the visual project reflect the topic you selected in an appropriate manner?
4. Were you able to implement the environmental portion successfully?
5. Were the key elements of the process of *midrash* and the environment covered effectively?



## **Conclusion**

A fully integrated Jewish environmental education curriculum is a crucial component of supplementary school education and, by extension, of day school education as well. This thesis suggests that the central purpose of our educational process is to capture the hearts and minds of educators, students, and their families. Jewish environmental education can make use of traditional Jewish text study, but for it to address the needs of the heart, it must be an integrated curriculum that embraces a variety of learning styles. Environmental education must engage the student on multiple levels, especially those students in eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. These students require challenging situations to help them in their transition to adulthood.

Each chapter in the thesis sets forth specific guidelines that attempt to address these issues. In Chapter One, we provided a historical overview of how environmental education first developed from a secular perspective and how criteria were developed to raise world awareness. Chapter Two addressed how modern Jewish thought, as it has done in regard to so many other secular issues throughout time, incorporated a concern of the greater society and adapted Jewish tradition to address such concerns. The chapter also sought to develop evaluative techniques for curricular programs and illustrated how any program could be evaluated using these criteria. Chapter Three examined specific traditional source texts that were most frequently utilized in Jewish environmental education. Some were in fact misappropriated. Sometimes the treatments of these texts were inadequate in setting forth their original contexts as well as in articulating the difficulties and issues that arose from their utilization. These source texts were evaluated

in situ to ensure that the circumstances in which each particular text is situated are an authentic representation of the story. The rabbinic commentaries were then researched to determine how these texts were interpreted. This method of research should be seen as a guideline according to which every educator should evaluate quotes before presenting them to their students.

Chapter Four developed a curriculum model that was based on traditional source texts, taking the students out of the classroom and directly into the environment, and brought the lessons into their homes. The curriculum was thus fully integrated, in that texts became the stepping stones to teach and hence heighten our appreciation of, and our need to preserve, the environment. In this way, *midrash* and the environment formed a symbiotic relationship that was tangible in the curriculum.

This sense of interconnectedness is best illustrated by citing Robert Marsh, who, in his book, *The Earth as Modified by Human Action (Man and Nature)*, wrote:

No atom can be disturbed in place, or undergo any change... without affecting... the surrounding atoms. These, again, by the same law, transmit the influence to other atoms, and the impulse thus given extends through the whole material universe... (N)o action can take place in physical, moral, or intellectual nature... without leaving all matter in a different state from what it would have been if such action had not occurred.... Hence... there exists, not alone in the human conscience or in the omniscience of the Creator, but in external nature, an ineffaceable, imperishable record, possibly legible even to created intelligence, of every act done, every word uttered, nay, of every wish and purpose and thought conceived, by mortal man, from the birth of our first parent to the final extinction of our race; so that the physical traces of our most secret sins shall last until time shall be merged in that eternity of which not science, but religion alone assumes to take cognizance.<sup>1</sup>

Torah and its commentary, be it *midrash*, Talmud, Rashi or other Sage, authenticates Jewishly the curriculum which then impacts on the environment outside the classroom. Jewish environmentalism becomes an ongoing process of establishing these connections

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Marsh. *The Earth as Modified by Human Action* (New York: Scribner, 1877).

and integrating them into the learning process which is not only life-long, but eternal in its motivating a humanity greatly in need of preserving and sustaining God's creation.

## Appendix

### Appendix A: Seven Core Questions to Ask About Potential Resources For Young Students<sup>1</sup>

1. **Does the resource speak to children?** Beyond having accurate and relevant information, resources to be used directly by young students should relate directly to their world of experiences; there should be obvious connections to their everyday lives in terms that are familiar to them.
2. **Does the resource speak to all children?** Do the materials represent or respond to the diversity of children in classrooms in terms of ethnicities, heritage, experiential backgrounds, or worldviews? Does the resource appeal to girls as well as boys?
3. **Is there a wide range of learning possibilities?** Young people as well as older students have a wide range of interests and learning style preferences. Do resources provide learning options, a variety of direct experiences, a rich combination of textual information and visuals, and high interest elements such as games, puzzles, or stories?
4. **Do the learning activities emphasize critical thinking, inquiry, problem-solving, or use of information over memorization of facts?** Life-long learners must begin to recognize early on that facts can always be located, but the construction of knowledge, using information to make decisions, and solving problems requires the application of critical thinking skills.
5. **Are the learning activities safe and simple?** The educational value of activities should not be degraded by unduly complex or risky procedures, or procedures that are not easily adapted to the constraints of time and materials found in typical classrooms. Equipment and supply needs should include items that are typically found in classrooms and homes, and instructions should be clear to average readers. There should also be notices where adult help is needed.
6. **Can you, the teacher, understand the content?** You should not need advanced studies in science, economics, or other disciplines to understand the principles and concepts in environmental education materials intended for use by young students. If you as an adult do not understand the ideas being presented, young students certainly will not understand them either. It is expected that you will need to help them in their understanding, but the meaning of resources intended for young students should be readily apparent and clear to informed adults without advanced degrees in particular content areas.
7. **Will using the resource be fun for students, or provoke interest or wonder among students?** Is humor used to good advantage and are there attention-grabbing illustrations? Are there interesting or bizarre facts? We live in an age when the youngest students have encountered information being packaged in very appealing ways, so resources are more likely to be engaging if attention is given to presentations that invite attention. Appealing materials may not be of high substantive quality, but unappealing, high-quality materials are less likely to engage students in learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward A. Johnson and Michael J. Mappin, eds. *Environmental Education and Advocacy – Changing Perspectives of Ecology and Education*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 203.

## Appendix B: Example Criteria for Environmental Education Resources<sup>2</sup>

### A. Resources should provide *knowledge* about the environment and environmental issues.

As such, resources should:

- Develop awareness and understanding of environmental concepts.
- Provide balanced presentation of differing viewpoints and theories about environmental issues.
- Provide fair and accurate information.
- Provide well-documented factual information.
- Provide information and data drawn from current and respected sources.
- Provide the identification and affiliation of the author.
- Provide the science that underlies the environmental issue or topic.
- Reflect the complexity of issues providing depth, and scale.
- Draw attention to different scales: local, national, and global.
- Help learners recognize the symptoms and causes of environmental problems including socioeconomic and political factors.
- Place current or potential environmental challenges in historical perspective.

### B. Resources should provide *skills* that will enable users to learn about the environment and to address environmental issues. As such, resources should:

- Suggest a rational, analytic approach to problems.
- Provide suggestions for action, but not advocate a singular course of action.
- Support skill-building in areas such as: data collection, inquiry, critical thinking, and decision-making.

### C. Resources should promote positive *attitudes* toward the environment and environmental issues. As such, resources should:

- Emphasize the interconnection between people and the environment and the need to manage and protect the environment.
- Motivate and empower people to act on their own conclusions about what should be done to resolve environmental problems.
- Promote civic responsibility and the value and necessity of local, national, and international cooperation.

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<sup>2</sup>Johnson and Mappin, eds. *Environmental Education and Advocacy*. 204.

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#### **Important Websites**

<http://eelink.net> *Environmental Education on the Internet*

[www.associationforexperientialeducation.com](http://www.associationforexperientialeducation.com)

[www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org) *The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life*, "engages Jewish institutions and individuals in bringing the moral passion of Jewish tradition and social action to environmental stewardship in order to preserve the integrity of creation, advance

*social justice, protect future generations, and strengthen the Jewish community."*

*[http://www.coejl.org/resources/bi\\_compre.pdf](http://www.coejl.org/resources/bi_compre.pdf) A Comprehensive Bibliography on Judaism and the Environment, compiled by Laurie Stenger*

*[www.creec.org](http://www.creec.org) California Regional Environmental Education Community*

*[www.csun.edu/~vceed009/lesson.html](http://www.csun.edu/~vceed009/lesson.html) Environmental Lesson Plans*

*[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov) The website for the environmental protection agency is also an incredibly valuable tool. [www.epa.gov/teachers/](http://www.epa.gov/teachers/) For their environmental education programs.*

*[www.ericse.org/](http://www.ericse.org/) ERIC- Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education*

*[www.JewishNatureCenter.org](http://www.JewishNatureCenter.org) – Dr. Gabriel Goldman*

*[www.jnf.org](http://www.jnf.org) The Jewish National Fund is now challenged to both preserve and develop the land of Israel. So the JNF garners support for this challenge by focusing on specific action areas. The website gives one access into their many projects, fund raising efforts, as well as, tours.*

*[www.jtsa.edu/davidson/melton/bestof/midrash.shtml](http://www.jtsa.edu/davidson/melton/bestof/midrash.shtml)*

*[www.kidsrecycle.org](http://www.kidsrecycle.org)*

*[www.outdoorjewishadventures.com](http://www.outdoorjewishadventures.com)*

*[www.recycleroom.org/html/launch.html](http://www.recycleroom.org/html/launch.html)*

*[www.teach-nology.com/teachers/subject\\_matter/science/biology/enviro/](http://www.teach-nology.com/teachers/subject_matter/science/biology/enviro/)*

*[www.tevacenter.org](http://www.tevacenter.org)*

*[www.worldwildlife.org](http://www.worldwildlife.org) The World Wildlife Fund is "dedicated to protecting the world's wildlife and wildlands." It directs its conservation efforts toward three global goals; protecting endangered spaces, saving endangered species and addressing global threats.*

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