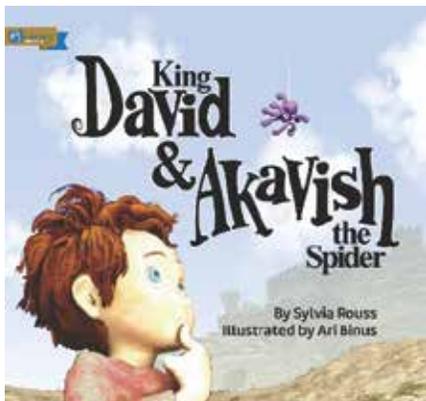




Global Day of Jewish Learning

Curriculum — Under the Same Sky: “The Earth is Full of Your Creations”



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A Project of the Aleph Society

Written by: **Devorah Katz**

Introduction (10 minutes)

- **Begin today's class by reading a story. Ask your students to get comfortable, relax and listen to a story.**
- **Read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein to the class.** The story is about a tree that loves a little boy and all that the tree gives to the child.
- **Once you are done reading, facilitate a class discussion on the story.**
- **Ask some of these questions:**

1. What physical things does the tree provide for the boy throughout his life?
2. What is the relationship between the tree and the boy?
3. Is the boy selfish to be taking so much from the tree?
4. Why does the tree keep on giving? Is it possible to give too much?
5. What is the moral of the story?

The Giving Tree talks about the relationship people have with nature — appreciating it and, at times, taking advantage of it. Today's class is about just that — how Judaism views humanity's relationship with nature.

Part One: Creating a World (10 minutes)

One of the first things God does after creating Adam and Eve is to place them in a garden.

- **Read Texts #1 and #2 aloud.**

Text #1: Genesis 2:8-9.

ח וַיִּטַע ה' אֱלֹהִים, גֶּן-בְּעֵדֶן — מִקְדָּם; וַיִּשֶׂם שָׁם, אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצַר.
ט וַיְצַמַח ה' אֱלֹהִים, מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, כָּל-עֵץ נְחֻמָּד לְמִרְאֵה, וְטוֹב לְמֵאֲכָל — וַעֵץ הַחַיִּים, בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן, וַעֵץ, הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע.

8 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. **9** And from the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

- **Ask:**

1. Why do you think God placed man in a garden surrounded by trees?
2. What are some of your favorite things to be surrounded by (e.g., toys, friends, siblings)?

The next source describes God taking the first human around the Garden of Eden. It is from *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, a collection of midrashim on Ecclesiastes.

Text #2: *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:13.

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 אחריך.

When God created the first human, God led him around all the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to him, "See My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are. Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy My world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you."

➤ Ask:

1. God is proud to show Adam the trees in the Garden of Eden. He even calls them "beautiful". Think of a time you've created something that you've been proud of. What message is God trying to give to humanity?
2. Looking at Earth today, do you think God would be proud of how we treat the planet?
3. Is it our responsibility to look after Earth? What are some ways we could take better care of our planet?

Part Two: A Story (10 minutes)

The Talmud tells a story about Honi, a scholar who lived in Israel over 2,000 years ago.

Text #3: Babylonian Talmud *Ta'anit* 23a. English translation [**bold text**] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

יומא חד הוה אול באורקא, תזייה להווא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא. אמר ליה: האי עד כמה שנין טעין? אמר ליה: עד שבועין שנין. אמר ליה: פשיטא לך דחייית שבועין שנין? אמר ליה: האי גברא עלמא בחרובא אשבחתיה. כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי, שתלי נמי לבראי.

One day, he was walking along the road when he saw a certain man planting a carob tree.⁸ Honi said to him: This tree, after how many years will it bear fruit? The man said to him: It will not produce fruit until seventy years have passed. Honi said to him: Is it obvious to you that you will live seventy years, that you expect to benefit from this tree? He said to him: That man himself found a world full of carob trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, I too am planting for my descendants.

It is clear from the story that, although the man is planting carob trees, he will not be around to enjoy the carob from the trees.

Ask:

1. What is the value of doing something that you will not benefit from?
2. Can you think of some ways that you could help make the world a better place for your children and grandchildren?
3. How do your actions shape the world?
4. Can you think of another action that may take a long time to show results?

Part Three: Blessing a Tree (10 minutes)

In our next text, we learn about blessing trees.

Read Text #4 aloud.

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 5b–6a. English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

כי הוּוּ מִיפְטָרֵי מִהֲדָדֵי אָמַר לֵיהּ: לִיבְרֹכָן מַר! אָמַר לֵיהּ: אֲמַשׁוּל לָךְ מִשָּׁל, לָמָּה הֲדַבֵּר דּוּמָה – לְאָדָם שֶׁהֵיָהּ הוֹלֵךְ בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהֵיָהּ רָעֵב וְעָיִף וְצָמָא, וּמִצֵּא אֵילָן שֶׁפִּירוֹתָיו מְתוּקִין וְצִלּוֹ נָאֵה, וְאִמַּת הַמַּיִם עוֹבְרַת תַּחְתָּיו. אָכַל מִפִּירוֹתָיו, וְשָׁתָה מִמַּיְמָיו, וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּצִילוֹ.

The Gemara relates: **When they were taking leave of one another, Rav Naḥman said to Rabbi Yitzḥak: Master, give me a blessing.** Rabbi Yitzḥak said to him: **I will tell you a parable. To what is this matter comparable?** It is comparable to one who was walking through a desert and who was hungry, tired, and thirsty. And he found a tree whose fruits were sweet and whose shade was pleasant, and a stream of water flowed beneath it. He ate from the fruits of the tree, drank from the water in the stream, and sat in the shade of the tree.

וּכְשֶׁבִיקֵשׁ לִילָךְ, אָמַר: אֵילָן אֵילָן, בְּמָה אֲבָרְכְךָ? אִם אוֹמַר לָךְ שֶׁיְהִי פִירוֹתֶיךָ מְתוּקִין – הֲרֵי פִירוֹתֶיךָ מְתוּקִין, שֶׁיְהִי צִלְךָ נָאֵה – הֲרֵי צִלְךָ נָאֵה, שֶׁתִּהְיֶה אִמַּת הַמַּיִם עוֹבְרַת תַּחְתֶּיךָ – הֲרֵי אִמַּת הַמַּיִם עוֹבְרַת תַּחְתֶּיךָ, אֲלֵא: יְהִי רְצוֹן שְׁכָל נְטִיעוֹת שְׁנוֹטְעִין מִמֶּךָ.

And when he wished to leave, he said: **Tree, tree, with what shall I bless you?** If I say to you that **your fruits should be sweet, your fruits are already sweet; if I say that your shade should be pleasant, your shade is already pleasant; if I say that a stream of water should flow beneath you, a stream of water already flows beneath you.** Rather, I will bless you as follows: **May it be God's will that all saplings which they plant from you**

יְהִיו כְּמוֹתֶיךָ. אִף אַתָּה, בְּמָה אֲבָרְכְךָ? אִם בְּתוֹרָה, הֲרֵי תוֹרָה. אִם בְּעוֹשֶׁר, הֲרֵי עוֹשֶׁר. אִם בְּבָנִים, הֲרֵי בָנִים. אֲלֵא, יְהִי רְצוֹן שֶׁיְהִיו צְאֲצָאִי מֵעֵיךָ כְּמוֹתֶיךָ.

be like you. So it is with you. With what shall I bless you? If I bless you with Torah, you already have Torah; if I bless you with wealth, you already have wealth; if I bless you with children, you already have children. Rather, may it be God's will that your offspring shall be like you.

Loving the Trees (Elementary School)

➤ **Read Text #5 aloud. This text is optional. If you do not have enough time, skip the text and continue with the questions below it.**

Text #5: Babylonian Talmud *Berakhot* 43b. English translation [**bold text**] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

אמר רב יהודה האי מאן דנפיק ביומי ניסן וחזי אילני דקא מלבלבי אומר ברוך שלא חיסר בעולמו כלום וברא בו בריות טובות ואילנות טובות להתנאות בהן בני אדם.

On a related topic, the Gemara cites that **Rav Yehuda said: One who goes out during Nisan and sees trees that are blossoming recites: Blessed... who has withheld nothing from His world, and has created in it beautiful creatures and trees for human beings to enjoy.**

Today people still say a blessing over the blossoming trees. It is an amazing sight to see — parents and children walking around searching for a newly blossoming tree in order to say a blessing.

➤ **Ask:**

1. When is the last time you were surrounded by nature? How did it feel?
2. What is the value in appreciating and blessing your surroundings?
3. What do you think it means that the Sages established a blessing to thank trees, or to say when seeing trees blossom?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

The next source is a quotation from Rabbi Yitzchak Eisik Safrin, a 19th century Hasidic Rebbe from Ukraine.

➤ **Ask your students to read this text out loud.**

Text #6: Rabbi Yitzchak Eisik Safrin quoted in Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters*.

Rabbi Yitzchak Eisik said, “The motto of life is ‘Give and Take.’ Everyone must be both a giver and a receiver. He who is not is like he is a barren tree.”

A barren tree is a tree that produces no fruit at all. Rabbi Yitzchak Eisik is teaching us a life lesson here. Just like a tree both gives fruit and takes nutrients from the environment, human beings should live the same way. People should both accept from the world around them and make sure to give back to that same world.

➤ **Ask:**

1. In what ways can you be like trees — accepting from and giving to the world?

Trees hold such a significant place in Judaism. There is even a holiday, *Tu B'Shevat*, where we celebrate the birthday of trees! God made sure to plant trees in the Garden of Eden and He was proud to show off His beautiful creation. We have also been tasked with taking care of the trees on Earth, be it through planting new trees or appreciating the ones we now have. Planet Earth is a resource that we need to treasure both by receiving its goodness and treating it well.

Concluding Activity Options (15 minutes +)

Trees provide us with so many things, as we saw in *The Giving Tree*. Here are some tree-related activities you could do as a group:

1. Plant a tree with your class.
2. If you have a tree or trees nearby, have your students spend time with the trees. Ask them to write their own tree story.
3. Do a craft project that uses recycled materials. You could, for example, make paper mache trees out of old newspaper and paper towel rolls.

Part One: Creating a World

Text #1: Genesis 2:8–9.

ח וַיִּטַע ה' אֱלֹקִים, גֶּן-פְּדֵדֶן — מִקֶּדֶם; וַיִּשֶׂם שָׁם, אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר.
ט וַיַּצְמַח ה' אֱלֹקִים, מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, כָּל-עֵץ נֹחֵמֵד לְמִרְאֵה, וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל — וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים, בְּתוֹךְ הָגֶן, וְעֵץ, הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע.

8 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. **9** And from the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

Text #2: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13.

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When God created the first human, God led him around all the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to him, “See My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are. Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy My world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you.”

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One day, he was walking along the road when he saw a certain man planting a carob tree.^b Honi said to him: This tree, after how many years will it bear fruit? The man said to him: It will not produce fruit until seventy years have passed. Honi said to him: Is it obvious to you that you will live seventy years, that you expect to benefit from this tree? He said to him: That man himself found a world full of carob trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, I too am planting for my descendants.

Part Three: Blessing a Tree

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud *Ta'anit* 5b–6a. English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

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The Gemara relates: **When they were taking leave of one another**, Rav Nahman said to Rabbi Yitzhak: **Master, give me a blessing.** Rabbi Yitzhak said to him: **I will tell you a parable. To what is this matter comparable?** It is comparable to one who was walking through a desert and who was hungry, tired, and thirsty. And he found a tree whose fruits were sweet and whose shade was pleasant, and a stream of water flowed beneath it. He ate from the fruits of the tree, drank from the water in the stream, and sat in the shade of the tree.

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Conclusion

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