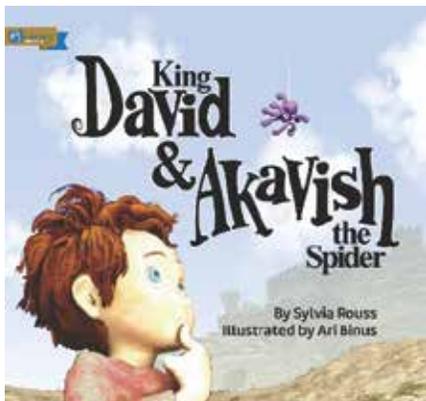




# Global Day of Jewish Learning

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



NOV. 20.16

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A Project of the Aleph Society



# The Power of Planting: Appreciating Seeds and Saplings (Middle School)

Written by: **Devorah Katz**

## Introduction (5 minutes)

Robert Louis Stevenson, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish author, wrote in his play *Admiral Guinea* (1892):  
 “Do not judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that you plant.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a 19<sup>th</sup> century American poet and essayist, wrote in *Essays: First Series* (1841):  
 “The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”

➤ **Ask:**

1. What message do you think these writers are trying to share with us?
2. Can you give other examples of small things that are significant?

These authors suggest that harvests and forests come from humble beginnings. In order to produce fields of produce or mighty forests, someone has to plant tiny seeds and acorns.

➤ **Ask:**

1. Can you think of one small step you have taken that has led to big results?

## Part One: The First Gardens (15 minutes)

After God created the basics of the world — light and darkness, the heavens and earth, sky and water — He planted.

➤ **Read Text #1 aloud.**

**Text #1: Genesis 1:11–12.**

**יא** וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, תִּדְשֵׂא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ וְרֵעַ, עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינּוֹ, אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ-בוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ; וַיְהִי-כֵן.  
**יב** וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ וְרֵעַ, לְמִינֵהוּ, וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה-פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ-בוֹ, לְמִינֵהוּ; וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים, כִּי-טוֹב.

**11** And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. **12** The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good.

➤ **Ask:**

1. God clearly values plants; they are the first living things He creates. Why does He value them so highly?
2. Do you have a garden? Describe it.

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Think of painting or drawing a picture. You start with a blank space, but if you work on it and carefully add things, it becomes a full picture. You have worked hard and created something beautiful.

### ➤ Ask:

1. How does it make you feel to accomplish something? To finish a project?

If God was the first gardener, he wasn't the last! He commands the Children of Israel to plant as soon as they enter the land of Israel.

Text #2 is from *Leviticus Rabbah*, a compilation of *midrash* on Leviticus.

### ➤ Read Text #2 aloud.

#### Text #2: *Leviticus Rabbah 25:3*.

אף אתם כשאתם נכנסין לארץ ישראל לא תתעסקון אלא במטע תחילה, כי תבאו אל הארץ ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל.

Therefore, when you are in the Land of Israel, occupy yourselves first and foremost with planting. Hence it is written, "When you come into the land, you shall plant trees for food" (Leviticus 19:23).

### ➤ Ask:

1. Did you expect this to be the first action that the Children of Israel had to do when they arrived in the Land of Israel?
2. Why do you think they were commanded to plant immediately?

When the universe was created, God made gardens before mankind. The first thing the Children of Israel did when they arrived in the Land of Israel was to plant. Clearly, planting is something important and valuable to God.

**Text #3: Babylonian Talmud Tractate Gittin 57a.** English translation [**bold text**] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

הָיָה מִתְּלִיד יְבוּקָא שְׁתֵּלִי אֲרָזָא, יְבוּקָתָא — שְׁתֵּלִי תוֹרְנִיתָא, וְכִי הָיוּ מֵינְסָבִי, קִיָּצִי לְהוּ וְעֲבָדוּ גִּנְנָא.

The Gemara explains that **it was customary** in Beitar that **when a boy was born they would plant a cedar tree** and when a **girl was born they would plant a cypress [tornita]**. **And when they would later marry** each other **they would cut** down these trees and **construct** a wedding **canopy** for them from their branches.

### ➤ Ask:

1. Why do you think planting plays such an important role in Judaism?

## The Power of Planting: Appreciating Seeds and Saplings (Middle School)

Planting plays such an important role in Judaism because it signifies new beginnings — when the world was created, when the nation moved into its homeland, and when children are born.

### Part Two: Planting for the Future (15 minutes)

Let's look more closely at how planting connects beginnings with the future, helping us to take a long-term view.

► **Read Texts #4 and #5 aloud.**

**Text #4: Babylonian Talmud *Ta'anit* 23a.** English translation [**bold text**] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

וּמָא חַד הָוָה אֵזֶל בְּאוֹרְחָא. חוֹזִיָּה לְהוּוּא  
גְּבֵרָא דְהָוָה נָטַע חֲרוֹבָא. אָמַר לֵיהּ: הָאִי  
עַד כְּמָה שָׁנִין טָעִין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: עַד שְׁבַעִין  
שָׁנִין. אָמַר לֵיהּ: פְּשִׁיטָא לָךְ דְּחַיִּית שְׁבַעִין  
שָׁנִין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: הָאִי גְבֵרָא עֲלָמָא בְּחֲרוֹבָא  
אֲשַׁבְּחִתִּיהּ. כִּי הֵיכִי דְשָׁתְלִי לִי אֲבָהַתִּי,  
שְׁתְּלִי נַמְי לְבָרָאִי.

One day, he was walking along the road when he saw a certain man planting a carob tree.<sup>8</sup> 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.

Text #5 is from *Midrash Tanchuma*, a compilation of legal and narrative *midrash* on the Torah named for Rabbi Tanchuma, the first person mentioned in the collection.

### Text #5: *Midrash Tanchuma. Parshat Kedoshim, Chapter 8.*

אע"פ שתמצאו אותה מליאה כל טוב, לא תאמרו נשב ולא נטע אלא הוּו זהירין בנטיעות שנאמר ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל, כשם שנכנסתם ומצאתם נטיעות שנטעו אחרים אף אתם היו נוטעים לבניכם שלא יאמר אדם אני זקן כמה שנים אני חי מה אני עומד מתגיע לאחרים למחר אני מת.

Even if you find the land full of all good things, you should not say, "We will sit and not plant;" rather, be diligent in planting! As it says "you shall plant trees for food" (Leviticus 19:23). Just as you came and found trees planted by others, you must plant for your children; a person must not say, "I am old, how many years will I live? Why should I get up and exert myself for others? I'm going to die tomorrow."

► **Ask:**

1. What life lessons can we learn from these texts?
2. What in your life has been passed down to you from previous generations?
3. What is something you can do today that would benefit future generations?

## The Power of Planting: Appreciating Seeds and Saplings (Middle School)

We may think that planting only benefits us directly; after all, if we plant a seed, we will enjoy its fruits. Yet these sources show us that planting is valuable even if we derive no immediate benefit from our seeds and deeds.

### Conclusion (10 minutes)

Our final text is a bit surprising. It shows us the priority we are to give planting!

Text #6 is from *Midrash Avot Derabbi Natan*, a commentary on Ethics of our Fathers (*Pirkei Avot*) compiled in 700–900 CE.

#### Text #6: *Midrash Avot Derabbi Natan*, Version B, Chapter 31.

אם היתה נטיעה בתוך ירך ויאמרו לך הרי לך המשיח. בוא ונטע את הנטיעה (ואח"כ צא והקבילו).

If you had a sapling in your hand and were told that the Messiah had come, first plant the sapling [and then go out to greet the Messiah].

#### ➤ Ask:

1. What is this Midrash trying to teach us?
2. Jews have been praying for the Messiah for thousands of years. How could planting be more important than greeting the Messiah?

One would think that if something so important was happening, we would put down the seeds or the sapling. Imagine seeing a famous person or a beloved grandparent. What would you do? The Midrash is telling us that planting is so important that it comes before anything else; first you finish planting and then you go to greet the Messiah (or the grandparent!).

It is almost unexpected to see Judaism's approach to planting. The act of doing something so small and simple is actually revered in Judaism. What could be more special and important than helping out future generations? Planting a seed or a garden allows us to help preserve and sustain the earth. Judaism places value on thinking about the next generation and how to provide them with a beautiful planet.

### Concluding Activity Options (15 minutes +)

1. Each of the texts that we have explored in this class can make a beautiful visual. If you have an artistic class, ask each student to pick one of the sources and create a poster or drawing to reflect its message.
2. Clothespin Planters. Using tuna cans and clothespins, you can make an easy and cute planter for each student to take home.

#### **MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Tuna Fish Can
- Clothespins
- If you are feeling ambitious, paint

#### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

- Take the top off the tuna can and clean and dry it thoroughly.
  - Clip the clothespins all the way around the can. (You may paint the cans to add a little more color to the project)
  - Plant a small plant or herb inside the tuna can.
3. Consider visiting a community garden. If you are teaching a class that meets regularly, consider planting a class garden.

## Part One: The First Gardens

### Text #1: Genesis 1:11–12.

**יא** וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, תִּדְשֵׂא הָאָרֶץ דְּשֵׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע, עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינוֹ, אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ-בּוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ; וַיְהִי-כֵן.  
**יב** וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דְּשֵׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע, לְמִינֵהוּ, וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה-פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ-בּוֹ, לְמִינֵהוּ; וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים, כִּי-טוֹב.

**11** And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. **12** The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good.

### Text #2: *Leviticus Rabbah* 25:3.

אָף אַתֶּם כְּשֵׂאתֶם נִכְנְסִין לְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא תִתְעַסְקוּן אֶלָּא בַמַּטְעַ תַּחִּילָה, כִּי תִבְאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ וּנְטַעְתֶּם כָּל עֵץ מֵאֲכָל.

Therefore, when you are in the Land of Israel, occupy yourselves first and foremost with planting. Hence it is written, “When you come into the land, you shall plant trees for food” (Leviticus 19:23).

### Text #3: *Babylonian Talmud Tractate Gittin 57a*. English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

הָיָה מִתְּחִלָּתָא יְנוּקָא שְׂתָלִי אַרְזָא, יְנוּקָתָא — שְׂתָלִי תוֹרְנִיתָא, וְכִי הוּוּ מֵיַנְסְבִי, קְוִיֵּצִי לְהוּ וְעַבְדוּ גִּנְנָא.

The Gemara explains that **it was customary** in Beitar that **when a boy was born they would plant a cedar tree** and when a **girl** was born they **would plant a cypress [tornita]**. **And when they would later marry each other they would cut** down these trees and **construct** a wedding **canopy** for them from their branches.

## Part Two: Planting for the Future

### Text #4: *Babylonian Talmud Ta’anit 23a*. English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

יוֹמָא חַד הוּוּ אִזְל בְּאוּרְחָא, חֲזִייה לְהוּוּא גְבֵרָא דְהָוָה נָטַע חֲרוּבָא. אָמַר לֵיהּ: הָאֵי עַד כַּמָּה שָׁנִין טָעִין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: עַד שִׁבְעִין שָׁנִין. אָמַר לֵיהּ: פְּשִׁיטָא לָךְ דְּחִיית שִׁבְעִין שָׁנִין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: הָאֵי גְבֵרָא עֲלָמָא בְּחֲרוּבָא אֲשַׁבְּחָתִיה. כִּי הֵיכִי דְשְׂתָלִי לִי אֲבָהַתִּי, שְׂתָלִי נְמִי לְבְרָאֵי.

One day, he was walking along the road when he saw a certain man planting a carob tree.<sup>b</sup> 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.



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## Conclusion

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אם היתה נטיעה בתוך ירך ויאמרו לך הרי לך המשיח. בוא ונטע את הנטיעה (ואח"כ צא והקבילו).

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