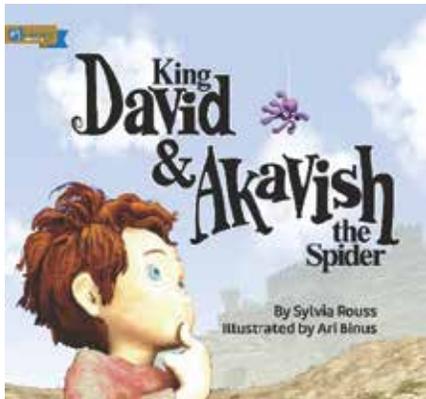




Global Day of Jewish Learning

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



Written by: **Devorah Katz**

Introduction (5 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning.

The act of planting is at the core of gardening and farming, and serves as a universally understood metaphor for long-term planning and investment. In this session, we will look more closely at how planting holds a special significance in Jewish life, and find lessons in Jewish tradition that can apply to our lives today.

➤ Read aloud this traditional Welsh proverb:

A seed hidden in the heart of an apple is an orchard invisible.

➤ Ask:

1. What do you think this proverb means?
2. Think of a time in your life when this proverb could have applied to the situation. Describe that time.
3. The proverb lists three things: a seed; the heart of an apple; an orchard. Each of these is something unseen — hidden or invisible. What is the significance of this emphasis on the unseen?

As we study together today, keep in mind this proverb, seeds, and things that we cannot yet see.

Part One: The First Gardener (10 minutes)

After God separated the light from the darkness, made the heavens and earth, the sky and water, He created plants.

➤ Read Text #1 aloud.

Text #1: Genesis 1:11–12.

יא וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, תְּדַשָּׂא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע, עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֹו, אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ-בּוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ; וַיְהִי-כֵן.
יב וַתּוּצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע, לְמִינֵהוּ, וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה-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.

➤ Ask:

1. In these two verses, the Bible repeats four times the fact that the plants God creates contain seeds. Why is this fact apparently so important?
2. The word “sprout” is used to describe how the plants emerge during Creation. Plants did not appear fully-formed, but instead grew from the earth and became plants. What is God’s role in this process of growth?

God has the power to create huge and fundamental things fully formed — like the heavens and the earth — yet He creates plants as sprouts that must grow into their final form.

Bringing plants into existence is the first act of creating life, and that process incorporates the concept of the seed. By creating plants with seeds inside of them, God anticipates the essential place that planting is to hold in the perpetuation of life. Indeed, planting is a top priority within the Jewish tradition.

Part Two: Plant First and Foremost (15 minutes)

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. Why do you think the first action the Children of Israel are to take when they enter the Land of Israel is to plant? What might be the significance of the commentary emphasizing that planting be done “first and foremost”?
2. What do you think people today — most of whom are not farmers — should do as the first action they take when arriving in a new home or town?

The Bible states that when the Children of Israel first arrive in the Land of Israel they are commanded to put down roots first, to plant the seeds of the crops they will need to eat in the next season. They start with planting seeds and, with time and patience, harvest the growth from those plants.

In addition to securing physical livelihood, planting is an investment in a new home. Planting requires that you be there to tend the crops — to garden means to invest the time to be in that place.

We make land ours by planting and tending it, as we turn a house into a home by investing time and effort.

Text #3 is from *Midrash Avot Derabbi Natan*, a commentary on Ethics of our Fathers (*Pirkei Avot*) compiled in 700–900 CE.

➤ **Read Text #3 aloud.**

Text #3: *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 והקביל).

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. Jews have been praying for the Messiah for thousands of years, yet this text says planting a sapling is more important than greeting the Messiah. How would you explain this?
2. In this text a person is in the middle of planting — the sapling is in hand. What does this Midrash teach us about finishing tasks?
3. Plants were the first living things created by God. The arrival of the Messiah would signal the end of history. What is the significance of juxtaposing these two extremes together in one Midrash?

One might think that the coming of the Messiah would be a legitimate occasion to “drop everything”, or that arriving in the Promised Land would call for thankful prayer as the first act. However, as these texts make clear, Jewish tradition values planting as a practical necessity to such an extent that it becomes the prescribed act of devotion. The Children of Israel are commanded to plant. In doing so they are accepting the responsibilities of their new home. The obligation to plant is binding even at the arrival of the Messiah.

Now let’s explore the more practical elements behind those priorities, and how planting is part of a long-term obligation.

Part Three: Planting for the Future (15 minutes)

➤ **Ask participants to read Texts #4 and #5 in *chavruta*.** *Chavruta* is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you learn together.

Text #4 relates the story of Honi “The Circle Maker,” a Jewish scholar of the 1st century B.C.E.

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 תַד הָוָה אֵיל בְּאוֹרְחָא. תְּזִיָּה לְהָוָה
גְּבֵרָא דְהָוָה נָטַע חֲרוּבָא. אָמַר לֵיהּ: הָאִי
עַד כַּמָּה שָׁנִין טְעִין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: עַד שְׁבַעֲעִין
שָׁנִין. אָמַר לֵיהּ: פְּשִׁיטָא לָךְ דְּחַיִּית שְׁבַעֲעִין
שָׁנִין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: הָאִי גְבֵרָא עֲלָמָא בְּחֲרוּבָא
אֲשַׁבְּחִתִּיהּ. כִּי הֵיכִי דִשְׁתְּלִי לִי אֲבָהַתִּי,
שְׁתְּלִי נַמְי לְבְרָאִי.

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.

Planting for the Future

Text #5 describes a tradition of planting a tree when a child is born.

Text #5: Babylonian Talmud Gittin 57a. English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

הָוּה מְתִילֵיד יְנוּקָא שְׁתְּלֵי אַרְזָא, יְנוּקָתָא — שְׁתְּלֵי תוֹרְנִיתָא, וְכִי הוּוּ מֵיִנְסָבִי, קְנִיִצִי לְהוּ וְעֵבְדוּ גִנְנָא.

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.

➤ In *Chavruta*, discuss:

1. What common theme are both of these texts addressing? What is the main idea of each text?
2. Bring to mind the theme and main ideas you identified in the previous question. Considering that many of us today live in urban societies rather than agricultural ones — even in places where we don't have our own gardens — how would you apply the same theme and main ideas to our modern lives?

➤ Bring the group together. Ask a few *chavrutot* to share their responses to the questions with the full group.

The old man with the carob tree knows he will not eat fruit from that particular tree, but he plants it anyway, for his children. In Beitar, the branches of cedar trees and cypress trees that were planted for children would be used to make wedding canopies for them. In this light, the act of planting becomes a metaphor signifying long-term planning and commitment.

➤ Ask:

1. Judaism emphasizes that individuals should care about future generations. Why do you think this is, and what does it mean to you?

Conclusion (15 minutes)

Text #6 is by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentary on the entire Talmud and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

Text #7 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.

➤ Bring the group back together again. Ask one person from the group to read Texts #6 and #7 aloud.

Text #6: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “Banishment from Eden”. *In the Beginning*.

God sent Adam forth from the Garden to till the soil from which he had been taken, work that requires sorting out, sowing, plowing, and harvesting. In order to be able to live from the earth, man has to keep digging, weeding and drawing forth from the ground. The point is that the work of weeding out the harmful and proliferating the good can be done only in and with the earth itself. The war of man against thorns and thistles, insects and rodents, is an incessant struggle, and it is part of his work of *Tikun*, correcting the world.

Text #7: *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 מתיגע 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. In these texts, Rabbi Steinsaltz and *Midrash Tanchuma* mention cultivation of plants alongside individual responsibilities to others. What are those responsibilities?
2. Which points made by these texts do you particularly agree or disagree with? Why?

Think back to the proverb we read at the beginning: “A seed hidden in the heart of an apple is an orchard invisible.” We have learned how God chose to create plants as sprouts containing the seed for future generations within themselves. We found that planting is a cultural priority in the Jewish tradition and that planting is sacred. We’ve seen how planting is something we are obligated to do, both as a practical preparation for our needs and as an investment for the future. The seed — the source of so much potential — is hidden in the heart of an apple. That apple came from a tree planted by someone who lived before we did. Generation to generation, the potential for life and growth is passed down through the act of planting. In taking the time and effort to plant, tend and harvest, we allow ourselves to be “rooted” in what we do. We plant things for our children — to celebrate their birth and to provide for their futures. We understand that the “fruit” of our efforts may be something that we ourselves will not get to harvest.

Even when we think our gardens are full — that we find trees planted by others, or we have things provided for us so easily — we are still obligated to plant. Even when our own immediate needs are met, we must plan(t) for the needs of those who come after us. Planting is a way to give significance to our actions, and for our actions to make the world better.

Part One: The First Gardener

Text #1: Genesis 1:11–12.

יא וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ דְּשֵׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע, עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינּוֹ, אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ-בוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ; וְנִהְיֶה-כֵן.
יב וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דְּשֵׂא עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע, לְמִינֵהוּ, וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה-פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ-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.

Part Two: Plant First and Foremost

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).

Text #3: *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 והקביל).

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].

Part Three: 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*.

יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא, תזייה ליהווא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא. אמר ליה: האי עד כמה שנין טעין? אמר ליה: עד שבעין שנין. אמר ליה: פשיטא לך דחייית שבעין 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.

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Conclusion

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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.”



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