

Lesson 7: Protecting Our Eden

**Lesson 7:
Protecting
Our Eden**

OUR MASTER STORY: *The Garden of Eden*

Genesis (*Bereshit*) 2: 4-17 (בראשית ב: ד-יז)

- 4 Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. When the LORD God made earth and heaven
- 5 when no shrub 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,
- 6 but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth
- 7 the LORD God formed man^b from the dust of the earth.^c He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.
- 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.
- 10 A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches.
- 11 The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is.
- 12 The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.
- 13 The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush.

- 14 The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur.
And the fourth river is the Euphrates.
- 15 The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.
- 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat;
- 17 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."

TEXTS

Text 1

Midrash Rabbah, Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) 7: 13

[Homiletic and midrashic material compiled on the biblical text, mainly in Yisrael, from the 3rd to 10th centuries]

At the time that God created Adam, the first [human], He took him, and toured him amongst all the trees of the Garden of Eden. He said, "See My works, how pleasant and fine they are! And all that I have created, I have created for you. Set your mind not to ruin and destroy My world, for if you ruin it, there is none who can repair it after you."

5

קְהֵלֶת רַבָּה ז': יג

בְּשַׁעַה שֶׁבָרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן נִטְלוּ וְהִחְזִירוּ עַל כָּל אֵילָנֵי גֶן עֵדֶן וְאָמַר לוֹ רֵאֵה מַעֲשֵׂי כַּמָּה נְאִים וּמִשְׁבַּחֵינָהּ הֵן וְכֹל מֵהַ שֶׁבָרָאתִי בְּשִׁבְלֶךָ בְּרָאתִי תָּן דַּעְתְּךָ שְׁלֵא תִקְלַקֵּל וְתִחְרִיב אֶת עוֹלָמִי שָׂאם קִלְקֵלְתָּ אֵין מִי שְׂיִתְקֵן אַחֲרֶיךָ:

Text 2

Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 20: 19-20

- 19 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 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.

דברים כ: יט-כ

(יט) כִּי-תָצוּר אֶל-עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשׁוּהָ, לֹא-תִשְׁחִית אֶת-עֵצָהּ לְנֹדֵחַ עָלֶיהָ גֵרֹזֵן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל, וְאֵתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת: כִּי הָאֲדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה, לִבְאֵר מִפְּנֵיךָ בְּמִצּוֹר:
(כ) רַק עֵץ אֲשֶׁר-תִּדְרַע, כִּי-לֹא-עֵץ מֵאֲכָל הוּא--אֵתוֹ תִשְׁחִית, וְכָרְתָּ; וּבְנִיתָ מִצּוֹר, עַל-הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר-הוּא עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה--עַד רִדְתָּהּ:

Text 3

Sefer HaChinukh, Commandment # 529

[Book from the 13th century listing the 613 commandments.]

...to love that which is good and worthwhile and to cling to it, so that good becomes a part of us and we will avoid all bad and destructive things. This is the way of the pious and people of action... not destroying even a grain of mustard in this world... if possible they will prevent any destruction they can. Not so are the wicked..., who rejoice in the destruction of the world, and they are destroyers...

5

ספר החינוך מצנה תקכט

... לאהוב הטוב והתועלת ולהדבק בו, ומתוך כך תדבק בנו הטובה ונרחיק מפל דבר רע ומפל דבר השחתה, וזהו דרך החסידים ואנשי מעשה ... ולא יאבדו אפילו גרגר של חרדל בעולם ... ואם יוכלו להציל יצילו כל דבר מהשחית בכל כחם. ולא כן הרשעים ... שמחים בהשחתת עולם והמה משחיתים...

Text 4

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit 23a

[Compilation of teachings of 3rd-6th century scholars in Babylonia (*Amora'im*); final redaction in the 6-7th centuries]

A. Once [Honi] was travelling on the road, and he noticed a man planting a carob-tree. He asked him, "In how many years will this tree bear fruit?" "Seventy years." "Do you think that you will live for seventy years?" The man replied: "I found a world with carob-trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, so too, I plant for my children?" [Honi] sat down to eat a sandwich. He then was overtaken by sleep and he slept. A tel formed about him so that he could not be noticed; he slept for seventy years. When he awoke, he observed a man gathering the fruit from the carob-tree; "Did you plant this tree?" "No; I am the grandson of the man that planted it."

B. [Honi] said to him: "It would appear that I have slept for seventy years." He observed that his donkey had given birth to many herds of donkeys. He then went to his home, and asked the people: "Is the son of Honi still alive?" "His son no, but his grandson yes." He then said: "I am Honi the Circle Maker"; but they would not believe him. He went to the house of study and heard them say: "Today the laws are as clear as in the days of Honi the Circle Maker, for when he would come to the house of study, he would answer any question put to him by the rabbis." Honi went in and said to them: "I am that Honi"; but they

would not believe him... He felt sorry and prayed to God that he might die, and so he died.

תלמוד בבלי, מסכת תענית דף כג עמוד א

יומא חד הנה אזל באורחא חזייה לההוא גברא דהנה נטע חרובא אמר ליה האי עד כמה שנין טעין אמר ליה עד שבועין שנין אמר ליה פשיטא לך דתניית שבועין שנין אמר ליה האי [גברא] עלמא בתרובא אשכחתייה פי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי שתלי נמי לבראי יתיב קא פריך ריפתא אתא ליה שינתא נים אהדרא ליה משוניתא איפסי מעינא ונים שבועין שנין פי קם חזייה לההוא גברא דהנה קא מלקט מינייהו אמר ליה אתה הוא דשתלתיה אמר ליה בר בריה אנא.

אמר ליה שמע מינה דנימי שבועין שנין חזא לחמריה דאתילידא ליה רמכי רמכי אזל לביתיא אמר להו בריה דחוני המעגל מי קים אמרו ליה בריה ליתא בר בריה איתא אמר להו אנא חוני המעגל לא הימנוהו אזל לבית המדרש שמעינהו לרבנן דקאמרי נהירן שמעתתין פבשני חוני המעגל דכי הוי עייל לבית מדרשא פל קושיא דהו להו לרבנן הנה מפרק להו אמר להו אנא ניהו לא הימנוהו ... חלש דעתיה בעי רחמי ומית.

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Text 5

Dr. Jeremy Benstein, *Bein Adam Le'Olam?* Jewish Legal and Moral Categories Regarding Nature

[Fellowship director of the Abraham Joshua Heschel Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership in Tel Aviv]

We do indeed take on commitments in the name of future generations, and responsibilities to them, as it says 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." The world, like the Torah, is both a bequest that we have inherited from those that have come before, and a birthright we are holding in safekeeping for those that will come after us.

[Benstein, J. (2006). *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, p. 93]

Text 6

Mishnah, Tractate Avot 3: 17¹

[Compilation of teachings of 3rd century BCE – 3rd century CE scholars in *Eretz Yisrael (Tanna'im)*; compiled and edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi]

When a person's wisdom exceeds his good deeds, to what may he be compared? To a tree with many branches but few roots. A wind blows, uproots it, and topples it over, as it is written, "He shall be like a desert scrub that never thrives but dwells unwatered in the wilderness, in a salty, solitary land" (Jeremiah 17:6)

However when a person's good deeds exceed his wisdom, to what may he be compared? To a tree with few branches but with many roots. All the winds of the world may blow against it, yet they cannot move it from its place, as it is written, "He shall be like a tree planted by the waters that spreads its roots by the stream. Untouched by the scorching heat, its foliage remains luxurious. It will have no concern in a year of drought and will not cease from bearing fruit" (ibid. 17:8)

משנה, מסכת אבות ג: יז

כל שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מרביין ושרשיו מעטין, והרוח באה ועוקרתו והופכתו על פניו, שנאמר, והיה כערער בערבה ולא יראה כי יבוא טוב ושכן חררים במדבר ארץ מלחה ולא תשב. אבל כל שמעשיו מרביין מחכמתו למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מעטין ושרשיו מרביין, שאפלו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו, שנאמר, והיה כעץ שתול על מים ועל יובל ישלח שרשיו ולא יראה כי יבא חם, והיה עלהו רענן, ובשנת בצורת לא ידאג, ולא ימיש מעשות פרי:

¹ In some editions of *Avot* this passage is numbered 3: 22.

Text 7

Rabbi Julie Hilton Danan, Planting for the Future

[Contemporary rabbi in the Renewal movement; instructor in Jewish Studies]

Planting for the future is a lot of what parenting is about. Much of what we do day after day has no immediate or obvious effect, and yet the influence of our small, everyday interactions with our children may have great bearing on their futures and even upon the futures of generations yet unborn. “Just as the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined,” says the Book of Proverbs.

By making the effort to create a “small sanctuary” in our homes, we plant the seed of our people’s continuity in the ways of Torah that is called “a tree of life to them that hold fast to it.”

[Danan, J. H. (1993). *The Jewish Parents’ Almanac*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., p. 220]

Text 8

Jewish Climate Change Campaign

SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

'Burning fossil fuels is as if you are burning all of the furniture in your house to stay warm. But you are running out of furniture and it's beginning to stink because of all the smoke. Oh, and the basement is flooding." That's just one of the metaphors Pesach Stadlin, 31, and the other members of a traveling troupe of teachers used to help get across their Jewish message of sustainability during a two-month odyssey traversing the continental US. The other, biggest, tool is their transportation - a topsy-turvy bus which runs on used vegetable oil.

15

The bus is a perfect tool for their funky educational message. Stadlin and the other four members of the project converted it to run on used vegetable oil. It has a solar oven on the roof, a worm compost and plants...
[...]

"There's a Jewish phrase about pursuing justice. We can't just sit back and wait for it," Stadlin explained. "We're focusing on the Jews first, so we can get our act together as a tribe and teach other tribes."

20

The educational idea is to pass along the Jewish Climate Change Campaign pledge, teach about climate change and offer solutions and strategies.

25

"What kind of light unto the nations do we want to be? We wanted to reach out to Jewish institutions and communities. We helped them form green teams in their institutions, talked to them about energy audits and converting school lawns and sports fields to gardens to grow their own food," he said.

[...]

30

For Stadlin, environmental messages abound in the Torah. "Joseph foresaw a global climate change. The Torah says there was a drought and a heat wave for the whole world. And what did Joseph do? He prepared during the plentiful years. He put up grain silos for locally grown food - it says in the Torah that it was locally grown. We are in that phase now.

[...]

35

"Let's say you eat a bag of chips that's been flown around the world to reach you. You are left with this stupid bag at the end that you don't know what to do with. That's a poor design. And that's not how God created Earth. God gave us a manual - the Torah - and placed us in a garden. We

believe we are still in that garden. You can wrap it up in concrete but it wants to break through and give us its abundance," Stadlin said.

[...]

"The sun laughs at us as we scrounge around for energy [instead of utilizing its rays]."

[Ehud Zion Waldoks, "Smells like teen spirit". *The Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 28, 2009. Available at <http://www.jpost.com/Features/Article.aspx?id=164530> Viewed on June 12, 2012]

A LIST OF KEY NAMES AND KEY TERMS

(A brief description can be found in the Glossary at the end of the Student Reader)

- ▶ *Bal Tashchit*
- ▶ Benstein, Jeremy
- ▶ Danan, Julie Hilton
- ▶ Eden
- ▶ Honi HaMe'agel
- ▶ *Midrash Rabbah*
- ▶ *Sefer HaChinukh*
- ▶ *Tikkun Olam*

TAKING THE CONVERSATION HOME

RETELLING THE MASTER STORY

The Garden of Eden

Back when God made the Earth, God looked down and saw that there was no one to take care of it.

So God reached down into the ground and scooped up some stuff from the earth. He took the stuff from the earth into his hands and formed it into a person. But the person just lay there on the ground like a lump of clay.

There was no life in him. So God bent down again and breathed into the person – called Adam - and Adam became alive!

Adam's body was made from the earth, but his life came from the breath of God.

Then God planted a garden in the east of Eden for Adam to live in. And since God is God, He is a pretty good gardener. He planted all kinds of trees in His garden; apple trees, and pear trees, banana trees and mango trees, fig trees and who knows what other kinds of trees in his garden. God wanted to make sure there were plenty of good things to eat. (Don't ask me why he didn't plant any candy trees!)

Gardens need water to grow, so God took extra care to make sure that there would plenty of water. There were four big rivers that ran through the Garden of Eden. The four rivers are the Pishon River, the Gihon River, the Tigris River and the Euphrates River. The rivers brought a stream of clear, cool water to flow through the middle of the garden to water it and keep it green.

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In the middle of the garden God also planted two special trees. One was called the Tree of Life, and the other was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Then God brought Adam to the garden and he told him, "Take care of my garden. You may eat the fruit of any of the trees that I have made to grow there. But be careful. Do not eat any of the fruit from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you eat any of that fruit, you will be sent out of the garden forever."

So Adam began to live and work in the garden God had made for him. The garden was a wonderful, beautiful place.

Honi Ha-Meagel Sleeps for Seventy Years

A long time ago, there lived in Israel a man named Honi-Ha-Meagel. He was a very wise man.

One spring day, Honi went for a walk. "What a lovely sunny day it is today," he thought to himself.

5 He noticed that there were people in the fields planting vegetables and fruit trees. As he passed by a pretty little house, he saw an old man planting a tree.

10 "Why would such an old man be planting a tree?" he wondered. "It takes a very long time for fruit trees to grow, and planting is hard work. He might not even be around when the tree is big enough to give fruit."

Then Honi said aloud, "Excuse me sir, but what kind of tree are you planting?"

15 "This sapling is a carob tree," said the man. "I love to eat carob on Tu B'Shevat. In about seventy years, this tree will produce carobs good enough for eating."

“Do you think that you will live seventy more years and be able to eat the carob fruit?” asked Honi.

The man looked surprised. “Oh, no! but I remember seeing carob trees growing when I was a little boy. I ate some of those carobs on Tu B’Shevat. They were so delicious! Those carob trees were planted by those who wanted to leave a gift for younger people. I am planting this tree as a gift for the people who will be living seventy years from now. Then they can enjoy eating carob on Tu B’Shevat too. Just as my parents and grandparents planted trees for me, so I plant trees for my children and grandchildren.”

That’s a very smart thing to do,” said Honi, and he continued his walk. After a short while, he began to feel very tired.

“I’ll just rest for a few moments,” he thought as he sat down on the ground. “Maybe I’ll close my eyes for a while. I’ll eat my lunch when I wake up.”

Honi stretched out on the ground, closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep. While he slept, a wonderful thing happened. A rock appeared nearby. It grew bigger and bigger. After a while, it began to surround Honi. Then it grew into the shape of a tent, with Honi inside. The tent protected him from the wind, from the rain, from the cold and from the hot sun. Honi slept very comfortably inside the tent. He slept on and on for a very long time. He slept during the winter. He slept during the summer. He slept when it was raining. He slept when the sun was shining. He slept and slept. He slept for seventy years!

One day, the tent that covered Honi began to shrink. It grew smaller and smaller until it did not cover him anymore.

Honi woke up. He looked around. He stretched and stretched.

“What a good nap I had!” said Honi, his arms out wide and his mouth yawning. “I must have slept for a long time.”

45 Honi noticed a man picking carobs from a tree nearby. This man was not the one to whom Honi had spoken earlier.

Honi stood up and walked over to the man. “Did you plant this tree?” he asked.

“No,” answered the man. “My grandfather planted it seventy years ago.”

50 “I can’t believe it,” Honi said to himself. “I must have been sleeping for seventy years!”

“I’m going to plant a carob tree also,” said the man. “See, I have a sapling all ready to plant. Someday my children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy carobs just as I do.”

55 Honi remembered the words of the old man. “Just as my parents and grandparents planted trees for me, so do I plant trees for my children and grandchildren.”

[Excerpted from Feinberg, M. P., and Rotenberg, R. (1993). *Lively Legends – Jewish Values: An Early Childhood Teaching Guide*. Denver: CO: A.R.E.]

TIKKUN OLAM

Themes and Major Ideas

- The world is a gift to humankind. We must not ruin or destroy the world.
- *Tikkun Olam* refers to the practice of caring for the world for future generations.
- Jews should strive to be a light unto the nations and should demonstrate to others how to help save the world's environment.
- *Bal Tashchit* refers to the Torah commandment of “not wasting” (This commandment stems from the Torah's prohibition against cutting down fruit trees during times of war).

Topics for Discussion with Children

- It is our God-given job to take care of the world.
- As *Tu biShevat*, the “birthday” or “new year of the trees” approaches, it is important for us to be thankful for all that trees do for us, and for us to take care of both the trees and the world around us.
- The Torah teaches us the commandment of *Bal Tashchit*. Reusing and recycling are ways that all of us can fulfill this mitzvah.

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Ages 2-5**Dear Tree** by Dora Weber

Through clear, interesting illustrations, this book shows the many benefits which trees bestow upon us, and models different ways in which we can take care of and express our gratitude towards the trees.

Joseph Had Little Overcoat by Simms Tabak.

Emphasizes the need to recycle and reuse. Rather than discard his beloved overcoat, Joseph continually recycles it. He skillfully reshapes and reuses it until not a stitch remains of the original coat.

Ages 3-6**Something from Nothing** by Phoebe Gilman.

A story which illustrates the many benefits of recycling. Joseph's grandfather helps young Joseph find ways to continually recycle and reuse his wonderful baby blanket. Each time Joseph's grandfather cuts and refashions the blanket; the family of mice who live underneath Joseph's house pick up the scraps of material and use them to create some new additions to their home.

Sammy Spider's First Day of School by Sylvia Rouss.

A Sammy Spider story which teaches about respect for animals and emphasizes the necessity of protecting all living creatures. When Sammy accompanies Josh to school, he plays happily in the classroom until his presence is discovered by several of Josh's classmates. A few frightened classmates demand that someone step on the spider, but Josh reminds his classmates that we must never hurt any of God's creatures.

Ages 6-12**The Wisdom Bird: A Tale of Solomon and Sheba** by Sheldon Oberman.

A beautiful legend that speaks of the necessity of caring for and respecting all living creatures. Hoping to impress and demonstrate his cleverness to the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon promises to build her a palace made of bird beaks. Although all of the birds are willing to give their beaks to Solomon, one small bird, the hoopoe, reminds Solomon of how important a beak is to a bird and how devastated the birds will be without their beaks. Thanks to the riddles which the hoopoe poses to Solomon, Solomon realizes that even though he is a powerful king, he must never misuse his power and hurt other creature.



www.shalomsesame.org

Watch **Abigail Grows a Tree**. Abigail plants a small tree in honor of *Tu Bishvat* and is fearful that it won't grow.

Also: **Planting a tree**. A young girl in Turkey plants a tree with her grandfather illustrates the concept of generations providing for generations yet to come.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS

Benstein, J. (2006). *The Way into Judaism and the Environment*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. (Jewish Environmentalism)

Bernstein, E. (1998). *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing. (Jewish Environmentalism)

Danan, J. H. (1993). *The Jewish Parents' Almanac*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc. (Contemporary Parenting)

Waskow, A.O. (2000). *Torah of the Earth: Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. (Renewal)

For more information about the **topsy-turvy bus** and related environmental activities see: <http://jclimatebus.wordpress.com/> and www.jewishclimatecampaign.org (both viewed on June 13, 2012)

STORIES AND ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

Appelman, H. & Shapiro, J., illus. McLean, C. R. (1984). *A Seder for Tu B'Shevat*. Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben.

Biers-Ariel, M., Newbrun, D., & Smart, M. F. (2000). *Spirit in Nature: Teaching Judaism and Ecology on the Trail*. Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, Inc.

Ganz, Y, illus. Klineman, H. (1987). *The Gift That Grew*. Nanuet, NY: Feldheim.

Gershator, P., illus. Green, M. (1994). *Honi's Circle of Trees*. Philadelphia, PA: JPS.