

## Attitudes, Beliefs & Values Shaping Jewish Practice

From *A Guide to Jewish Practice* by David A. Teutsch

*Ahavah* (Love)  
*Anava* (Humility)  
*Avadim hayinu bemitzrayim* (We were slaves in Egypt.)  
*Avoda* (Service)  
*Bal tashchit* (Avoiding waste)  
*B'riyut* (Health and wellness)  
*Bitul z'man* (Not wasting time)  
*Brit* (Covenant)  
*B'tzelem Elokim* (Human beings are created in the image of God.)  
*Darkhey shalom* (Paths of peace)  
Democracy  
*D'veikut* (Connection to God)  
Diversity  
Egalitarianism  
*Emet* (Truth and integrity)  
*Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel)  
Fidelity  
*Haganat hateva* (Environmentalism)  
*Chesed* (Covenanted caring)  
*Hidur mitzvah* (Beautifying Jewish observance)  
*Hodaya* (Gratitude)  
Inclusion  
Jewish authenticity  
*Kavana* (Intention)  
*Kedusha* (Holiness)  
*Kehila* (Commitment to community)  
*K'vod habriyot* (Human dignity)  
*Klal Yisrael* (Unity and survival of the Jewish people)  
*La'Adoshem ha'aretz umelo'o* (The earth and all that is in it belong to God.)  
*Limud Torah* (Jewish learning)  
*Menschlichkeit*  
*Menucha* (Rest and renewal)  
*Mitzvah* (Obligation)  
Physical pleasure  
Pluralism  
*P'ru u'r'vu* (Be fruitful and multiply)  
*Rachmanut* (Compassion and mercy)  
*Shalshet hakabbala* (Preserving the chain of tradition)  
*Shalom bayit* (Peace at home)  
*Shmirat haguf* (Protecting the body)  
*Shmirat halashon* (Guarding speech)  
*Simcha* (Joy and celebration)  
Spirituality  
*Tikkun olam* (Improving the world)  
*Tza'ar ba'aley chayim* (Prevention of pain to animals)  
*Tzedek* (Social justice)  
*Tzniyut* (Modesty)  
*Yirat Shamayim* (Awe of God)

## **Jewish Environmental Values in Torah**

### Vegetarianism

#### GENESIS 1:29-30

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

### Stewardship

#### GENESIS 2:15

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

### Sabbatical Year

#### EXODUS 23:10-11

For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.

### Trees in War

#### DEUTERONOMY 20:19

When you are attacking a town and the war drags on, you must not cut down the trees with your axes. You may eat the fruit, but do not cut down the trees. Are the trees your enemies, that you should attack them?



## **Tu B'Shvat**

the fifteenth day of the lunar month Shevat

### **Birthday of the Trees**

Tu B'Shvat, the full moon of the lunar month Shevat, in other words, the middle of the middle month, is considered to be the birthday of the trees. It is one of four “new years” of the Jewish calendar – Rosh Hashanah and Nisan (the month containing Passover) being the two most prominent. The first of Elul was an ancient new year for tithing animals; Tu B'Shvat was an ancient financial new year with respect to certain agricultural laws related to tithing, including the tithing of fruits. Over time it became a minor festival. With the majority of winter rain having fallen and sap rising in the trees, the Talmud (developed 70 BCE – 500 CE) declares Tu B'Shvat a harbinger of spring.

After the various exiles of the Jews from the Land of Israel, Tu B'Shvat also became a day for commemorating connection to the lost land of Promise. During much of Jewish history the only observance of this day was the practice of eating fruit associated with the Holy Land, as described in Deuteronomy 8:8 - “a Land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey.”

In the 20<sup>th</sup> C, with the advent of Zionism and then the founding of the State of Israel, the association of Tu B'Shvat with the Land of Israel gained even more significance. In Israel, the day is celebrated as a secular holiday, with elaborate

tree-planting ceremonies.

The Kabbalists (13<sup>th</sup> C) (mystics) in the town of Safed, in the Galilee, expounded on the meaning of a New Year for trees, further developing a relationship between Tu B'Shvat and Rosh Hashanah. Their spiritual lens on the festival derived from the Kabbalistic image of God as a tree.

They imagined the dynamic aspect of God's continual flow through the world as a Tree whose roots are above and whose trunk and branches reach down. Through this Tree there courses a divine flow that irrigates the world, giving life to the whole palpable universe. This is the Tree of Life, the ultimate treasure of the Garden of Eden.

The Kabbalists' glorified Tu B'Shvat by lighting candles and decorating their homes with myrtle branches, flowers, greenery and scented rose water. They also developed a Seder the ritual of which centered on conscious eating of fruit acknowledged by blessings, and the drinking of four cups of wine, beginning with a cup of white wine, then a cup of mild pink made by mixing some red wine into the white, a cup of deep rose, and a cup of red with just a drop of white in it. These four glasses of wine may have represented the shift in the yearly seasons from the paleness of winter through the awakening spring into blooming summer and the riotous color of fall.

In the early 1970's the many-layered Jewish imagery of trees – Biblical, Kabbalistic, Zionist – became especially important to North American Jews protesting the Vietnam War at a time when US policy took as one of its tasks the destruction of Vietnamese forests. Deuteronomy 20:19 teaches that even if one decides to make war against a city, its trees must be protected. Out of this focus developed a Campaign for Trees and Life for Vietnam, which raised money for reforestation and reconstruction of devastated areas in Vietnam.

From the same command of the Torah not to destroy trees in wartime, the rabbis deduced the general command of *bal tashchit* (Do Not Destroy), an entire ethic of protecting both the natural world and the product of human labors. If we are expected to preserve the trees of our enemies during warfare, how much the more must we preserve earth and air and water in times of peace!

Out of this has grown yet another iteration of Tu B'Shvat, elevating the holiday as a celebration and reaffirmation of our stewardship of the earth and our mandate to protect God's world.

# **Chevruta Study**

## **further teachings on Judaism and the environment**

Rabbi Lawrence Troster, z"l

Instructions: peruse the headings and choose to read and discuss those that resonate most immediately in the time allotted

### **1. God created the universe.**

This is the most fundamental concept of Judaism. Its implications are that only God has absolute ownership over Creation (Gen. 1-2, Psalm 24:1, I Chron. 29:10-16). Thus Judaism's worldview is theocentric not anthropocentric. The environmental implications are that humans must realize that they do not have unrestricted freedom to misuse Creation, as it does not belong to them. Everything we own, everything we use ultimately belongs to God. Even our own selves belong to God. As a prayer in the High Holiday liturgy proclaims, "The soul is Yours and the body is Your handiwork." As we are "sojourners with You, mere transients like our ancestors; our days on earth are like a shadow..." (I Chronicles 29:15), we must always consider our use of Creation with a view to the larger good in both time (responsibility to future generations) and space (others on this world). We must also think beyond our own species to that of all Creation.

### **2. God's Creation is good.**

In Genesis 1: 31 when God found all of Creation, "very good," this means several things. First of all it means that Creation is sufficient, structured and ordered (the rabbis called it *Seder Bereishit*, the Order of Creation). It is also harmonious. It exists to serve God (Psalm 148). This order reflects God's wisdom (Psalm 104:24), which is beyond human understanding (Psalm 92:6-7, Job 38-39). All of God's creations are consequently part of the Order of Creation and all are subject to its nature (Psalm 148). Humans are also part of the Order, which can be said to be a community of worshipers.

### **3. Human beings are created in the image of God**

Human beings have a special place and role in the Order of Creation. Of all God's creations, only human beings have the power to disrupt Creation. This power, which gives them a kind of control over Creation, comes from special characteristics that no other creature possesses (Psalm 8). This idea is expressed in the concept that humans were created in the image of God (*tzelem Elohim*). In its original sense, *tzelem Elohim*, means that humans were put on the earth to act as God's agents and to actualize God's presence in Creation.

This also has ethical implications which stem from the fact that human beings

have certain intrinsic dignities: infinite value, equality and uniqueness. It also means that human beings possess God-like capacities: power, consciousness, relationship, will, freedom and life. Human beings are supposed to exercise their power, consciousness and free will to be wise stewards of Creation. They should help to maintain the Order of Creation even while they are allowed to use it for their own benefit within certain limits established by God (Genesis 2:14). This balance applies to both human society as well to the natural world.

Since the time of the expulsion from Garden of Eden, Creation has tended to be out of balance because of the human impulse towards inequality resulting from the misuse of its powers for selfish ends. The earth is morally sensitive to human misdeeds (Genesis 4, Leviticus 18:27-30).

#### **4. Humanity should view their place in Creation with love and awe.**

It may be said that there are two books of God's revelation to humanity: The Torah and Creation itself. The book of Creation can help us to perceive ourselves as "living breathing beings connected to the rhythms of the earth, the biogeochemical cycles, the grand and complex diversity of ecological systems." (Mitchell Thomashow, *Ecological Identity*) This knowledge is gained both through an understanding of Creation and through scientific knowledge. In Judaism, this can be understood as the fulfillment of the commandments to love and to fear God (Deuteronomy 6:5,13). Rambam (Moses Maimonides, 1135-1204) interpreted these commandments in the following way:

"When a person observes God's works and God's great and marvelous creatures, and they see from them God wisdom that is without estimate or end, immediately they will love God, praise God and long with a great desire to know God's Great Name...And when a person thinks about these things they draw back and are afraid and realizes that they are small, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of God who is perfect in knowledge." (Mishneh Torah, Sepher Madah, Hikhhot Yesodei Ha-Torah 2:1-2)

Thus, when we study Creation with all the tools of modern science, we are filled with love and a sense of connection to a greater order of things. We feel a sense of wonder but also a sense of awe and humility as we perceive how small we are in the universe as well as within the history of evolution. Love and humility should then invoke in us a sense of reverence for Creation and modesty in our desire to use it. We should, according to Abraham Joshua Heschel see the world as God-centered, not human-centered. By putting God at the center of life, we see the sacred in everything and the natural world becomes a source of wonder and not only a resource for our use and abuse.

#### **5. The Sabbath and prayer help us to achieve this state of mind.**

The Sabbath is a way to begin to engender this sense of love and humility before Creation. It is also a way to living a sustainable life. For one day out of seven, we limit our use of resources. We walk to attend synagogue and drive only when walking is not possible. We do not cook and we do not shop. We can use the day for relaxation, contemplation and to ask ourselves: what is the real purpose of human life? Are we here on earth only to get and to spend? As Rabbi Schorsch has written: "To rest is to acknowledge our limitations. Willful inactivity is a statement of subservience to a power greater than our own." (To Till and to Tend, page 20)

Prayer also helps us to recognize that everything we are, everything we have and everything we use ultimately comes from God (Babylonian Talmud, Brakhot 35a). When we say a blessing, we create a moment of holiness, a sacred pause. Prayer also creates an awareness of the sacred by taking us out of ourselves and our artificial environments and allowing us to truly encounter natural phenomenon. Prayer creates a loss of control which allows us to "see the world in the mirror of the holy." (Heschel) We are then able to see the world as an object of divine concern and we can then place ourselves beyond self and more deeply within Creation.

## **6. The Torah prohibits the wasteful consumption of anything.**

In Judaism, the halakhah (Jewish law) prohibits wasteful consumption. When we waste resources we are violating the *mitzvah* (commandment) of *Bal Tashhit* ("Do not destroy"). It is based on 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? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siege works against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced."

This law was expanded in later Jewish legal sources to include the prohibition of the wanton destruction of household goods, clothes, buildings, springs, food or the wasteful consumption of anything (see Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and Wars 6:8, 10; Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb*, 279-80). The underlying idea of this law is the recognition that everything we own belongs to God. When we consume in a wasteful manner, we damage Creation and violate our mandate to use Creation only for our legitimate benefit. Modesty in consumption is a value that Jews have held for centuries. For example, one is not supposed to be excessive in eating and drinking or in the kind of clothes that one wears (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Discernment, chapter 5). Jews are obligated to consider carefully our real needs whenever we purchase anything. We are obligated when

we have a *simchah* (a celebration) to consider whether we need to have elaborate meals and wasteful decorations. We are obligated to consider our energy use and the sources from which it comes.

## **7. The Torah gives an obligation to save human life.**

The Jewish tradition mandates an obligation to save and preserve life (called in Jewish legal sources: *pikuach nefesh*) based on an interpretation of Leviticus 18:5, “You shall keep My laws and My rules, by the pursuit of which man shall live: I am the Lord (See Babylonian *Talmud Sanhedrin* 74a).” Jewish law forbids us from knowingly harming ourselves (Leviticus 19:28). There are also numerous sources mandating the proper disposal of waste; the noxious products from industrial production must be kept far from human habitation (see for example, Deuteronomy 23:13-15, *Mishnah Baba Batra* 2:9) In the Jewish tradition, the public good overrides individual desires.

While there are many useful and even lifesaving technologies that come from modern chemicals and materials, we have an obligation to be cautious in their use. *Pikuach nefesh* demands that we consider the impact of our use of chemicals and other materials, not only in the short term but also in the long term. For the Jewish tradition, the Precautionary Principle can be seen as a modern form of the warning not to tamper too much with the boundaries of Creation.

## **8. The Torah prohibits the extinction of species and causing undo pain to non-human creatures.**

Our ancestors could not have anticipated the loss of biodiversity that the modern world has produced; from their perspective, there was no natural extinction rate of species. God, they believed, had created all species at one time and there could be no new creatures. Only humans could cause extinction and bring about the loss of one of the members of the Creation choir. In the Torah there is a law that says:

“If along the road, you chance upon a bird’s nest, in any 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 with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7)

Ramban (Moses ben Nachman, Nachmanides, 1194-1270) in his commentary to the Torah wrote:

“This also is an explanatory commandment of the prohibition you shall not kill it [the mother] and its young both in one day (Leviticus 22:28). The reason for both [commandments] is that we should not have a cruel heart, or it may be that Scripture does not permit us to destroy a species altogether, although it permits slaughter [for

food] within that group. Now the person who kills the mother and the young in one day or takes them when they are free to fly, [it is regarded] as though they have destroyed that species.”

It is evident from the first chapter of Genesis and other Biblical texts (Psalm 104, 148, and Job 38-41) that God takes care of, and takes pleasure in, the variety of life that makes up Creation. And although we might regard a species as unimportant or bothersome to human beings, God does not regard them so.

The rabbis understood that we do not know God’s purpose for every creature and that we should not regard any of them as superfluous. “Our Rabbis said: Even those things that you may regard as completely superfluous to Creation – such as fleas, gnats and flies—even they were included in Creation; and God’s purpose is carried through everything—even through a snake, a scorpion, a gnat, a frog.” (*Breishit Rabbah* 10:7) In environmental terms, every species has an inherent value beyond its instrumental or useful value to human beings.

Related to this idea is the concept of *Tzaar Baalei Chayyim*, the prohibition of hurting animals without good purpose (based on Deut. 22:6, 22:10, 25:4, Numbers 22:32, Exodus 20:8-10, Lev. 22:27-8). These concepts bring to our relationships with the non-human world limits and controls over our power and greed.

## **9. Environmental Justice is a Jewish value.**

The Torah has numerous laws which attempt to redress the power and economic imbalances in human society and Creation. Examples are the Sabbatical year (Exodus 23:11, Leviticus 25:2-5, Deuteronomy 15:1-4) and the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-24).

There is a whole program in the Torah for creating a balanced distribution of resources across society (Exodus 22:24-26, Leviticus 25:36-37, Deuteronomy 23:20-1, 24:6,10-13,17). This is an expression of the concept of *Tzedek*, which means righteousness, justice and equity. It is the value, which tries to correct the imbalances, which humans create in society and in the natural world. In the modern world globalization has strived to achieve the free movement of people, information, money, goods and services but it can also create major disruptions in local cultures and environments.

While globalization has created great wealth for millions of people, many millions more have been bypassed by its benefits and has had in some cases a negative impact upon the environment and human rights. The Jewish concept of *Tzedek* demands that we create a worldwide economy that is sustainable and that is equitable in the distribution of wealth and resources.

## **10. *Tikkun Olam*: The perfection/fixing of the world is in our hands.**

There is a *midrash* (Rabbinic commentary on the Bible) which Jewish environmentalists are fond of quoting:

“When God created the first human beings, God led them around the garden of Eden and said: “Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.” (*Midrash Kohelet Rabbah*, 1 on Ecclesiastes 7:13)

In the Jewish liturgy there is a prayer called *Aleinu* in which we ask that the world be soon perfected under the sovereignty of God (*le-takein 'olam be-malkhut Shaddai*). *Tikkun 'olam*, the perfecting or the repairing of the world, has become a major theme in modern Jewish social justice theology. It is usually expressed as an activity, which must be done by humans in partnership with God. It is an important concept in light of the task ahead in environmentalism.

In our ignorance and our greed, we have damaged the world and silenced many of the voices of the choir of Creation. Now we must fix it. There is no one else to repair it but us.

## A Tu B'Shvat Seder

The Tu B'shvat Seder is a celebration of our relationship with nature and with fruit trees in particular, and it is a time for reflection. Today, as we celebrate together, let us envision ourselves as partners in shaping, cultivating, and healing our natural world.

The seder has four parts. Each, as on Passover, with its own glass of wine. Mystically, the seder sections represent four worlds described in Kabbalah, moving from most physical to most spiritual. The seder also refers to the seasons, embodying a move from the hibernating world of winter toward Spring awakening, and elevates different kinds of fruits symbolizing aspects of the human experience.

### *The World of Asiyah (Actualization)*

*First Cup – white wine*

*Conscious eating: fruits and nuts with a hard outside and an edible inside*

Although seemingly inedible from the outside, each of the foods at the level of Asiyah, when peeled or shelled, hold gifts that transcend their outward appearance. Like winter, when everything lays dormant and hidden within.

Because of their hard exterior, these foods can represent the human tendency to judge others by their outer appearance. They can also represent the ways we separate ourselves from other people.

Eating these fruits reminds us that we all carry a divine spark within.

When have you “judged a book by its cover”  
only to realize that you were mistaken?

### *World of Yetzirah (Formation)*

*Second Cup – add a few drops of red wine*

*Conscious eating: fruits with pits at their center*

We now drink our second cup of wine, Just as each new stream begins with a trickle, each flower with a bud, just a few drps of color transform the hue of our wine.

Although we discard the pits of these fruits, they are the seeds, the means to rebirth. These fruits can remind us that every flowering tree was once bare and that the means to growth can sometimes come from the innermost overlooked places. They can symbolize the potential in us that is not yet tapped.

What is something you have done or created that started out very small and became bigger or more important over time?

How do you view the difference between being wrapped in a protective shell or peel and being soft on the exterior, formed around a hard core?

### *World of Beriah (Creation)*

*Third Cup – half red and half white*

*Conscious eating: fruits that are entirely edible*

We drink the third cup of wine. We now have half a cup of red and half a cup of white liquid – even though the trees will be full and green and their flowers will blossom, their growth is not complete. So much more will be created; so much more to come.

These fruits can remind us of the wholeness of the world, where nothing is wasted and everything nourishes everything else. We can take this time to look at the fruit of our own creations and actions and consider how to deepen our relationships in the world and with the earth.

When do you feel truly happy and whole?

### *World of Atzilut (Presence, Emanation, Birth)*

*Fourth Cup – red with a drop or two of white*

*instead of eating, we take in a fragrance, perhaps that of a peel discarded*

Now we come to the final cup; the drops of white in the red remind us of the first cup we drank and of the cyclical nature of the seasons.

This final section of the Seder represents what is invisible to the eye.

Beyond the cycle of eating is the cycle of breathing, when something lives both within and without us at the same time, when it is so much a part of us that we cannot even see it. At this level, all things are already part of each other. We all that this kind of connection with the earth and with God. Like smells, the ways we remember this connection are subtle: the feel of the soil or the smell of dew, the color of the changing leaves, the sound of birds migrating, or the clasp of a hand.

What helps you remember and appreciate what you cannot see?

May the New Year of the Trees begin a year of growth; may it be a year of renewal for the trees and for us; and may our blessings give strength to the trees and may our eyes be opened to the wonders of Creation, and may we nurture the world that nurtures us.

## Some Blessings Over Food

Note: these blessings are written using “*Melech*” – “King” or “Majesty” as a name of God. Renewal Jews often replace “*Melech Haolam*” – “Ruler of the Universe” with “*Ruach Haolam*” – “Spirit of the Universe.” Others replace with other names of God, like “*Mekor Hachayyim*” – “Wellspring of Life.”

### Bread

Bread made from the five species of grains identified by our sages (wheat, barley, rye, spelt or oat) require the blessing “*Hamotzi*”.

*Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha’Olam, Hamotzi lechem min haaretz.*

Blessed are You, Source of all life,  
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

Prior to eating bread, we wash our hands in preparation - a consecration of the hands that bring our bread to our mouths with consciousness, and we say a blessing for washing/consecration of our hands.

*Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha’Olam,  
asher kideshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu al netilat yadayim.*

Blessed are You, God, Ruler of the Universe,  
Who has sanctifies us with your commandments  
and asks us to consecrate the work of our hands.

### Other Baked Goods

Food that is made from grain but is not bread gets the blessing *mezonot*. This includes cakes and pastries, crackers and cereals, pasta and other cooked grain products like rice and barley.

*Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha’Olam, borei minei mezonot.*

Blessed are you God, O Fountain of Blessings,  
Who creates the variety of sustenance.

### Wine

Wine has special significance and uses in Jewish law, so it gets its own blessing. Make this blessing when drinking wine or grape juice:

*Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam, borei pri hagafen.*

Blessed are You God, ruler of all time and space,  
Who creates the fruit of the vine.

### **Fruit from Perennial Trees**

*Baruch ata A-donai, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam, borei pri haetz.*

Blessed are You, Source of all Life, who creates the fruit of the tree.

### **Vegetables and Fruits**

"Fruits of the ground" include vegetables, legumes, peanuts, and the fruit that does not grow on trees, like melons, bananas, pineapple, and some berries. On all these, make the "*Ha-adamah*" blessing:

*Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam, borei pri ha-adamah.*

Blessed are You, God, Fountain of Blessings,  
Who creates the fruit of the earth.

### **"Shehakol"**

All foods that do not fall into the preceding specific groups get the blessing "Shehakol." This includes animal products: meat, chicken, fish, and eggs; water and all other drinks (except for wine) and soups; and miscellaneous foods like mushrooms, candy, etc.

*Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam, shehakol nihiyah bed'varo.*

Blessed are You, God, Sovereign of the Universe,  
by Whose word all things came to be.

### **Blessing Over Sweet Fragrances**

*Baruch atah A-donay, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, borei minei besamim.*

Blessed are You, God, Holy One, Creator of all,  
who has created the variety of sweet fragrances.