

# **Our Relationship to the Land: Meaning of the Omer**

## **Alternate Lesson Plan for More Text Oriented Groups**

**Estimated Time: Three class sessions, approximately 45 minutes**  
**Suggested for Middle School Grades**

Note: This is a great option for those classes/ groups who wish to use the ongoing rhythm of Parshat HaShavuah learning as a means of introducing Environmental Education components.

**Suggested Preparation:** The readings below may be assigned and given to students to prepare before they meet as groups as a homework assignment. They should be read along with the actual Parsha for which each *Dvar Torah* is indicated. In this case, they may use the group time to process the material, using the organizer and taking the initiative to do some searches for follow-up materials. This would be a wonderful opportunity to use the site of <http://www.greenflagschools.org> to locate additional follow up information and activities.

**Let's think about this together:** G-d is the ultimate strategic planner. G-d sets everything in place and gives us continual reminders about how we are to “keep it all going,” constantly balancing our role of working and using the land with our role of maintaining and guarding the land, as we discussed in earlier lessons. Now, as we move through the season of *Sefirat HaOmer*, we see these reminders in our cycle of readings in *Parshat Hashavuah*. In this activity, the teacher will divide the class into smaller learning groups, and give each student the appropriate material from the *Parshiot* that we read during this season.

For the purposes of this lesson, we will be using the following materials from: **Etz Chayim Hee: A Torah Commentary for Environmental Learning and Action**, Canfei Nesharim Publication, sponsored by the Gaia Fund, 2008.

To locate these materials: Note that the link for these materials is parsha/ Go to this website and scroll down the Parshat HaShavuah list until you get to each of these texts.

Additional web connections suggested are as follows:

[Holidays/a-tool-for-nature-consciousness/](#) (omer)  
[tubshevat/the-land-is-mine/](#) (shmittah/Sabbatical year and relationship to land)  
[Holidays/an-ecological-synthesis/](#) (omer)  
[science/connect-food-land/](#) (land and food related action suggestions)  
[science/native-species/](#) (connecting to your own land/backyard)  
[torah/lech-lecha-justice-in-the-land/](#) (Abraham and Lot sharing the land)  
[eikev-shivat-haminim-seven-fruits-israel](#) (on the fruits of the land of Israel)

Alternatively, each group can be given one of the following texts from the hard copy of these materials (copies can be made for the purpose of this lesson and experience):

1. Parshat Shemini, “An Abundance of Fish,” by Candace Nachman, pp. 87 – 89.
2. Parshat Tazria, “Healing Ourselves, Healing Our Planet,” by Rabbi Natan Greenberg, pp. 90 – 93.
3. Parshat Metzora, “Natural Healing,” by Ramona Rubin, pp. 94 – 96.
4. Parshat Acherei Mot, “Raising up the Physical Sustainably: Lessons of the Ketoret,” by Baruch Herschkopff, pp. 97 – 100.
5. Parshat Kedoshim, “Corporate and Consumer Responsibility,” by Rabbi Carmi Wisemon, pp. 101 – 104.
6. Parshat Emor, “Our Relationship to Other Creatures,” by Ora Sheinson, pp. 105 – 108.
7. Parshat Behar, “The Mitzva of Shemita/The Sabbatical Year,” by Noam Yehuda Sendor, pp. 109 – 112.
8. Parshat Bechukotai, “The Blessing of Rain,” by Jonathan Neril, pp. 113 – 116.

**Note to Teacher:** There are many ways in which this material can be used. What is being suggested here is to divide capable classes into eight groups of two to three students each (or less groups, combining Parshiot that are combined in non-leap years) and have smaller learning groups (*Chevrutot*) go through the indicated reading, fill in the worksheets provided and then have groups report to the class about their findings. The members of the class can then take notes on each presentation (if the teacher feels that the group is capable) and additional copies of the indicated texts can be distributed to the students.

- Students should have been given the assigned material to read prior to this lesson and spend fifteen to twenty minutes in groups discussing the most critical points (using the provided Information Organizer) and then ten

minute presentations should be made, ideally by all groups to the entire class. If time is tight, the teacher can condense this by choosing one lesson per text.

- Teachers should be familiar with all materials and through reading the material prior to these lessons, can and should focus on elements that fit well into the ongoing involvements of the class and environmental issues that are of particular importance to you and your students. There is a great deal of material and related discussions that are possible; obviously, as in any educational learning unit, decisions will and should be made about the directions you wish to take your class. This should be balanced with the overall purpose of these lessons in *stressing that environmental awareness and sustainability is clearly a Jewish responsibility about which our students and community members should learn and take action.*

### ***Alternative Options:***

1. The class can do one of these Parshiot texts together as a model, with the teacher guiding the group through the process and then divide into groups for the remainder of the texts.
2. The class can go through the material together for chosen Parshiot with the teacher and then in small groups work through the Information Organizer. If this option is chosen, each text should be done separately and the teacher may need to make additional copies of the **Information Organizer**.
3. Regardless of when these lessons are actually implemented, the teacher and class can use this as their Parshat HaShavuah class for the appropriate weeks.

Obviously, there are other options depending on the level, group personality and other factors in your class. Use the option that works best in your reality.

Regardless of which choice is utilized, it is estimated that this activity will take about one hour, thus the need for two classes.

### ***Possible Follow-up Actions to Take:***

1. Students can be encouraged to transport this lesson to their family and share it with them at an appropriate moment, perhaps around the Shabbat dinner table, during the appropriate weeks. Educating others and sharing learning

information with family and friends is an important action that all of us can take.

2. The class can make a composite list of all of the actions that can be taken and commit themselves to actual implementation of agreed upon actions to work consciously and purposefully towards attaining Environmental Sustainability.
3. The class can take the list in #2 and put it in a public place in the school to monitor changes in behaviors amongst the students, faculty and other members of the academic community. The focus here is AWARENESS of what we can do to work towards Environmental Sustainability and Health of our larger community. You could even monitor expenses for disposable products in the school and any changes in expenses for that, use of electricity, etc. in the school community. Get everyone involved and show how its to the collective benefit to be aware of these practices and watch them.
4. The class can look at the various activity links and choose a few actions to actually take on for the school, as suggested here in #3 and in the various materials indicated.

[Time frame: approximately 25 - 30 minutes in group work and 60 - 80 minutes in sharing group findings – about 10 minutes per group; the teacher will use various options above in processing this material. Further, the last class can be focused on engaging in an activity connected to Environmental Awareness and Sustainability as suggested above.]

### **Information Organizer**

Text and Intentions/Instructions in *Parshat* \_\_\_\_\_:

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What Has Gone Wrong in our Reality/ Problems We Confront:

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Possible Actions Suggested That Could Bring Healing and *Izzun*:

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