



## Learning Sources for Tu b'Shevat

As part of our 5770 Learning and Action Campaign, we've gathered a rich compilation of traditional Jewish texts which may be learned around the holiday of Tu b'Shevat. Canfei Nesharim also offers individual, printable source sheets based on these materials, with discussion questions, which you may like to use for your community's programs. Sources compiled by Rabbi Daniel Brown. See below for sources for English translations.

### Why Tu b'Shevat?

#### 1. משנה מסכת ראש השנה פרק א משנה א

ארבעה ראשי שנים... באחד בשבט ראש השנה לאילן כדברי בית שמאי בית הלל אומרים בחמשה עשר בו:

Mishna Rosh Hashana 1:1: There are four New Years: ... on the first of Shevat the New Year for the tree, according to Bet Shammai. Bet Hillel say, on the fifteenth thereof.

Rabbi Pinchas Kehati comments on this Mishna: "The Talmud explains that the New Year for the tree was established in Shevat, 'Because most of the rains have already fallen, and the resin has come up in the trees, and as a result the fruits begin to form now.'"

### Discussion questions:

1. Why was Tu b'Shevat chosen as the new year of the trees?
2. What can this teach us about Jewish thought on the timing of marking events and celebrations?
3. How is this similar or different to Jewish perspectives on birthdays, yartzheits, and the timing of other new years like Rosh Hashanah? Why do you think this might be so?

### A. Fruit Trees (recommended for use in Seder World 1)

#### 1. ספר דברים פרק כ:יט

כי תצור אל עיר זמנים רבים להלחם עליה לתפשה לא תשחית את עצמה לגדלך עליה גרזן כי ממנו תאכל ואתו לא תכרת כי האדם עץ השדה לבא מפניך במצור:

Devariim (Deuteronomy) 20:19: When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it to seize it, do not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from it you will eat, and you shall not cut it down; for is the tree of the field a man (could also be translated: "for the tree of the field is a man") that it should enter the siege before you?

#### 2. ספרי דברים פסקא רג

כי האדם עץ השדה, מלמד שחיייו של אדם אינם אלא מן האילן.

Sifrei, Devariim (Deuteronomy) ch. 203: (The scriptural verse) "Because man is a tree of the field" teaches that the life of man is only from the tree.

#### 3. רבינו בחיי דברים פרק כ פסוק יט

(ט) ואותו לא תכרת כי האדם עץ השדה. פירשו המפרשים ז"ל כי חיי האדם ומוזונו הוא עץ השדה... ואין מפעולות עם חכם ונבון להשחית הדבר הראוי ללא תועלת, ולכך אין לך להוציא כח בזה לכרות עץ השדה אלא שתשמור מהשחית אותו ומהזיקו ותקח ממנו התועלת...

Rabbeinu Bachya on Devariim (Deuteronomy) 20:19: "...And you will not cut them down because man is a tree of the field". The commentators, of blessed memory, explain thusly: because man's life and sustenance is (from) the tree of the field... and it is not the way of a wise and understanding nation to needlessly destroy

something so worthy, and therefore you shouldn't cut down a tree of the field, rather you should protect it from destruction and damage, and take benefit from it...

#### **4. פרקי דרבי אליעזר (ווארשא) פרק לד**

ששה קולן יוצא מסוף העולם ועד סופו ואין הקול נשמע...בשעה שכורתין את האילן שהוא עושה פרי הקול יוצא מסוף העולם ועד סופו ואין הקול נשמע...ובשעה שהנשמה יוצאת מן הגוף, הקול יוצא מסוף העולם ועד סופו ואין הקול נשמע.

Pirkei deRabbi Elieizer (Warsaw edition) chapter 34: Six voices go from one end of the world to the other and the sound is not audible... When a fruit-bearing tree is cut down the voice cries out from end of the world to the other, and its sound is not audible... When the soul departs from the body the voice goes out from one end of the world to the other, and its sound is not audible...

#### **Discussion questions:**

1. What do you think of Torah verse and the commentators' conclusions from it?
2. How are trees and people similar? How are we different?
3. Do people rely on trees now as much as they did in the past, given the abundance of products that we now derive from other sources like petroleum and metal? How does this change our view of trees? Of ourselves?

### **B. Settling the Land (recommended for use in World 2)**

#### **1. ויקרא פרק כה פסוק כג**

וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַּר לְצִמְתָּת כִּי לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי גֵרִים וְתוֹשָׁבִים אַתֶּם עַמִּדִּי:

Vayikra (Leviticus) 25:23: The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.

#### **2. ספרא בהר פרשה ג**

...כשתבוא שלי הרי היא שלכם.

Sifra (*bahar*, ch. 3): When it [the land] will be Mine (G-d's), it will be yours (man's).

#### **3. תהלים פרק כד פסוק א**

לְדָוִד מְזֻמָּר לִיקְנוֹת הָאָרֶץ וּמִלֹּאֲזָה תִבְּלֵ וַיֵּשְׁבִי בָּהּ:

Tehillim (Psalms) 24:1: A psalm of David. The earth is the L-rd's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell in it.

#### **4. תהלים 104 פסוק ז**

הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לֵה' וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לְבְנֵי־אָדָם:

Tehillim (Psalms) 115:16: The heavens belong to the L-rd, and the earth He has given to the children of Adam.

#### **5. ויקרא רבה (וילנא) פרשה כה:ג**

ר"י ב"ר סימון פתח (דברים יג) אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו, וכי אפשר לבשר ודם להלוך אחר הקב"ה... אלא מתחלת ברייתו של עולם לא נתעסק הקב"ה אלא במטע תחלה ה"ד (בראשית ב) ויטע ה' אלהים גן בעדן, אף אתם כשנכנסין לארץ לא תתעסקו אלא במטע תחלה ה"ד כי תבאו אל הארץ.

Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah (25:3): Rabbi Yehudah be Shimon began his discourse with the text, "After the Lord your G-d shall ye walk" (Devariim 12:5). But can a man of flesh and blood walk after the Holy One, blessed be he(?)... But in truth the Holy On, blessed be He, from the very beginning of the creation of the world, was before all else occupied with plantation, as is proved by the text, "And the Lord G-d planted a

garden in the first instance in Eden" (Bereshit 2:8), and so do you also, when you enter into the land, occupy yourselves first with nought else but plantation; hence it is written, "And when ye shall come into the land, then ye shall plant."

#### **6. ישעיהו פרק מה פסוק יח**

פי כה אמר יְקוֹן בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא הָאֱלֹקִים יֵצֵר הָאָרֶץ וְעָשָׂהּ הוּא כּוֹנֵנָהּ לֹא תִהְיֶה בְּרָאָה לְשִׁבְתָּ יִצְרָה אֲנִי יְקוֹן וְאִין עוֹד:

Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 45:18: For thus says the Lord that created the heavens; G-d himself that formed the earth and made it; he has established it, he did not create it a waste land, he formed to be inhabited: I am the Lord, and there is none else.

#### **7. תלמוד בבלי מסכת חגיגה דף ב עמוד ב**

... "לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה", אלא מפני תיקון העולם...

Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 2b: "He did not create it a waste land, he formed it to be inhabited", specifically for tikkun olam (repairing the world).

#### **8. שולחן ערוך חושן משפט סימן קעה סעיף כו**

היה רוצה הלוקח לקנותה לבנות בה בתים, ובן המצר רוצה לזורעה, הלוקח זוכה משום ישוב הארץ ואין בה דין בן המצר. ויש מי שאומר שאם המצרן רוצה לנוטעה יכול לסלקו.

Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat 175:26: An interested party desires to buy property in order to build houses, and the owner of adjoining property desires the (same) property in order to plant crops- the interested party has first rights to purchasing the property because of "yishuv ha'aretz" ("settling the land") and we are not concerned with the (presumed first rights of) the owner of adjoining property. And there are some (hallakhik decisors) who say that if the owner of adjoining property wants to plant trees, he may be take precedents.

#### **9. סמ"ע סימן קעה ס"ק מג**

משום ישוב הארץ כו'. דכל שיש קבוע וקיום בהקרקע טפי יש בו ישוב טפי, והבתים בר קיימא טפי מזרעים, ואילנות קבועים ונשרשים בקרקע טפי מבתים. ודין זה נוהג אפילו בחו"ל...

Sm'a (on the preceding source): "...because of 'yishuv ha'aretz'..." (that is to say,) that everything which has greater permance and is more established in the land better fulfills "yishuv" ("settlement"), houses are more established then crops, and trees are more established and remain in the earth longer than houses. And this hallakhik ruling is also practiced in hutz l'aretz (outside of the land of Israel)...

#### **Discussion questions:**

1. Who owns the world, G-d or people? What is humanity's role in relationship to the land?
2. The idea of settling the land has ancient Jewish roots and many modern applications. Why do you think "settling the land" has been considered such a value in Jewish thought over time?
3. When we settle the land, what is the human relationship to G-d? If it's not Shabbos, you may find it helpful to have participants draw a diagram that shows their view of the relationship between G-d, people, and the land.

### **C. The Interdependence of the World (Recommended for use in World 3)**

#### **1. משנה מסכת אבות פרק ה משנה א**

בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם ומה תלמוד לומר והלא במאמר אחד יכול להבראות אלא להפרע מן הרשעים שמאבדין את העולם שנברא בעשרה מאמרות וליתן שכר טוב לצדיקים שמקיימין את העולם שנברא בעשרה מאמרות:

Mishna Avot 5:1: By ten acts of speech was the world made. And what does Scripture mean [by having G-d say *say* ten times]? And is it not so that with a single act of speech [the world] could have been brought into being? But it is to exact punishment from the wicked, who destroy a world which was created through ten

acts of speech, and to secure a reward for the righteous, who sustain a world which was created through was created through ten acts of speech.

## **2. The Nineteen Letters- Letter Three Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch**

It was not with just one word, one summons of creation, that the Almighty brought this world into being, the whole of it and every detail; for if it had been created in this manner, everything would be directly dependent upon G-d's Word for its existence, life, and functioning. Instead, He called forth His world into existence in ten stages; He created an abundance of forces, intermingled and functioning closely together, according to His Word - and then He separated them, so that each had to sustain the other: none was henceforth able to exist and function by itself, but had to be sustained by its fellow creatures and, in turn, had to help them exist and function. In this way everything contributes according to its strength, however much or little, to the existence of the whole; and if it destroys a fellow creature, it robs itself of what it needs for its own existence.

### **3. תומר דבורה – פרק ג**

... שכמו שהחכמה העליונה אינה מבזה שום נמצא והכל נעשה משם, דכתיב (תהילים ק"ד, כ"ד) "כלם בחכמה עשית", כן יהיה רחמי האדם על כל מעשיו יתברך... ועל דרך זה לא יבזה שום נמצא מן הנמצאים, שכולם בחכמה, ולא יעקור הצומי אלא לצורך, ולא ימית הבעל חי אלא לצורך...

Tomer Devorah (Rav Moshe Cordovero) ch.3: Just as the Higher Wisdom does not disdain any creature, and causes everything, as it is written in Tehillim, "You made them all with wisdom" (Psalms 104:24), so should people's mercy be upon all G-d's works... Along these lines, a person should not treat anything disrespectfully, for all were made with wisdom. He should not uproot a plant except where necessary, and he should not cause the death of a living creature except where necessary.

### **4. בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשה ה סימן ו**

...שנברא הברזל התחילו האילנות מרתתים, אמר להן מה לכם מרתתין, עץ מכם אל יכנס בי, ואין אחד מכם ניזוק.  
Bereshit (Genesis) Rabbah ch. 5, sub. 10: When iron was created, the trees began to shake (with fear), he (the iron) said to them: "why do you shake? If your wood does not enter me (as an axe handle), not one of you will be harmed!"

### **5. רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק ב הלכה ב**

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו, בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאור ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול כמו שאמר דוד צמאה נפשי לאלהים לאל חי, וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן מיד הוא נרתע לאחוריו ויפחד ויודע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה עומדת בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות, כמו שאמר דוד כי אראה שמיד מעשה אצבעותיך מה אנוש כי תזכרנו, ולפי הדברים האלו אני מבאר כללים גדולים ממעשה רבון העולמים כדי שיהיו פתח למבין לאהוב את השם, כמו שאמרו חכמים בענין אהבה שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם.

Rambam (Maimonides) Fundamentals of the Torah, 2:2: Now, what the way that leads to the love of him and the reverence for him? When a person contemplates his great and wonderous acts and creations, obtaining from them a glimpse of his wisdom, which is beyond compare and infinite, he will promptly love and glorify him, longing exceedingly to know the greatName of G-d. As David said "My whole being thirsts for G-d, the living G-d" (tehillim 42:3). When he ponders over these very subjects, he will forthwith recoil startled, conceiving that he is a lowly, obscure creature... as David said: "As I look up to the heavens thy fingers made... what is man that thou shouldst think of him?" (tehillim 8:4-5)...

## **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why was the world created with interdependence as such a fundamental part of its nature?
2. What can this interdependence teach us about our relationships with other people, and our relationships with the animals, plants and inanimate objects of creation?
3. What can we learn about G-d from the vast and complex nature of creation?

## D. "Fruit" Trees (recommended for use in World 4)

### 1. בראשית פרק א פסוק יא-יב

ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע עץ פרי עשה פרי למינו אשר זרעו בו על הארץ ויהי כן: ותוצא הארץ דשא עשב  
מזריע זרע למיניהו ועץ עשה פרי אשר זרעו בו למיניהו וירא אלקים כי טוב:

Bereshit (Genesis) 1:11-12: And G-d said, let the earth bring forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed, after its kind, and fruit tree after its kind, whose seed was in itself, after its kind; and G-d saw that it was good.

### 2. רש"י בראשית פרק א פסוק יא

עץ פרי - שיהא טעם העץ כטעם הפרי, והיא לא עשתה כן, אלא (פסוק יב) ותוצא הארץ עץ עושה פרי, ולא העץ פרי, לפיכך כשנתקלל אדם על עונו נפקדה גם היא על עוניה ונתקללה:

Rashi on Bereshit (Genesis) 1:11: "Fruit-tree" That the taste of the tree (will be) like the taste of (it's) fruit. But it (the earth) did not do so, rather (the verse says) "and the earth brought forth...trees yielding fruit", but the tree was not (itself like the taste of the) fruit. Therefore, when Adam was cursed for his sin, also she (the earth) was cursed for her sin, and was cursed.

## 3. Orot haTeshuvah 6:7- Rav Avraham Isaac Kook

7. At the inception of creation it was intended that the tree have the same taste as the fruit (Genesis Rabbah 5:9). All the supportive actions that sustain any general worthwhile spiritual goal should by right be experienced in the soul with the same feeling of elation and delight as the goal itself is experienced when we envision it. But earthly existence, the instability of life, the weariness of the spirit when confined in a corporate frame, brought it about that only the fruition of the final step, which embodies the primary ideal, is experienced in its pleasure and splendor. The trees that bear the fruit, with all of the necessity for the growth of the fruit have, however, become coarse matter and have lost their taste. This is the failing of the "earth," because of which it was cursed when Adam was also cursed for his sin. But every defect is destined to be mended. Thus we are assured that the day will come when creation will return to its original state, when the taste of the tree will be the same as the taste of the fruit. The earth will "repent" of its "sin" and the way of the practical life will no longer obstruct the delight of the ideal, which is sustained by appropriate intermediate steps on its way toward realization, and will stimulate its emergence from potentiality to actuality.

### 4. תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כג עמוד א

יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא, חזייה לההוא 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 אשכחתי, כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי – שתלי נמי לבראי. יתיב, קא כריך ריפתא, אתא ליה שינתא, נים. אהדרא ליה משוניתא, איכסי מעינא, ונים שבעין שנין. כי קם חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה קא מלקט מינייהו. אמר ליה: את הוא דשתלתי? – אמר ליה: בר בריה אנא. אמר ליה: שמע מינה דניימי שבעין שנין.

Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 23a: One day he [Honi the Circle Drawer] was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree; he asked him, How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit? The man replied: Seventy years. He then further asked him: Are you certain that you will live another seventy years? The man replied: I found [ready grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children.

Honi sat down to have a meal and sleep overcame him. As he slept a rocky formation enclosed upon him which hid him from sight and he continued to sleep for seventy years. When he awoke he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and he asked him, Are you the man who planted the tree? The man replied: I am his grandson. Thereupon he exclaimed: It is clear that I slept for seventy years.

### Discussion questions:

1. Think about times in your life when the process of getting to a result was very difficult. When the process is more challenging, do you find the result more satisfying?
2. The sages seem to imply that it was not meant to be that way; that the “tree bark” or the work put in should be as satisfying as the fruit. What would this be like? Do you think this is possible?
3. What things have you been putting off because the fruits of your labor, while important, will take a very long time to achieve?
4. What environmental actions might you take on if you were willing to have the patience of Honi?

Compiled by Rabbi Daniel Brown

### Sources for Translations:

All entries listed are for English sources in print; all other translations were provided to, or produced by the compiler of this source sheet.

English translations for sources 1 and C1 taken from *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. Jacob Neusner. 1988, Yale University Press. New Haven and London.

English translations for sources B3, C3, and D4 taken from the "Koren Tanakh" *The Holy Scriptures*. Revised and edited by Harold Fisch. 1997, Koren Publishers Ltd. Jerusalem.

English translation for source B5 taken from *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon. 1983, The Soncino Press. London, New York.

Source C2 taken from *The Nineteen Letters*. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch Translated Karin Paritzky, with commentary by Rabbi Joseph Elias. 1995, Feldheim. Jerusalem.

English translation for source C5 taken from *Mishneh Torah Maimonides' Code of Law and Ethics*. Abridged and translated by Philip Birnbaum. 1944, Hebrew Publishing Co. New York.

English translation for D3 taken from *Abraham Isaac Kook*. Ben Zion Bokser. 1978, Paulist Press. New York, Ramsey, Toronto.