

Background Information for Tu Bishvat

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On Tu Bishvat we celebrate the new year for trees. Our sages, felt that 15th of Shvat is the date on which the last year's rains stopped irrigating the trees and would start to benefit from the new year's rains.

Tu Bishvat is the festival that demonstrates our link to Eretz Israel and expresses a love of the land and for the commandments that relate to the land. It is the festival of agriculture and nature's renewal; the festival of love for trees which reaches back to our distant roots as a people in the land of Israel.

This festival was born in the country of Israel, where its main customs and traditions developed. Traditionally, the festival is commemorated by planting trees in Israel and eating the seven biblical fruits, as in the verse:

פִּי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ, מְבִיאֶךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה:
אֶרֶץ, נַחְלֵי מַיִם--עֵינַת וְתַהֲמַת, יִצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָר.
ח אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וְשִׁעְרָה, וְגִפְנֵי וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן; אֶרֶץ-זֵית שָׁמוֹן, וּדְבַשׁ.

For the Lord G-d will lead you into the good land, a land flowing with waters... A land of wheat and barley and vine, of fig and pomegranate, the land of the olive and honey. (Deuteronomy, 8:7-8)

The first fruits of these species were once brought as an offering to the priests in the Temple and we try to eat the fruits of these seven trees, as well as other fruits associated with Eretz Israel and its produce - particularly: almonds, citrus fruits, apples, whether fresh or dry.

The sources:

וכִּי-תֵבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, וּנְטַעְתֶּם כָּל-עֵץ מֵאֲכָל

And when you enter this land, you shall plant fruit-bearing trees... Vayikra, 19.23

This source comments on our commitment to nature:



מתחלת ברייתו של עולם לא נתעסק הקב"ה אלא במטע תחלה הה"ד (בראשית ב) ויטע ה' אלהים גן בעדן, אף אתם כשנכנסין לארץ לא תתעסקו אלא במטע תחלה הה"ד כי תבאו אל הארץ.

The Holy One, blessed be He, occupied Himself with planting immediately after Creation of the world. For it is specifically written: "And the Lord G-d planted a garden in Eden". So shall you also, when you enter the land of Israel, first of all occupy yourself in planting. Vayikra Rabba, 25

This midrash recalls our duty to be committed to investing in the future by planting and caring for the environment.



ח] אמר להם הקב"ה לישראל, אעפ"י 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 נטעו לבניכם, שלא יאמר אדם אני זקן ולמחר אני מת, ולמה אני יגע בשביל אחרים...לפיכך לא יבטל אדם מן הנטיעות, אלא כשם שמצא עוד יוסיף ויטע, אפילו זקן

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the Jews: even if you see that it is filled with every good thing, you shall not say: I shall settle, but will not plant, - and you shall not be negligent in planting... When you enter the land, you will find trees planted by other people. So shall you plant trees for your descendants. And let no-one say: I am already old, how much longer shall I live? Why should I strive on behalf of others, if tomorrow I may die? Therefore a person may not evade this duty, even if he plants trees in old age, to add to what has already been planted. Midrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim

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Lesson 1: The The Environment and Our Relationship to the World

We are learning:

- to sequence a story
- to understand how much we need trees and what they can provide us with
- to appreciate and consider our relationships as carers of the world
- that G-d gave us the world to look after and therefore we have a duty to protect nature today and for the future

Introduction

Read pupils *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. The story is about a relationship between a young boy and a tree in a forest. The tree and the boy become best friends. The tree always provides the boy with what he wants - branches to swing from, shade to sit under, apples to snack on, branches to build a house with. As the boy grows older and older he requires more and more of the tree. The tree loves the boy very much and gives him anything he asks for. In the ultimate act of self-sacrifice, the tree lets the boy cut her down so the boy can build a boat in which he can sail. The boy leaves the tree, now a stump. Many years later, the boy, now an old man, returns and the tree says, "I have nothing left to give you". The boy replies that all he needs is a quiet place to sit and rest. The tree happily obliges.

Ask pupils:



- What did the tree give to the boy?
- What did the boy give to the tree?
- What do trees give us?
- Why are they important? Who else benefits from trees?
- Why should we look after nature and the environment?

The Giving Tree

25 minutes

1. Organise pupils into pairs and distribute [The Giving Tree Cards](#), pages 6 and 7.
2. Ask pupils to order the cards.
3. Stick the ordered cards on to paper or card.

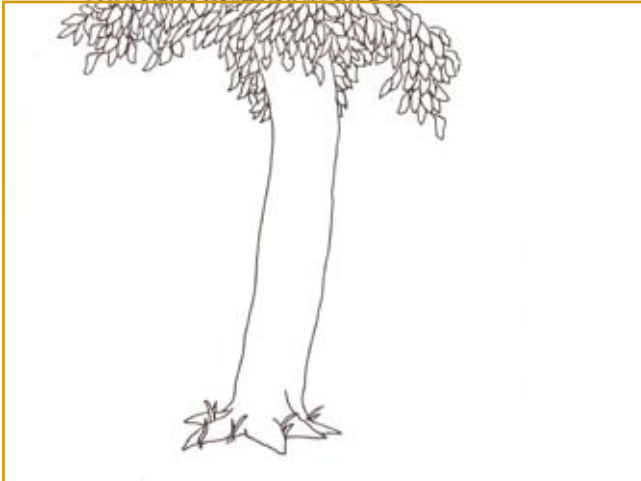
Ask pupils how the boy could have given something back to the environment. Examples can be broad and do not have to relate to the tree.

4. Identify one thing for each stage and either write or draw under each stage what the boy could have done for the environment.

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The Giving Tree Cards 1



Once there was a tree and she loved the little boy



And every day the boy would come and he would gather her leaves



Make them into crowns and play king of the forest



And they would play hide and seek

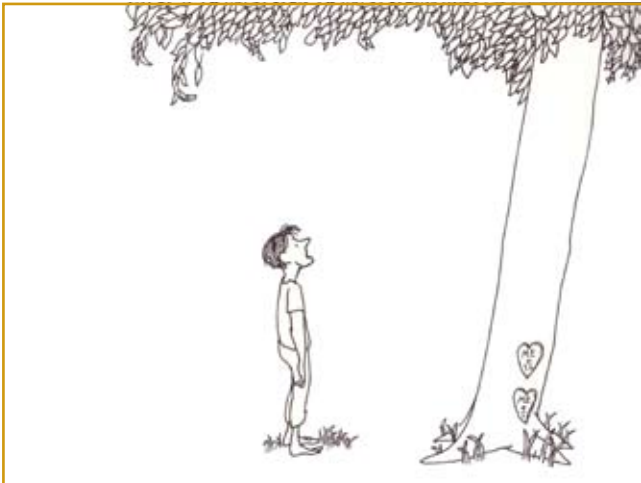


And the boy loved the tree very much



Time went by and the boy grew older

The Giving Tree Cards 2



One day the boy came to the tree and the tree said, "come boy climb up my trunk"



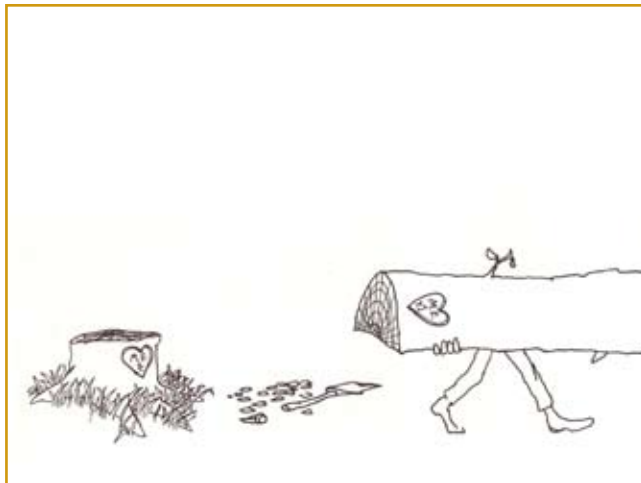
The boy gathered up her apples and carried them away to sell for money



The boy cut off her branches and carried them away to build a house



The boy stayed away for a long time



The boy cut down her trunk and made a boat and sailed away



After a long time the boy came back again and the tree said, "come boy, come sit down and rest," and the boy did