



Tu BiShvat 2020 Text Study

Making the Desert Bloom from our Jewish Sources

Biblical

כִּי־תִצֹר אֶל־עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצָהּ 19
לִנְדֹחַ עָלֶיהָ גֵּרֶוֹן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאַתָּה לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹא
מִפְּנֵיךְ בַּמָּצוֹר:

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**, (*ba'al tachsheet*) 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?

Deuteronomy 20:19

דְּרָכֶיהָ דְּרָכֵי־נֶעֱם וְכָל־נִתְיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם: 17

עֵץ־חַיִּים הִיא לַמְחַיִּיקִים בָּהּ וְתַמְכִּיהָ מֵאֲשֶׁר: (פ) 18

Its ways are ways of pleasantness; and all its paths are peace. It (the Torah) is a tree of life to them that hold on to it; and all its supporters are happy.

Proverbs 3:17-18

Questions for Discussion about Torah texts:

The Torah makes it clear that the earth and trees are important.

- Why do you think trees are not supposed to be cut down, even during a war?
- What can trees provide us?
- The text from Deuteronomy is the origin source text that informs the Jewish value of caring for nature. What else have you learned about Ba'al Tashcheet?
- Why do you think it's important to "not destroy" the environment?
- Why do you think the Torah is referred to as "a tree of life?"
- In what ways are trees in nature similar to the Torah?



JEWISH
NATIONAL
FUND

Your Voice in Israel

jnf.org
800.JNF.0099

f JEWISHNATIONALFUND
JNFUSA
JNFUSA

Rabbinic

. אָמַר רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאִי, שְׁלֹשָׁה

דְּבָרִים שְׁקוּלִין זֶה כְּזֶה, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: אֶרֶץ, וָאָדָם, וּמָטָר. אָמַר רַבִּי לִוִּי בֶר חִיָּא
וּשְׁלֹשֶׁתָן מְשַׁלֵּשׁ אוֹתֵייהוּ, לְלַמֶּדֶךָ שְׁאֵם אֵין אֶרֶץ אֵין מָטָר, וְאֵם אֵין מָטָר אֵין
אֶרֶץ, וְאֵם אֵין שְׁנֵיהֶם אֵין אָדָם.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said: Three things are of equal importance – earth, humans, and rain.

Bereisheet Rabbah, 13:3

אבות דרבי נתן א

אִם הָיְתָה נְטִיעָה בְּתוֹךְ יָדְךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָךְ "הֲרִי לָךְ הַמָּשִׁיחַ", בּוֹא וּנְטֵעַ אֶת
הַנְטִיעָה וְאַחֵר כָּךְ צֵא וְהִקְבִּילוּ.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai used to say: If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone should say to you "Come quickly, the Messiah is here!", first complete the planting, and then go out to greet the Messiah.

Avot d'Rabbi Natan, 31

Questions for Discussion about Rabbinic texts:

Much of the world's Jewish community did not live in Israel during the time when these two texts were written. In many cases, Jews were not land owners at the time.

- Do you agree with Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's list? What would you add to it (e.g. what else do humans need)?
- Why do you think that Rabbi Levi ben Hiygata needed to add to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's statement? What else does humanity need in order to live?

Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai was one of the greatest teachers during his time and is credited for "saving" Judaism by sneaking out of Jerusalem before it was destroyed. By doing this, and holding a secret meeting with the Roman military commander, he ensured that a school could be created in Yavneh. After his meeting, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the school became a center for Jewish life.

- If anyone during this time period could have used the help of the "Messiah," it would be Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakai. If this is the case, why do you think that he was the one who said, plant a tree first?
- Why do you think that planting trees was so important to him?
- Do you think that planting trees is important? Why?



JEWISH
NATIONAL
FUND

Your Voice in Israel

jnf.org
800.JNF.0099

f JEWISHNATIONALFUND

t JNFFUSA

ig JNFFUSA

Modernity
(1900's on)

I contemplate a tree.

I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green traversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground. I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with earth and air—and the growing itself in its darkness. I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life. I can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously that I recognize it only as an expression of the law—those laws according to which a constant opposition of forces is continually adjusted, or those laws according to which the elements mix and separate.

I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers, and eternalize it. Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.

But it can also happen, if ***will and grace*** are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me.

This does not require me to forego any of the modes of contemplation. There is nothing that I must not see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and instance, law and number included and inseparably fused. Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colors and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars—all this in its entirety. The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no aspect of a mood; it confronts me bodily and has to deal with me as I must deal with it—only differently.

One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: ***relation is reciprocity***.

Does the tree then have consciousness, similar to our own? I have no experience of that. But thinking that you have brought this off in your own case, must you again divide the indivisible? What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself.

from Martin Buber, I and Thou

"It is in the Negev that the creativity and pioneer vigor of Israel will be tested, and this will be a crucial test. Israel's capacity for science and research will be tested in the Negev and it is incumbent upon our scientists and researchers to focus on new areas of research which residents of the North will have need of: research to desalinate seawater with inexpensive processes; to exploit solar energy which is so abundant in our country, and especially in the Negev; to use wind power to generate electric power; to prevent the wastage of scarce rain water which flows unused to the Mediterranean or to the Dead Sea; to build ponds across the length and breadth of the Negev for collecting precious rain water, to investigate the vegetation found in the Negev, despite its aridity....it is incumbent upon Israel's scientists to reveal the secrets of nature that are unique to our land...."

David Ben-Gurion, January 1955



**JEWISH
NATIONAL
FUND**

Your Voice in Israel

jnf.org
800.JNF.0099

 JEWISHNATIONALFUND

 JNFUSA

 JNFUSA

"The Negev is a great Zionist asset, with no substitute anywhere in the country. First of all, it constitutes half of the State of Israel...the Negev is a desolate area which is currently empty of people, and therein lies its importance. What it lacks is water and Jews. It has the potential to be densely populated, even amounting to millions....two million Jews can be settled there with agriculture, and two million with industry."

David Ben-Gurion, from "The Renewed State of Israel" October 6, 1963

Questions for Discussion about Modern (1900's on) texts:

Martin Buber (1878-1965) was one of the 20th century's most widely influential Jewish thinkers. His work included teaching and writing books on interpreting the Bible, on Hasidism, and the philosophy of Judaism. After living and working in Germany, he moved to pre-state Palestine, and from 1938 he was Professor of Social Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he lived until his death.

David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) was the first Prime Minister of Israel. After his first term in office ended in 1954, he served again as Prime Minister until 1963. By 1970, he retired from politics and moved to Sde Boker (a kibbutz) in the Negev.

- Describe what Martin Buber is saying about a tree in the beginning of this piece. How does he "experience" it?
- How do you experience trees? Name a tree that you can describe, that you have experienced. Describe it to your class, etc.
- According to the piece, what changes when "will and grace" enter the picture?
- How does Martin Buber describe the tree, once he is in a relationship with the tree?
- Why do you think that he uses a tree as his example of changing a relationship?
- It's clear by his life choices that David Ben-Gurion valued living in the Negev. Name some of the innovative ideas based in "science and research" that he lists in the first piece.
- With help from the JNF, Israel has met many of David Ben-Gurion's dreams. The second piece answers the "why" from the first piece. Why does he think that the Negev is so important?
- Ben-Gurion dreamed of many ways to use the Negev before these technologies were even invented. What do you think inspired his dreams?
- Many of Ben-Gurion's ideas have come true. If he was giving this speech today, what do you think his dreams for tomorrow would be?
- How do Ben-Gurion's dreams compare with the other texts you have studied today?



**JEWISH
NATIONAL
FUND**

Your Voice in Israel

jnf.org
800.JNF.0099

 JEWISHNATIONALFUND
 JNFUSA
 JNFUSA