

House of Sages

JUDAISM AND NATURE

15TH MAY, 2025

COME & LEARN

וְאֹלָם שְׂאֵלֵנָּה בְּהֵמוֹת וְתִרְבֵּי עֵוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְגַדְּלֶךָ:
אוֹ שִׁיחַ לְאֶרֶץ וְתִרְבֵּי וַיְסַפְּרוּ לְךָ דְּגַי הַיָּם:

But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; The birds of the sky, they will tell you,
Or speak to the earth, it will teach you; The fish of the sea, they will inform you.

Job 12:7-8



House of Sages

House of Sages

JUDAISM AND NATURE

15TH MAY, 2025

SOURCE 1 – GENESIS 2:15

God settled the Human in the garden of Eden, to till it and guard it.

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ:

SOURCE 2 – PSALMS 24:1-2

Of David. A psalm. The earth is the LORD's and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants.

לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר לַיהוָה הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ תִּבְלֵ וַיֹּשְׁבֵי בָהּ:

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What does “guard” mean?
- How does the commandment in Genesis relate to the source in Psalms?

SOURCE 3 – LEVITICUS 25:3-5

Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of God: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land.

שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךָ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כַּרְמְךָ וְאַסַּפְתָּ אֹתָּהּ תְּבוֹאָתָהּ: וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבַּת שְׂבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאֶרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה לֹא תִזְרַע וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר: אֶת סַפְיֹחַ קִצִּירְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת־עֲנָבֵי נִזְיֶרְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שְׂבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לְאֶרֶץ:

House of Sages

JUDAISM AND NATURE

15TH MAY, 2025

SOURCE 4 – EXODUS 20:9-10

Six days you shall labor and do all your work,
but the seventh day is a sabbath of your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־
מְלֹאכֶתְךָ:
יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־
תַעֲשֶׂה כָל־מְלֹאכָה אֶתְּהָ וּבְנֶךָ־
וּבִתְּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וּבַהֲמֹתֶיךָ וּגְרֶיךָ
אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

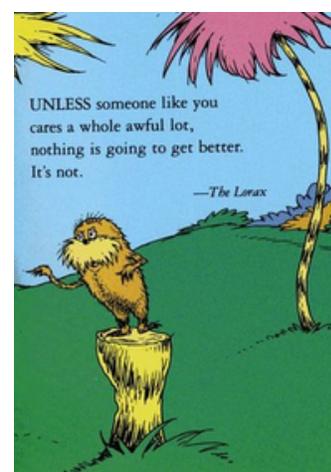
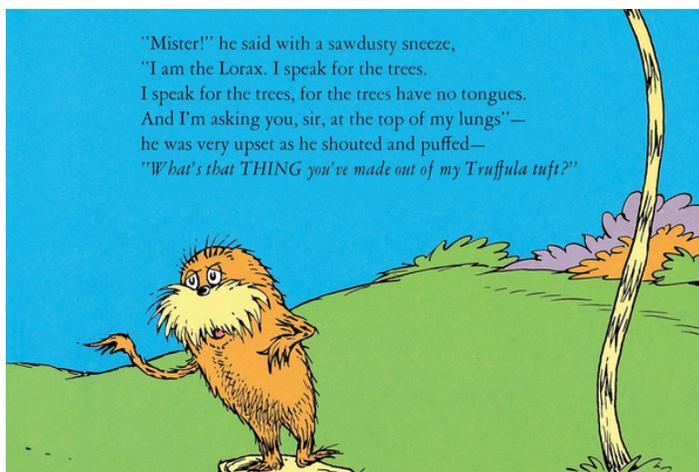
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What are similarities between Shabbat and Shmita, and what do they teach us?
- What is the purpose of Shmita and how is it similar or different than the purpose of Shabbat?

SOURCE 5 - THE LORAX BY DR. SEUSS

“Mister! he said with a sawdusty sneeze, i am the lorax i speak for the trees. i speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues, and i, asking you sir at the top of my lungs”

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it’s not.”



House of Sages

JUDAISM AND NATURE

15TH MAY, 2025

Context: The idea of bal tashchit comes from this source. Bal tashchit (meaning do not destroy) is a prohibition against unnecessary waste or destruction and is an important ethical concept in Judaism.

SOURCE 6 – DEUTERONOMY 20:20

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?

כִּי־תָצֹר אֶל־עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים
לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא־
תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצָהּ לְנַדַּח עָלֶיהָ גֵרְוֹן
כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֹתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי
הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לִבָּא מִפְּנֵיךָ
בַּמָּצוֹר:

SOURCE 7 – MISHNEH TORAH, KINGS AND WARS 6

We should not cut down fruit trees outside a city nor prevent an irrigation ditch from bringing water to them so that they dry up, as Deuteronomy 20:19 states: 'Do not destroy its trees.' Anyone who cuts down such a tree should be lashed.

This does not apply only in a siege, but in all situations. Anyone who cuts down a fruit tree with a destructive intent, should be lashed. Nevertheless, a fruit tree may be cut down if it causes damage to other trees or to fields belonging to others, or if a high price could be received for its wood. The Torah only prohibited cutting down a tree with a destructive intent.

אִין קוֹצְצִין אֵילַיִן מֵאֲכָל שְׁחוּץ לְמַדִּינָה
וְאִין מוֹנְעִין מֵהֶם אִמַּת הַמַּיִם כְּדִי
שְׁיִיבִשׁוּ. שְׁנַאֲמַר (דְּבָרִים כ, יט) "לֹא
תִשְׁחִית אֶת עֵצָה". וְכָל הַקּוֹצֵץ לֹקֵה.
וְלֹא בַּמָּצוֹר בְּלִבַּד אֲלֵא בְּכָל מְקוֹם כָּל
הַקּוֹצֵץ אֵילָן מֵאֲכָל דֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁחִתָּה לֹקֵה.
אֲבָל קוֹצְצִין אוֹתוֹ אִם הִיא מְזִיקָה אֵילָנוֹת
אֲחֵרִים. אוּ מִפְּנֵי שְׂמִזִּיק בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲחֵרִים.
אוּ מִפְּנֵי שְׂדָמִיו יִקְרִים. לֹא אֲסָרָה תוֹרָה
אֲלֵא דֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁחִתָּה:

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What value does *Bal tashchit* espouse? Does this relate to the Lorax quotes?
- How does *Bal tashchit* relate to the purpose of shmita or the Genesis source about guarding the earth?