



Guarding and Gardening

L'ovdah ul'Shomrah, Protecting the World Around Us - Tu B'Shvat



GETTING BACK TO THE GARDEN

In this increasingly technological world, how can we engage our families with the natural world? In a world that needs our protection more and more, what are fitting ways for us to be “guardians of the garden”?

When Adam and Eve were created, God placed them in the Garden of Eden, which was brimming with beautiful trees and natural resources. God instructed them to “work it and protect it” (Gen. 2:15). Ever since then, human beings have been entranced by the beauty of nature and the sustenance it provides, experiencing the wonder of Creation and a sense of deep interconnectedness with the natural world.

Biblical Hebrew does not have a word for nature. Perhaps it’s like the joke about a fish responding to a question about the water with: “What the heck is water?” Nature was so pervasive that it was hidden in plain sight. Contemporary Hebrew, however, uses the term *teva* for nature. It comes from the Hebrew word for “imprint.” Perhaps it implies that while not everything in nature is like a human being, made in the image of God, nature nonetheless is imprinted with Godliness and wisdom.

Respecting the natural world and understanding our place in it has been an ongoing challenge. In today’s world, it seems no coincidence that God’s guidance of humanity began with His declaring that our role is to guard the garden. What is the right way to enjoy this world? How can we guard our tendency to take it for granted, or to carelessly waste natural resources and harm the world around us? How can we be responsible stewards of this great gift we have been given? And how might we do so as moms, while also tending to our inner garden?

As you read through and discuss this unit, ask yourself these questions:

- *How can our family be nurtured by the natural world?*
- *How can we join in caring for the environment? How can we be a force helping our community to protect the earth for our children and grandchildren?*
- *How might our family root our eating practices in Jewish values, and how could that benefit the environment as well as our own spiritual development?*

CARING FOR THE GARDEN

How might our lifestyle help us leave the places in which we live in better shape for our children's generation?

In the Midrash, a compilation of rabbinic interpretations of the Torah, the rabbis elaborate on the theme of human responsibility for maintaining “the garden.” They emphasize that the health of the natural world is ultimately up to human beings. The very name *Adam* comes from the Hebrew word for land and ground, *adamah!*

Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:13

When God created the first human being, God led him around all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said: “Look at My works! See how beautiful and glorious they are! For your sake I created them all; see to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world, for if you do, there will be no one else [other than you] to repair it.”

בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחרריך

- *The Torah uses the words l'ovdah ul'shomrah, “to work it and to protect it,” when describing the human role in the Garden of Eden. How do these two words relate to how you see your role in relation to the environment?*
- *What do you already do that expresses this charge?*
- *How might we share the responsibility to care for the environment with our children?*
- *Role-play a conversation twenty-five years from now in which your children are reflecting with their peers about our generation's stewardship of the planet. Add something you'd want them to see about their own family and parents.*

THE BEST CITIES

If you were to write a short list of what makes a good town or city to live in, what would be on it? What city or town has inspired you?

The rabbis in the Jerusalem Talmud shared their thoughts by considering a city's "must have" items; items so essential that without them it would be forbidden to live there. As you read this piece of Talmud, ask yourself what message Rabbi Yossi was trying to add to the discussion.

Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 4:12

Rabbi Hezekiah said in the name of Rabbi Kohen in the name of Rav: It is forbidden to live in a city which has no healer, no bathhouse, and no court which administers punishment and prison sentences. Rabbi Yossi said in the name of Rabbi Bon: It is even forbidden to live in a city which has no vegetable garden.

Research has confirmed Rabbi Yossi's point: Taking a stroll in nature is good for your mental health and supports relaxation and sleep.¹ But even without leaving your home you can benefit. Researchers in the United Kingdom found that just looking at gardens from within your home can reduce the strength and frequency of

cravings for alcohol, cigarettes, and unhealthy food.²

Abraham J. Heschel, Who is Man?

Wonder, or radical amazement, is a way of going beyond what is given in thing and thought, refusing to take anything for granted, to regard anything as final. It is our honest response to the grandeur and mystery of reality and confrontation with that which transcends the given.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) was a Jewish scholar, activist and philosopher.

- *What connection do you see between wonder and going beyond how things currently are or "what is given?"*
- *Share an experience in which being in a garden or in nature added to your life and the way you experience the world, or share your family's favorite ways of spending time in nature in your community.*
- *How might you reorganize your week for more time in or for viewing the natural world?*

1 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204614002941>;
<https://www.mnn.com/health/fitness-well-being/blogs/how-walking-in-the-woods-benefits-your-health>.
 2 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1353829218308451?via%3Dihub>.

THE HOLINESS OF EATING

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger

Remember what happens right after Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden to work the land and protect it? He is told that he (and Eve) may eat from any of the beautiful trees – except for one, the Tree of Knowledge.

We know how that story ends. Hasidic master Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen teaches that since humanity's first “missing of the mark” was through food, then it is also through food that humanity's rectification – *tikkun* – can happen. Many of the Hasidic masters speak of the importance of how we relate to food. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, in the text on the facing page, says we might think we are eating to have the energy to do other things such as study Torah, but actually, we study Torah in order to gain understanding about eating. Eating is that important. In fact, the human organ with the largest interface with the outside world is not the skin but the digestive tract!

Is food just food? If we had spiritual magnifying glasses, might we be able to see that this seemingly mundane aspect of life harbors powerful spiritual opportunities?

Our interactions with food show what we do with the blessings we have been given. Food is a

prism for viewing how we relate to others, show discipline in our nutrition choices, care for the needy and the environment, distribute food fairly, eat what is fit and kosher, and many more values.

These issues speak deeply to mothers. Much of a parent's life can revolve around preparing meals, packing lunches, and finding the specific foods our children will actually eat. Even when our children have become more self-sufficient in the kitchen, family and holiday meals remain lynchpin rituals that engender special memories and connections for the entire family. What would it mean to consider eating as more than just an opportunity to consume delicious calories – and instead think of it as an opportunity for mindfulness, spirituality, and caring for others and our world?

On the next page, an idea from Rabbi Nachman brings focus to the spiritual dimensions of eating and other physical needs, viewing them as not just a meal or a mundane activity but as a potentially holy act.



Try to turn the fulfillment of your physical needs into a spiritual experience. There are people who eat to gain strength for learning the word of God (Torah). Others, who are more spiritually conscious, learn God's word in order to know how to eat.

נסה להפוך את מילוי צרכיך הגופניים לחוויה רוחנית. יש אנשים האוכלים בכדי לאזור כוח ללמוד את דבר האלוהים. אחרים, המודעים יותר לרוחניותם, לומדים את דבר האלוהים על מנת לדעת כיצד לאכול

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) was a Hasidic master and founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement.

Writing Exercise

Take 5-10 minutes to write down your responses to the following prompts. Write in silence, allowing your thoughts to flow freely, unedited. When you are finished writing, share with a partner something from your experience of writing and the ideas that came up for you.

- *What is my current relationship with food and eating?*
- *What might it mean to think of eating as a spiritual experience?*
- *How do our family food choices reflect our values?*
- *How might our food choices include guarding the garden (eating local, reducing food waste, limiting meat consumption, hosting people in need)?*
- *How do I envision my ideal relationship with food and eating?*
- *What is holding me back?*
- *What is one piece of advice I can give myself to help me grow in my relationship with food and eating?*
- *Are there other physical needs whose fulfillment I consider or want to consider in terms of a spiritual experience?*

BLESSINGS FOR FOOD

One way Judaism guides us to be sensitive to the miracles of food and eating is by inviting us to take a moment to consciously pause before eating, and make a blessing.

English

Transliteration

Hebrew

For Bread

This blessing is said first and includes all other food eaten as part of the meal

Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our God,
Master of the Universe, who brings
forth bread from the earth.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu
Melech Ha'Olam, hamotzi lechem
min ha'aretz.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַמוֹצֵיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

For Grains

This blessing is for grains that are not bread: pasta, crackers, cakes, etc.

Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our God,
Master of the Universe, who creates
various kinds of sustenance.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu
Melech Ha'Olam, borei minei
mezonot.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא
מִיַּיִן מְזוֹנוֹת

For Wine

This blessing is also for grape juice

Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our God,
Master of the Universe, who creates
the fruit of the vine.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu
Melech Ha'Olam, borei pri
hagafen.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא
פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

English

Transliteration

Hebrew

For Fruit

This blessing is for produce that grows on trees

Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our God,
Master of the Universe, who creates
the fruit of the tree.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu
Melech Ha'Olam, borei pri ha'etz.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא
פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

For Vegetables

This blessing is for produce that grows in the ground

Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our God,
Master of the Universe, who creates
the fruit of the earth.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu
Melech Ha'Olam, borei pri
ha'adamah.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא
פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

Anything Else

This category includes fish, eggs, dairy, meat, drinks (besides wine and grape juice), candy,
and other processed food

Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our God,
Master of the Universe, by whose
word all things came to be.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu
Melech Ha'Olam, shehakol nihiya
bid'varo.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַכֹּל
נִהְיָ בִדְבָרוֹ.



BEAUTY BEYOND WHAT MEETS THE EYE

Tu BiShvat, the fifteenth day of the Jewish month of Shvat, celebrates the new year for trees. While we might live in regions where it's an unlikely time to celebrate trees, Tu BiShvat actually marks the time that sap first starts rising in trees in Israel, well before we see any outward blooming. This focus on inner potential, even when it is invisible to the naked eye, teaches us that there is much more to life, and to each and every one of us, than what is immediately apparent. On Tu BiShvat, Jewish communities the world over have the custom to eat the seven species for which the Land of Israel is especially praised: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. While enjoying fruit, how and with whom might you pause to appreciate all the beauty, care, and love imbued in the sun-soaked fruit, in celebration of Tu BiShvat?

“If not for the trees, human life could not exist.”

– Midrash Sifre, Deut. 20:19





Did You Know?

Here are some statistics from the Jewish National Fund (*Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael*):

Israel is one of only two countries in the world that entered the 21st century with a net gain in its number of trees. Remarkably, there were no natural forests at the founding of the modern State of Israel; its forests are completely hand planted.

Since it was established in 1901, the JNF has planted more than 240 million trees all over the State of Israel, providing luscious belts of green covering more than 250,000 acres.

- *Why are trees so important? How might we bring the tree-planting ethic modeled by the JNF and their donors to our communities?*



STEWARDING NATURE'S GIFTS

Use without Abuse: Bal Tashchit

Climate change has heightened many people's focus on the need to carefully steward the natural world.

Jewish sources tell us that we are commanded not to waste or destroy natural resources. In the Torah, we learn this *mitzvah* with regard to fruit trees from the laws of war. Later authorities explain that this *mitzvah* applies in all situations, as well as extends beyond fruit trees to include the many physical blessings we have been given.

Deuteronomy 20:19

“When in war against a city where you besiege it for a long time to capture it, you must not destroy (*lo tashchit*) its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you may not cut them down.”

כי תצור אֶל עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְסָּהּ לֹא תִשְׁחִית
אֶת עֵצֶהּ לְגִדּוֹחַ עָלֶיהָ גְרֵזוֹן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכְלוּ וְאוֹתוֹ לֹא תִכְרַת

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings 6:8, 10

This prohibition applies not only to a city under siege, but rather to every place: It is prohibited to cut down a fruit tree to destroy it. You can trim the tree if it is harming other trees or harming someone else's field, or if it is very valuable. The Torah prohibits only destroying.

And this prohibition applies not only to trees, as whoever destroys vessels, tears clothing, destroys a building, obstructs a wellspring, or wastes food in a destructive way – all transgress the *mitzvah* of *bal tashchit*.

- *What are three positive things your family can start doing to minimize waste of natural resources?*
- *What are three things your family can stop doing to minimize waste of natural resources?*
- *What can you and your family do to bring the message of bal tashchit to your greater community?*

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

*Spotlight on Israeli Innovation*³

Watch the "Made in Israel-Clean and Green" video from The 700 Club on YouTube, a 12-minute, beautifully produced video of Israeli innovations related to protecting the world around us.

- Which of these stories did you find of special interest? Which could you share with others?

Let There Be Light: The Inspiring Story of Solar Power in Israel's Arava Desert³

"We are standing in the middle of the Syrian-African rift," Energiya Global's CEO Josef Abramowitz shouts excitedly to our small group of environmental writers. He spreads his arms wide. To the east I can see the mountains of Jordan, to the west the cliffs leading northwest to the Negev desert and the Ramon crater of Israel. A vast valley separates the two sides, stretching north toward Syria and south to the Red Sea. It is hot, dry, and very sunny.

"This is a place for big messages, where ethical revolutions begin," he sings out, launching into a quick history lesson on the ancient events that have occurred in this inhospitable place, from

the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to Moses and the wandering Israelites to countless others.

Now, another chapter has begun in this part of the world, one that will, hopefully, play a key role in halting climate change.

Energiya Global is a company that develops affordable solar projects worldwide. Their first solar field is located just outside a community called Kibbutz Ketura in Israel's Negev Desert. The enormous solar field is also the first commercial-scale solar field in the Middle East. It was launched in 2014 and generates 40 megawatts of power – enough to power one-third of the nearby city of Eilat's daytime power.

The entire Arava region, which stretches from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, currently generates 70 percent of its power needs, and will exceed 100 percent by 2020, including the port city of Eilat. But, as Abramowitz points out, "Israel should be 100 percent solar by day. This could be the blueprint for all of Africa, and more."

Solar is now a fraction of the cost of diesel, and entirely green. Energiya shows that a business model can change the world, with a quadruple bottom line that makes everyone happy – decent

³ Adapted from Katherine Martinko, "Let there be light: The inspiring story of solar power in Israel's Arava Desert," *Treehugger*, January 10, 2017, <https://www.treehugger.com/renewable-energy/let-there-be-light-inspiring-story-solar-power-israels-arava-desert.html>. Used with permission.



returns for investors, humanitarian benefits, environmental benefits, and smart geo-strategy.

Solar has even bridged gaps between Palestinians, Israelis, and Jordanians, many of whom work as partners on projects.

On the day of our visit in mid-December, we stayed in the solar field until the light was “just right” and the mountaintops turned purple in the setting sun. Then we all sat under the palm trees, sipping sweet mint tea and eating dates, watching the full moon rise over the silvery solar panels in the distance. From that vantage point, finally, the future looked blessedly golden.



Energiya also has partnership projects with African countries. In Rwanda, Energiya partners with the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village (ASYV), which was inspired by Israel’s “Youth Aliyah” villages from the State’s first decades. The Youth Village is home to five hundred children who have either lost their parents or whose families cannot take care of them. The Youth Village provides safety and education, and helps the children develop real-world skills. By 2018, the Energiya-ASYV project will generate 10 percent of Rwanda’s electricity, with the Youth Village itself receiving a portion of the profits.

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Making Clementine Lanterns⁴

Awaken your senses and your creativity by⁴ looking at nature's gifts in a new way. Creating a mini-clementine lantern will help you celebrate bounty and the Tu BiShvat holiday by bringing the outdoors in and savoring the seasonality of a much-beloved fruit. Lanterns can be used to lend a sweet aroma to any room, to enhance a Tu BiShvat Seder, or as a tool to help you reflect while journaling.



Materials:

- Clementines or tangerines (including skin and pulp!)
- Paring knife
- Olive oil
- Fireproof dish/coaster

Instructions:

- Carefully score the widest perimeter of a clementine, just close enough to see the fruit. Do not cut through the fruit itself.
- Remove the peel, each separately, by slipping your finger between the peel and the fruit.
- Set aside the center strand of pulp. This will serve as your wick.
- Use a paring knife to cut out a design on the top half of the clementine.
- Put the bottom half of the clementine on a fireproof coaster or plate. Add olive oil until the scooped-out bottom is one-quarter full. Add the wick and drizzle a small amount of olive oil over it, then light it.
- Place the cut out top of the clementine over the flame. Make sure that the flame is not obstructed; if it is, it won't burn!

⁴ These clementine lanterns are the brainchild of Jacqueline Serebrani-Kesner, an interdisciplinary and expressive arts educator. More about Jacquie's Creative Arts Enrichment can be found at www.creativeartsenrichment.org. Jacquie can be reached at jserebrani@gmail.com.



TRY IT OUT

PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Ideas for bringing the value of Protecting the World Around Us, L'ovdah Ul'shomrah (to work it and to protect it), into your family life.

For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the articles, videos, and podcasts on MomentumUnlimited.org.
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card, and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases you could consider:
 - I eat mindfully, appreciating the spiritual blessing food is
 - I breathe in, nourished by the natural world; I breathe out, smiling
 - I accept God's mission to protect the world around me
 - I remember to enjoy and to guard the garden
- For a glimpse into the intricate balance of the natural world, consider watching a 90-minute documentary, *The Biggest Little Farm*, about the challenges and ultimate success of a couple moving from the city to develop desolate land into a thriving farm. To view the film on YouTube, search "The Biggest Little Farm: John & Molly Chester."
- Learn about the carbon footprint of your food choices. Jonathan Safran Foer, in *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast*, makes a passionate case that one

of the most important individual changes we can make to help the planet has to do with our food choices. Foods differ significantly in the greenhouse gas emissions associated with growing, processing, transporting, storing, cooking, and disposing of them. For example, here's a list Foer presents of pounds of CO²e associated with one serving of the following foods:

- Beef 6.61
- Cheese 2.45
- Poultry 1.26
- Eggs 0.89
- Milk 0.72
- Rice 0.16
- Legumes 0.11
- Carrots 0.07
- Potatoes 0.03

- During your clothing and fashion forays, consider including clothing swaps, donating clothes, second-hand shopping, and prioritizing natural materials. According to *Forbes*, "The apparel industry accounts for 10 percent of global carbon emissions and remains the second largest industrial polluter, second only to oil." To read more about this, see: <https://hazon.org/its-time-to-slow-down-our-fast-fashion/>.



For Families with Children of All Ages

- **At buffets** or when served family-style, take small portions and go back for seconds! Many of us and our kids have eyes that are bigger than our stomachs. Throwing away or wasting food squanders resources.
- **Organize a clothing swap** in your community. There is great value in recycling clothing and accessories. Aside from the environmental value, it is a wonderful social opportunity and a way to purge your closet of that fabulous outfit that never quite fit.
- **Have the kids organize toy swaps.** Besides helping the environment and clearing out your home of unwanted toys, it helps children lose the “hoarding” impulse, while feeling good about themselves as well.
- **Plant a garden** as a family (containers work well on balconies). Begin with easy-to-grow basil, then teach the family how to make pesto sauce at the end of the season. Make a large quantity, and do a family activity for jarring and labeling creatively so the kids can give the jars as gifts when they visit their friends’ homes. Gardening teaches patience, and is the gift that keeps on giving!
- **To celebrate Tu BiShvat**, serve the seven species for which the Land of Israel is praised (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates). If you are feeling ambitious, have a family Tu BiShvat Seder. Check out the Family Tu BiShvat Seder on the Hazon website.
- **Watch the Bimbam video**, “Honi Comes Full Circle: A Tale for Tu BiShvat” with your elementary school-age children (<http://bit.ly/1BMfmwp>), and the Shaboom video, “Bal Tashchit: Waste Not! Why Recycling Is So Important” (<http://bit.ly/2jWb7s6>), with your preschool-age children. At the dinner table, talk about how to use objects in the right way, and how it would be considered *bal tashchit* to destroy or change them for no good reason. For example, if you take a leaf or a napkin and rip it simply out of boredom, this is transgressing *bal tashchit*. Go around the table and have each person choose an object and give an example of how they could use it in a productive way, and how they could use it in a non-productive way that would be a case of *bal tashchit*.

For Families with Older Children

- View the film *Sustainable Nation* on the Sustainable Nation website with your family. Discuss the impact Israel's work in sustainability is having around the globe. (The full version of *Sustainable Nation* is also available on Amazon Prime for rental or purchase).
- Watch the "Made in Israel-Clean and Green" 12-minute video of Israeli innovations with regard to protecting the world around us.
- Invite your kids to do a "garbage inventory" every day for a week. Afterward, have a family meeting and let the kids present their findings. Then discuss together how to minimize household waste.
- The carbon expenditure associated with a serving of beef is about twenty times higher than the carbon expenditure associated with a serving of potatoes. Search online to look up the average carbon impact of different meals. Look up the average carbon footprint of different countries as well. Consider one thing

your family can do to reduce your carbon imprint. Begin with making a commitment for a short time, such as for a week or two.

- At the dinner table, tell your family the following story and discuss it: Two men were fighting over a piece of land. Each shouted that the land was his. Finally, to settle their differences, they went to a wisewoman and agreed to abide by whatever decision she gave them. The wisewoman listened carefully, first to one man and then to the other. She repeated the men's question: "To whom does the land belong?" and then continued, "Since the question concerns the land, let's hear what the land has to say." The two men walked the wisewoman to the disputed land. To the men's surprise, she put her ear to the ground and listened. Nodding her head thoughtfully, she said, "I have listened to the land, and it says it belongs to neither of you." "What?!" shouted the men in unison. "The land says that you belong to it," the wisewoman told them. (Lightly adapted from the Tu BiShvat Seder on the Hazon website).



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

In this session, we explore the value of l'ovdah ul'shomrah, protecting the world around us

The guiding questions in this unit are:

- *How can our family be nurtured by the natural world?*
- *How can we join in caring for the environment? How can we be a force for helping our community protect the earth for our children and grandchildren?*
- *How might our family root our eating practices in Jewish values, and how could that benefit the environment, as well as our own spiritual development?*

Meaningful Vocabulary

adam	אָדָם	human
adamah	אֲדָמָה	ground or land
bal tashchit	בַּל תִּשְׁחִית	the prohibition against meaningless destruction

Facilitating the Session

1. Seek Participant Input

Well before the session invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading it. For example:

- Planning an activity to accompany the study session (see **Extra! Program Ideas**)
- Hosting the event
- Co-facilitating a conversation about food and eating. If you have a participant who

is a therapist or nutritionist and deals with these issues, she would be a great person to include for this part of the conversation

- Researching and presenting ideas to the group about environmental practices that participants could adopt and incorporate into their family lives
- Inviting one or more of the women to share one way she brought home the learning from your last gathering

Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning, and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!

2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

Remember: You know what will best engage your participants, and we encourage you to tailor the session to their interests and needs.

Soul Sparks activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible!

3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the room by helping the hostess put out a spread of food and drinks that feature the seven species for which the Land of Israel is praised (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates). At the beginning of the program, tell participants about these seven species, and consider leading them in blessings for different

foods (pp. 248–249). Arrange the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need and make sure you have everything prepared.

4. Welcome and Warm-Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. Consider engaging the women in a short stretching exercise, or in focusing on taking deep, relaxing breaths.

Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

Remind everyone that they are in the Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

5. Intro and Inspiration

Talk about Tu BiShvat! Enjoy the seven species together. Emphasize that Tu BiShvat actually marks the time that sap first starts rising in trees, even before we see any outward blooming. This focus on inner potential, even when it is invisible to the naked eye, teaches us that there is much more to life, and to each and every one of us, than what is immediately apparent. You may wish to lead participants in a few moments of silence, focusing on the potential that is inside of them despite its not being immediately obvious, and how they hope that potential will be expressed.

6. Soul Sparks Activities

There are different activities you can try that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest choosing one or two for your session. The following are some of our favorites:

Caring for the Garden (p. 244)

Ask women how they inspire their children to care for their home. Or invite them to imagine moving into a beautiful new space, where their children are capable of caring for it but are not inclined to do so. What guidance might they offer their children? Then go back in time to the Torah's first garden, the Garden of Eden. Explore God's guidance from the Torah and the *Midrash*, using the questions and referring back to the women's ideas. Then segue to discuss protecting our communal spaces and our world.

The Best Cities (p. 245)

Read together the excerpt from the Jerusalem Talmud, where the sages discuss what institutions are required in a city. While the requirements for a healer, bathhouse, and court are obvious, Rabbi Yossi's statement that it is forbidden to live in a city with no vegetable garden is surprising. Use the reflective questions to help participants think about their own experiences in a garden, and how it has helped them access a sense of wonder of and interconnectedness with nature and those around them.

The Holiness of Eating (pp. 246–247)

As parents, we are involved in feeding ourselves and our families. What would it look like if we treated eating as a spiritual act? Read together the Rabbi Nachman quote (p. 247), and give participants some quiet time to reflect on their relationship with food and eating using the writing exercise on the same page. Divide the women into pairs and have them share with each other what they discovered in their writing. Remind them to listen without offering advice, and mention that many people have complicated relationships with food. Then as a group, explore turning food challenges into a spiritual practice.

7. Reflection and Closing

Recall the main ideas explored in the session, and create an opportunity for reflection.

Reflection Suggestion: Ask participants to reflect on the following: “One takeaway I’ll be going home with today is...” or “I would like to begin practicing *l’ovdah ul’shomrah* with my family by...”

Invite the women to respond to the prompt by writing, drawing, or thinking silently. After individual reflection time, you may ask sisters to partner and share their reflections, which can be followed by group (voluntary) sharing.

Direct the women’s attention to the “Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families” section (pp. 258–261). These suggestions will

help them bring home to their families the learning they have done today, in fun and interesting ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and to report on how it went at the next session. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Provide an opportunity for participants to arrange a time to connect with another sister to continue exploring, reflecting, and offering each other support and accountability. This “Learn with Your Sister” activity (pp. 254–257) serves as an entry point for conversations that may never otherwise happen. Let all the women know when you’ll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

Extra! Program Ideas

To enhance your session and to help each and every participant know the goals that others in the group are working on and aspiring toward, you may want to consider the following:

- We recommend viewing the film, *Sustainable Nation*, with the women, and discussing the impact Israel’s work in sustainability is having around the globe. The full film is available for rental or purchase on Amazon Prime, and a shorter, 20-minute version is available for a licensing fee of \$149 for educational groups on the Sustainable Nation website.

- Include a short Tu BiShvat Seder as part of the session. Several organizations have designed beautiful ceremonies, including *Livnot U'Lehibanot* (<http://bit.ly/2j611DX>), the Israel Forever Foundation (<http://bit.ly/3d1AOX4>), and *Hazon* (<http://bit.ly/2jW19XD>).
- Volunteer with a community garden or a local organization that works to improve the environment.
- Have a participant or outside speaker demonstrate ideas for healthy and environmentally conscious meals and school lunch preparation.
- End the session with a planting activity (you can order seeds from Israel from the Israel Forever Foundation, <http://bit.ly/2jH1yOq>).



Proceeds from the sales of Year of Growth are used entirely to cover costs of creating, producing, distributing, and supporting the successful use of this educational resource.

We'd value hearing from you about how you are using *Year of Growth*. You can share ideas and suggestions at <https://momentumunlimited.org/year-of-growth>

Momentum Unlimited

6101 Executive Blvd, Suite 240, Rockville, MD 20852

240-747-7080 | info@MomentumUnlimited.org