

DARA SHAH

EXPERIENCING THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

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Parashat ha-Shavua Glasses

Gur friends Vicky Kelman and Gail Dorph are both fond of quoting their teacher, Dr. Joseph Lukinsky, who regularly teaches that Jews are supposed to look at the world through the lenses of the Torah portion every week.

Here is the basis of that idea.

The Torah is divided into fifty-four portions. Because of the uniqueness of the Jewish year, which adds a whole month every couple of years, the divisions are carefully arranged so that we have a fixed part of the Torah to read each week and can finish all of it in one year (or at least read a part of each portion each year).

Each portion has many, many truths to teach, but usually we only digest them one at a time. If we only learn one great thing each year from each *parashah*, *Dayenu!*

If we can take that one good idea with us all week, and test it, and use it as part of our life, then we will have really learned and incorporated its lesson into who we are.

By wearing *Parashat ha-Shavua* glasses we are learning the whole Torah, one piece at a time.

Consider this book a collection of fifty-four sets of *Parashat ha-Shavua* eyeglasses. We hope you see a lot of interesting and wonderful things.

Rachel Margolis, Jane Golub and Joel Lurie Grishaver

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OUR TORAH TEXT: GENESIS 1:27

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ
בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ
בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה
בָּרָא אֹתָם

God created people in God's image, in the
image of God—God created them—male and
female—God created them.

Exploring Our Torah Text

The first mitzvah in the Torah is “Be like fruit, and multiply.” It is the blessing that God gives to the first people. It teaches that families are good things. This midrash makes a connection between “being fruitful” and other responsibilities.

When God created the first people, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: “Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! I created them all for your sake. See to it that you do not spoil or destroy My world. If you do, there will be no one else to repair it” (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:3).

1. What does “Be fruitful and multiply” mean?
2. What is the connection between “taking care of the earth” and “being created in the image of God”?

TORAH EXPERIENCE

Our Jewish texts have a lot to say about the environment. Using these resources, create a PSA (public service announcement) to deliver to your school about the environment. Be sure to include at least one Jewish text and offer at least one way others can help the environment.

Resources

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 the trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed (Deuteronomy 20:19–20).

One should be trained to not be destructive. When you bury a person, do not waste garments by burying them in the grave. It is better to give them to the poor than to cast them to worms and moths. Anyone who buries the dead in an expensive garment violates the negative mitzvah of *bal tashhit* (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Mourning 14:24).

Whoever breaks vessels, or tears garments, or destroys a building, or clogs up a well, or does away with food in a destructive manner violates the negative mitzvah of *bal tashhit* (*Kiddushin* 32a).

It is forbidden to destroy anything that can be useful to people (*Shulhan Arukh, Laws of Body and Soul*, Section 14).

Reflection Question: Having created this PSA, how will your environmental behavior change?

MITZVAH OF THE WEEK: שְׁמִירַת הַטֶּבֶעַ SH'MIRAT HA-TEVA

Shmirat ha-Tevah means “guarding the environment.” Even though you won’t find the words *Shmirat ha-Teva* in the Bible or in the Talmud, you will find these ideas.

Shmitah (the Sabbatical year) is a biblical rule that the land must be allowed to rest every seven years. Nothing can be planted or harvested.

Tu b'Shevat (the fifteenth of the month of Shevat) is the New Year for trees. It is a day that celebrates all things that grow in the ground.

Ba'al Tashhit (do not waste or destroy) is a biblical mitzvah that begins by teaching that when you are fighting a war you cannot cut down fruit trees to try to starve you enemy. It turns into a law that says “It is wrong to waste or destroy anything that is useful.” It is the biblical recycling command.

This idea comes from our Torah text.

Shmirat ha-Teva Experience

Here are twenty things you can do to help protect the world. Check the ones you and your family are already doing. Add five more things to the list. Share your five with the whole class.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recycle paper, glass, aluminum, batteries and plastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Plant trees |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check your carbon footprint | <input type="checkbox"/> Compost |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check that all your toilets are water savers | <input type="checkbox"/> Know when to turn off lights |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turn off the water while brushing your teeth | <input type="checkbox"/> Cut six-pack rings; never let helium balloons go |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do not buy products with a lot of packaging | <input type="checkbox"/> Personally clean up your neighborhood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweep the backyard rather than hose down | <input type="checkbox"/> Find a non-polluting way to light a barbecue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do not buy fur, coral or ivory | <input type="checkbox"/> Educate yourself, educate others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use energy saver bulbs | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use recycled paper | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Know what products at the store are “green” | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't eat non-sustainable food | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do not use tropical hardwoods | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Carpool, bicycle or walk | |

Now highlight/circle two that you would like to do at home.

Reflection Question: Having looked at these changes, which do you believe that your family can really make?

Sh'mirat ha-Teva Resources

The **Jewish Farm School** is a project designed to connect Jews to the soil. **Hazon** is an ecological organization that is particularly interested in food. **Ha'reshut Le'Shmirat Ha'teva** is the Israeli organization that focuses on preserving the environment of the Land of Israel. **Teva Learning** is a North American organization particularly concerned with Jewish environmental education.



People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

<http://www.peta.org/>

Zoo Torah

<http://www.zootorah.com/>



Jewish Vegetarians of North America

<http://www.jewishveg.com/>

Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)

<http://www.aspca.org/>



Find a URL for a recycling center in your area.

OUR TORAH TEXT: GENESIS 6:9

In the Noah story, everyone is destroyed in the flood except for one person and his family. God chooses to save only Noah and those closest to him. This verse, which introduces Noah, gives us some clues about why God picked him.

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק
תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדַרְתּוֹ
אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ.

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים
הָיָה בְּדַרְתּוֹ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ

These are the stories of Noah. Noah was a righteous person for his generation. Noah walked with God.

Exploring Our Torah Text

Have your class join in this debate.

The Torah says, “Noah was righteous for his generation” (Genesis 6:9).

Rabbi Yoḥanan said: “He was righteous for his generation but would not be considered righteous in other generations.”

Resh Lakish said: “If he was able to be righteous in his generation, he would have been outstandingly righteous in any other generation” (*Sanhedrin* 108a).

Break into two teams and debate away.

TORAH EXPERIENCE

In the Midrash and in the Talmud (*Sandhedrin 56a*) we learn that God gave Noah seven commandments that all people (not only Jews) should follow. Any person who follow these rules, which are called *Sheva Mitzvot B'nei Noah*, is considered a righteous person.

Break into small groups and brainstorm you own list of seven mitzvot that you think all people should follow.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Compare your list to this actual list of the *Sheva Mitzvot B'nai Noah*.

1. Have a system of just courts.
2. Do not swear falsely with God's name; do not teach any untruths about God.
3. Do not worship idols.
4. Engage in no form of sexual assault or misconduct.
5. Do not murder.
6. Do not steal.
7. Do not cut the limb off a living animal and eat it while letting the animal live and suffer.

Explain the reason that number seven (cutting off the limb) is part of the list.

Reflection Questions: How do rules build community?

MITZVAH OF THE WEEK: צַעַר בְּעַלְיֵהִים TZA'AR BA'ALEI HAYYIM

The Bible is filled with references to the animal kingdom. So are the Talmud and Midrash. Jewish thinking about animals begins with the principle that all animals are part of God's creation toward which humans bear responsibility. Animals possess sensitivity and the capacity for feeling pain. And because God is concerned with all of creation, God is very concerned that they be protected and treated with compassion and justice. Interestingly, being concerned with animal welfare can even lead to marriage, as we see in Genesis, chapter 24. When Rebecca offers to quench the thirst of the camels, Eliezer (the servant of Abraham) knows that she is destined to become Isaac's wife.

Beginning in Bible times, it is clear that not only is cruelty to animals forbidden, but mercy, kindness and compassion for them are demanded of humans by God. The rabbinic name for the offense of cruelty to animals is *tza'ar ba'alei hayyim* ("pain to living creatures"). People are allowed to eat meat. People are allowed to wear animal skins. But killing an animal when it is not for legitimate human need is strictly forbidden. While torturing an animal is regarded as a criminal act, caring for an animal is an act of kindness, a mitzvah of the highest order.

These laws are from the *Code of Jewish Law*, Chapter 191, Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried. This is a summary of key laws from the *Shulhan Arukh*.

1. It is forbidden, according to the law of the Torah, to inflict pain upon any living creature. On the contrary, it is our duty to relieve the pain of any creature. However, if they cause trouble, or if they are needed for medicinal purposes or for any other human need, it is even permissible to kill them. Therefore, it is permitted to pluck feathers from a living goose with which to write, if no other pen is available. However, people abstain from doing it because of cruelty.
2. When horses drawing a cart come to a rough road or to a steep hill and it is hard for them to draw the cart without help, it is our duty to help them, because of the precept not to be cruel to animals. We do this to prevent the owner killing them in the process of trying to force them to draw more than their strength permits.
3. It is forbidden to tie the legs of a beast or of a bird in a such manner as to cause them pain.

Tza'ar Ba'alei Hayyim Experience

Today animal rights activists are making many demands. Some of them are supported by Jewish law; others are not. Which of the following demands do you believe are reasonable and just? Stand in a circle. When your teacher reads an item from the list below, step into the circle. The amount you step in should indicate the level to which you believe the practice is reasonable and just.

- Using makeup that does not involve animal testing.
- Protesting hospitals that use animals for medical research.
- Protesting hospitals that use animals for organ transplants.
- Confronting people who wear fur.
- Having dogs and cats spayed and neutered.
- Demanding that everyone become a vegetarian or vegan.
- Protesting the serving of veal.
- Always using plastic, not leather.
- Trying to stop all hunting and fishing.
- Saving the spotted owls.
- Boycotting countries that still kill whales.
- Refusing to dissect animals in biology class.
- Protesting zoos, rodeos, circuses and animal exhibitions.

Reflection Question: How does showing kindness to animals make you more human?

Tza'ar Ba'alei Hayyim Resources

PETA is an animal rights organization. **Zoo Torah** provides Jewish information about the treatment of animals.



People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

<http://www.peta.org/>

Zoo Torah

<http://www.zootorah.com/>



Jewish Vegetarians of North America

<http://www.jewishveg.com/>

**Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
(ASPCA)**

<http://www.asPCA.org/>



Find a URL for a provider of rescue pets in your area.