

הקשר היהודי שלך

Your Jewish Connection

Brought to you by the Lifelong Learning Committee – Written By Linda S Trapasso

The Tree Connection

Jews and trees have a connection that goes back to man's creation and the Garden of Eden. According to MyJewishLearning.com:

The *Me'Am Loez* (an 18th and 19th century Bible commentator) writes: “Man's life is dependent on trees, and the tree is so important for the existence of the world that the sages established a special blessing for those who go out in [the Hebrew month of] Nisan and see blossoming fruit-producing trees. [The blessing says] ‘nothing is lacking from His world and He created good creations and good trees for the benefit of man.’”



Every week on *Shabbat*, we read from *Torah*. The [Tree of Life](#) symbolizes the wisdom of the *Torah*: “Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace. It is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and those who draw near it are fortunate.” (*Mishlei* [Proverbs] 3:17-18). These verses are sung in the synagogue as the *Torah* is returned to the Ark, preceded by the verse from Proverbs, 4:2: “For I have given you good teaching; do not forsake My *Torah*.”

The [Jewish National Fund](#) (JNF) has an important role regarding trees. According to their web site, “over the past 113 years, JNF has evolved into a global environmental leader by planting more than 250 million trees, building over 240 reservoirs and dams, developing over 250,000 acres of land, creating more than 2,000 parks, providing the infrastructure for over 1,000 communities, and connecting thousands of children and young adults to Israel and their heritage.”

COEJL – the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life -- has long been a leader in educating Jews about ecology and mobilizing efforts to link Jewish study and practice with action and activism. One resource on their website is “Trees in Jewish Thought” at <http://www.coejl.org/resources/trees-in-jewish-thought-source-sheet/>.

The *Torah* tells us that G-d originally filled the land with olive, pine, cypress, tamarisk, acacia, and carob trees. These are the species that JNF plants today to renew and nurture the land. To plant a tree in Israel, [go here](#). Other organizations involved in trees and tree planting include [The Fruit Tree Planting Foundation](#), [GROW](#) (Great Reforestation Organizations of Worth), [ACTrees](#) (Alliance for Community Trees), the [Arbor Day Foundation](#), and [American Forests](#).



For an interesting discussion of trees and Judaism, go to [JewishFolkSongs.com](#). The topics include beauty, the tree of life, trees in Jewish culture, trees as metaphor, and songs about trees. Be sure to take the time to watch and listen to the music videos – there is a variety of music styles that I really enjoyed.

[Chabad](#) has many articles about trees, the *Tu B'Shevat* holiday, and how we connect to trees. One article compares humans to trees. For example, the fruit of the tree represents the impact we have on the lives of others. Just as fruit is harvested and consumed, so are our actions. Read [the article](#) for more insights. And then compare it to a similar article at Aish.com titled [Man Is a Tree](#).

**The human being is a tree
of the field.
(Deuteronomy 20:19)**

For some fun stuff, go to this [NY Times link](#) to see special tree leaves and then do a [tree personality test](#). I had a hard time deciding which tree was me – it was a toss-up between 5 and 6. I'll leave you with this last thought from the *Talmud* on the planting of trees:

An old man was planting a tree. A young person passed by and asked, “What are you planting?”

“A carob tree,” the old man replied.

“Silly fool,” said the youth. “Don't you know that it takes 70 years for a carob tree to bear fruit?”

“That's okay,” said the old man. “Just as others planted for me, I plant for future generations.”