

Devar Torah 2 (generic)

Plant and Preserve: *Le'avdah ul-shamrah*

Le'avdah ul-shamrah: In Genesis 2:15, after God completes creation and places humans in the garden, a first command is to “plant and preserve” their bountiful home. This divine directive to protect the environment is as appropriate today as it was at the beginning of recorded time. As the recipients of God’s command, *le'avdah ul-shamrah*, we became and continue to be partners in the ongoing process of creation.

In northern Israel there is a beautiful nature reserve called Banyis on the Harmon River. A stroll through Banyis leads along a path bordered by resplendent fig trees, flowing creeks, natural springs and cascading waterfalls. It is easy to believe for a moment or two that you are, indeed, walking through the actual Garden of Eden.

God’s commandment to plant and preserve is even more relevant to us today as we face multiple ecological threats to our environment. Air pollution, water pollution, global warming, carbon dioxide emissions, deforestation, climate change, mining, logging, over-fishing, acid rain, coral bleaching, extinction of species, ozone depletion, soil and beach erosion are just some of the numerous problems we experience on a daily basis.

We grew up in a culture that was not environmentally friendly. Twenty five years ago, a political leader would have dismissed any environmental discussion as irrelevant. It is unimaginable that any politician who wants to be taken seriously would say the same today.

Everyone is green, going green, joining the Green Revolution, even, in contemporary jargon, becoming a “fanatic tree hugger.” There are documentaries, movies, even TV channels, dedicated to becoming green. It can be somewhat overwhelming. What are some things we can do at the grassroots level, to follow God’s command to plant and preserve? Perhaps we can alter our lifestyle, change our paradigm for living.

Do something.

Start simple.

Maybe you already reuse plastic bags. Bring a reusable shopping bag to the store, any store, every store. Remember, even paper bags were once trees. Replace your light bulbs with low energy light bulbs. Fix a drip. Install low flow toilets. Turn off the tap while you brush your teeth. Turn off the TV and lights when you’re not in a room. Check for proper insulation around windows and doors. Carpool. Ride your bicycle to the store.

Plant and Preserve. Take a walk. Take your family on a hike. Go to an Audubon meeting. Join a vegetable cooperative. Grow herbs on your windowsill. Take a gardening class. Plant a garden. Compost. It’s amazing, as the frozen food, convenience food aisle rapidly expands, it seems crazy for someone to suggest that you grow your own food!

Psalm 115 says “May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth God has given to man.” This earth is a gift -- a gift we should cherish.

On Tu B'Shevat we plant trees in honor of the birthday of trees. Israel is the only country to start the century with more trees than the previous century. We, as Jews should care for the earth. Sometimes we get a little overwhelmed and just need a little reminding. With our busy lifestyles it has been easy for us to forget about the importance of taking care of the earth which was given to us as a precious gift.

Let me close with this quote attributed to a 19th -century Cree Indian:

*Only when the last tree has died and the last river has been poisoned
and the last fish has been caught will we realize that we cannot eat money.*

We are the stewards of this planet, entrusted with something sacred to care for and pass on to our children and our children's children.

Le'avdab ul-shamrab: plant and preserve.

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