

## Caretaking the Earth – Comprehension and Reflection Questions

### Prompt Questions

- a. Prompt 1: This quote is from the very beginning of the Torah when God creates the Garden of Eden and puts humans there. What does this *pasuk* teach us about the connection between Torah/Judaism and the idea of caretaking the earth?
- b. Prompt 2: This quote is from *Tehillim* and it is part of the *Hallel* service. What do these two *pesukim* teach us about our role and responsibility as caretakers of the earth?

### Comprehension and Reflection Questions

#### Source 1: [Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:1](#)

Note to Teachers: (1) You may have to explain that “Tu” is a way of pronouncing טו and that the numerical value (*gematria*) of “tu” (טו) is 15. (2) You may also have to explain “tithing” (תרומה מעשר) and the concept of *mitzvot* connected to *Eretz Yisrael* (מצוות תלויות בארץ).

1. What is the date of Tu B'Shvat?

---

2. Is this text part of the Torah or part of the Talmud?

---

3. According to this *mishnah*, how many different New Years are there?

---

4. What is the date of the New Year for the trees according to Beit Shammai? What is the date according to Beit Hillel?

---

5. Whose opinion do we go by?

---

6. For what types of trees is Tu B'Shvat a New Year?

---

7. What is being decided on that New Year?

---

*Reflection Question:* Why do we have actual *mitzvot* about giving a part of our crops to others—*kohanim*, *leviim*, the poor? In other words, it's not just a tax or a nice thing to do, it's a *mitzvah*!

**Source 2:** [Devarim 20:19-20](#)

1. What kind of a situation are these two *pesukim* talking about?

---

2. What are you not allowed to do with a fruit tree in this situation?

---

3. Why not? Quote from the *pasuk* to answer AND then explain the reason in your own words.

---

---

4. What are you allowed to do with a fruit tree in this situation?

---

5. What kind of tree are you allowed to chop down during this time?

---

6. Reflection Question: Why do you think this *mitzvat lo'taaseh* (prohibition) exists?

---

---

*Reflection Question:* Why do you think the Torah compares a fruit tree to a person?

**Source 3:** [Tehillim 92:13](#)

1. Which two trees are a *tzaddik* compared to?

---

2. Look at the images below of the trees described in the *pasuk*. How are these trees different in two ways?



---

*Reflection Questions:* How is the *tzaddik* like the date palm? How is the *tzaddik* like a cedar? Why do you think the author uses trees as a metaphor for the *tzaddik*?

**Source 4:** [Mishlei 3:18](#)

1. What is being described as a “tree of life”?

---

2. What happens to those people who “hold onto this”?

---

3. When in *tefillah* do we say this *pasuk*?

---

*Reflection Question:* Why do you think the metaphor of a “tree” works here?

**Source 5: [Taanit 5a-b](#)**

1. In the parable, where was the man walking?

---

2. What did he feel while walking there?

---

3. What things did he find there and how did these things benefit him??

---

---

4. What did the man want to do for the tree and what was his problem?

---

---

5. What was the blessing the man gave the tree?

---

---

6. Based on the parable, who is this Gemara is the “tree”? Who is the “man in the desert”?

---

---

7. In the Gemara, what is the blessing that the Rabbi gives?

---

---

*Reflection Questions:* Why do you think that the Master compares the student to a tree and a stream? Why are these images so powerful?

**Source 6: [Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:13](#)**

Note to Teachers: This text may be more appropriate for stronger/older middle schoolers. You may also have to explain what *Kohelet* is about and/or contextualize this *midrash*.

1. Where does this conversation between God and Adam take place?

---

2. What does God show Adam there?

---

3. For whom did God create everything?

---

4. What was God's warning to Adam?

---

5. What would be the consequences of "ruining" everything?

---

---

*Reflection Questions:* Why do you think paradise is described as a garden? How is taking care of the earth/the garden parallel to taking care of your relationship with God?