

The Beloved Land – Comprehension, Analysis, and Reflection Questions

Prompt Questions

Note to Teachers: The prompt questions are somewhat interchangeable.

- a. Prompt 1: What does this *pasuk* teach us about the connection between Torah/Judaism and our relationship to the earth? Why do you think that this lesson is so important that it is placed at the beginning of the Torah?
- b. Prompt 2: This quote 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: [Bereishit 1:1, Rashi](#)

1. What is Rabbi Yitzchak's (possibly Rashi's own) question?

2. What is the basis of Rabbi Yitzchak's question?

3. What *pasuk* does Rashi bring here? Please quote it:

4. What is the reason that Rashi gives for beginning the Torah with the creation of the world?

5. Analysis question: How does the quoted *pasuk* support the explanation given?

6. Analysis question: How does this Rashi—the very first one in his commentary on the Torah—present the special status of the land of Israel?

Reflection Question: Why do you think Rashi begins his entire commentary on the Torah with this?

Source 3: [Devarim 11:10-12](#)

1. To what land is *Eretz Yisrael (Cana'an)* contrasted?

2. How did they cultivate the land in that other land?

3. Background question: What was the source of water for that land? And why was this source reliable?

4. How is the topography of *Eretz Yisrael/Cana'an* described?

5. What is the source of water in this land?

6. What is God's relationship to this land? 2 quotes from the *pasuk*:

7. Analysis question: How are the 3 *pesukim* linked—what is the message that comes out of them?

Reflection Question: How do these *pesukim* reflect the relationship between us, the actual land in Israel, and God? And why is this 3-way relationship important?

Source 4: [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?

Reflection Questions: Why do you think this *mitzvat lo'taaseh* (prohibition) exists? Why do you think the Torah compares a fruit tree to a person?

Source 5: [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 6: [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 7: [Mishnah Masechtot Overview](#)

1. List the 6 major sections of the Mishnah:

2. How many *masechtot* are there in the first section?

3. In general terms, what does this section concern itself with?

4. Bonus (background) questions: How many *masechtot* of Talmud Bavli are part of this section? How many *masechtot* of Talmud *Yerushalmi* are there in this section?

5. Analysis question: Why do you think this difference exists between them?

Source 8: [Pirkei Avot 3:7](#)

1. Explain Rabbi Elazar of Barthota's statement in your own words:

2. Analysis question: How might this statement be a foundation for *mitzvot* that are connected to the land in Israel? (מצוות תלויות בארץ)

3. In the statement of Rabbi Shimon, what is the person (initially) doing while walking along the road?

4. For what reason does the person "interrupt his study"?

5. What does Rabbi Shimon say about this?

6. Analysis question: Why do you think that Rabbi Shimon's sentence on this act is so harsh?

7. Analysis question: How might the first half of the *mishnah* shed light on the second half?

Reflection Question: How does this *mishnah* shed light on the interrelationship between Torah study, the relationship between us and God, and the relationship between us and the natural world?

Source 9: [Kiddushin 36b-37a](#)

Questions 1-3 are on the Mishnah (36b-37a) and the rest are on the Gemara (37a).

1. The Mishnah first states a rule about which *mitzvot* apply only in *Eretz Yisrael* and which apply everywhere. What is the rule?

3. The Mishnah then gives two exceptions—*mitzvot t'luyot ba'aretz* (מצוות התלויות בארץ) that also apply outside *Eretz Yisrael*. What are these?

3. Which mitzvah does Rabbi Eliezer add to the “exceptions” list?

4. The Gemara begins with a question. What is that question?

5. In what way is the mitzvah of *tefillin* a challenge to the the principle presented in the Gemara of what determines *mitzvot teluyot b'aretz*?

6. According to Rabbi Yehudah, what kind of *mitzvot* apply everywhere?

7. According to Rabbi Yehudah, what kind of *mitzvot* apply only in *Eretz Yisrael*?

8. Give 3 examples of *mitzvot t'luyot ba'aretz*:

Source 10: [Shabbat 31a](#)

1. Where in Tanakh is Resh Lakish quoting from?

2. Fill in the chart. List the word of the *pasuk* on the left and how Resh Lakish explains (*darshans*) it on the right.

Word from the <i>pasuk</i>	Explanation

3. How does the *Yerushalmi* (Jerusalem Talmud) explain the connection between *emunah* and *Seder Zera'im*?

4. According to Rava, what is the first question that a person is asked after he dies and appears before the Heavenly Court?

5. Analysis Question: How is that question connected to *Seder Zera'im*, and why not to *Seder Nezikim*?

6. Analysis Question: Why is *yirat shamayim* (“fear of the Lord”) the foundation for everything, according to Rava? (The parable in the Gemara should help you).

Reflection Questions: How does attaching mitzvot to *Eretz Yisrael* highlight the special status of the land? How do agricultural *mitzvot* foster our connection with God?

Source 11: [*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?