

# TORAH FLORA AND FAUNA HIKE

**ABSTRACT:** Jewish environmental education is a natural extension of any scout, religious school, youth group or adult outdoor activity. Many basic concepts of ecology can be found in the T'NaCh and other Jewish religious writings. The use of Jewish texts and stories adds a new dimension to the generic hike

Jewish environmental education inspires participants to learn by listening, experimenting, discussing, playing, and doing! Jewish Environmental Education teaches Jewish texts and customs that promote an understanding of human interaction with nature and advances understanding of ecology and Judaism together.

## OBJECTIVES:

- To acquaint participants with the many facets of ecology that are found in the T'NaCh, Jewish stories and other Jewish religious writings
- To introduce the concepts of Tikkun Olam, l'Avdah ul'Shamrah, Stewardship, values and ethics from a Jewish perspective.
- To familiarize participants with ecological concepts such as "leave no trace" and preservation and that everything within the ecosystem has purpose.

## INTRODUCTION:

The focus of the Torah Flora and Fauna Hike will be based primarily on Jewish sources and the facilitator should be fully familiar with the texts before beginning. The conversation will likely touch on a number of relevant topics, with no one subject covered to the complete satisfaction of the group. While there are no rigid boundaries to the discussion, it is important for the facilitator to maintain a focus on the issue of Jewish interaction with the environment. It is also important to remember that this is a program that must have a beginning and an end. Be flexible in allowing issues not touched on during the hike to be discussed, but be careful to keep track of time. At the conclusion of the Torah Flora and Fauna Hike emphasize that this is only the start of a a journey and that learning continue with each step one takes.

## Riddle Me A Jewish Riddle

Riddles are an ancient Jewish form of entertainment which can successfully be used as motivators and attention-getters during the hike. Many early Biblical riddles centered around the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, whose wisdom she tested by pro-pounding riddles. The following is an example: "Without movement while living, it moves when its head is cut off." What is the answer, you ask? Why, it's a tree of course, since when its top is removed, it can be made into a moving ship.

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Our Talmudic tradition continued the riddle games. In the tractate of Kinnim (which deals with bird offerings), this riddle is posed: "What animal has one voice living and seven voices dead?" The answer given in the Talmud is the ibis, from whose carcass seven musical instruments were made.

**Purpose.** To add to the enjoyment of the Torah Fauna and Flora Hike.

**Group.** Ages 5 and up.

**Time.** No time limit.

**Materials.** Riddles are prepared in advance.

**Instructions.**

1. A group leader asks the group riddles throughout the hike. Each correct answer is awarded 1 point.
2. The person/team with the most points wins.

**Sample Riddles.**

The following riddles relate to the Genesis and Noah Bible stories:

I smell sweet, yet I can't smell,  
I grow in every country dell.  
What am I?

(Flower)

I wriggle, I wriggle,  
And then I wriggle again.  
I creep along to hiss and say,  
I'm known as the scourge of men.  
What am I?

(Snake)

I ripple, I ripple,  
I'm green or blue,  
I'm wild or tame  
But I'm needed by you. What am I?

(Water)

You see me from a distance, On every one I beam,  
With all my companions  
A big bright crowd we seem. What am I?

(Stars)

When the rain comes down  
And the sun comes peeping through, If you see me at that time,  
I will bring you good luck to you. What am I?

(Rainbow)

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I have a bark but cannot bite,  
I stay awake both day and night,  
The wind it sways me round and round,  
And yet I like it in the ground. What am I?

(Tree)

My house is not quiet, I am not loud;  
But for us Hashem fashioned our fate together.  
I am the swifter, at times the stronger,  
My house more enduring, longer to last.  
At times I rest; my dwelling still runs;  
Within it I lodge as long as I live.  
Should we two be severed, my death is sure.

(Fish in River)

"At night they come without being fetched,  
And by day they are lost without being stolen."  
Hint: They belong to the night.

(The stars)

"I never was, am always to be,  
No one ever saw me, nor ever will  
And yet I am the confidence of all  
To live and breathe on this terrestrial ball."  
Hint: It never comes

(Tomorrow)

"Runs over fields and woods all day  
Under the bed at night sits not alone,  
With long tongue hanging out,  
A-waiting for a bone."  
Hint: It's something very close to you.

(A shoe)

"There was a green house.  
Inside the green house there was a white house  
Inside the white house there was a red house.  
Inside the red house there were lots of babies."  
Hint: A fruit

(A watermelon)

## PROGRAM:

Begin the Torah Flora and Fauna Hike with a prayer from Rabbi Nachman of Breslov:  
*A Hiking Prayer*

Ribbono shel olam, Master of the Universe  
Grant me the ability to be alone;  
May it be my custom to go outdoors each day  
Among the trees and grass, among all living things.  
And there may I be alone, and enter into prayer,  
To talk with the one to whom I belong.  
May I express there everything in my heart,  
And may all the grasses, trees, and plants of the field  
May they all awake at my coming,  
To send the powers of their life into the words of my prayer  
So that my prayer and speech are made whole  
Through the life and the spirit of all growing things,  
Which are made as one by their transcendent source.

Who knows the first verse of the Torah:

ZPJr]h [av Mymwh [a Myh\_a arb [ywarb  
*Bereisheet bara Elokim et ha-shamayim v'et ha-aretz*

In the beginning Hashem created the Heavens and the Earth.

Who knows what the Hebrew word shamayim means? (wait for responses, allow participants to ponder the question)

This first creation holds the key to peace and harmony. How to we get peace and harmony from shamayim? (responses)

We learn in Sefer haBahir (1<sup>st</sup> century CE) that Hashem took two opposite elements, aish – fire and mayim – water, and combined them as an everlasting sign that peace and harmony are possible.

As we hike allow yourself to feel the peace, harmony and beauty of the landscape that surround us. This is the creation we learn about in the Torah.

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

And Hashem said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” And Hashem created man in His image, in the image of Hashem He created him; male and female He created them. Hashem blessed them and Hashem said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

Genesis 1:26-28

What does it mean to “master” and “rule” the earth?

Does this mean that humans are absolute rulers of creation, within their rights to do whatever they like with the earth?

(wait for responses, allow participants to ponder the question)

From the very beginning of human existence, there was warning given to us regarding our responsibility to care for the land and take care of it, to not spoil it, waste its resources or harm the animals who live on it. We learn that Hashem created the world for our sake from the Torah and that the charge to protect all that was created from:

And Hashem saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day

Genesis 1:31

Can someone tell us how to say “very good” in Hebrew? (tov me’od)

The Hebrew word me’od is spelled mem alef dalet dam

If we rearrange the letters of me’od to Mda it becomes adam, man

From this we can learn that man was the greatest of the creation.

Rabbi Hiyya said: “This means that He (Hashem) saw that it would be very good that they should continue in the state they were formed, remaining so, unchanged forever.

Midrash haNe’elam Zohar Chadash 13a

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

“Why were human beings created last in the order of Creation? (responses)

Our Rabbis taught: Adam was created on the eve of Shabbat. Why? [For if man had been created on the first day of creation,] the heretics might say: The Holy One, blessed be He, had a partner [Adam] in His work of creation. Or you might say: [Adam was the last of all creations] in order that, if a person becomes conceited [because he has a divine soul], we tell him: A mosquito was created before you.

Sanhedrin 38a

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

As Jewish people we need to renew and reestablish our relationship with the natural world. We must see the land, water and air with all its creatures as an interconnected web of life in which Hashem has charged us to protect and preserve.

Have you ever wondered what can we learn from animals? (responses)

R. Yochanan said: If the Torah had not been given we could have learned modesty from the cat, not to rob from the ant, loyalty from the dove, and good manners from the rooster.

Eruvin 100b

In fact, in Iyov (Job 12:7-9) it says:

“You need only ask the beasts, and they will teach you;

The birds of the sky, and they will tell you;

Or speak with the earth, and it will teach you;

And the fish of the sea will tell you stories.”

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

Did you ever wonder why certain things were created? (responses)

Gather around and I'll tell you about King David when he asked this question.

## The Spider and the Wasp

One day, before he ruled over Israel, David sat in his garden learning Torah when he came to the pasuk (verse) that said, “And Hashem saw all that He had done and behold, it was good” (Bereisheet 1:31). He began to think upon the meaning of these holy words when he saw a wasp devour a spider.

"Master of the world!" he said with wonder, "what purpose do these two creatures serve? The wasp does not make honey; it steals it from the bee. True, the spider weaves intricate cobwebs, but of what use are these to man? We cannot make cloth from them!"

*Hashem* replied, "David, do you dare mock My creations? Do you dare question My wisdom? Wait and see! The time will yet come when these two creatures will serve you and you will be grateful for their existence!"

And so it came to pass.

Once, when David fled from the wrath of King Shaul, he found shelter in a cave. The king, hot on his trail, reached the spot. A large spider web covered the mouth of the cave. "Surely no one has been in there recently," he thought, "for he would have ripped apart this spider web. I will search further."

Thus, David was saved with the help of a spider.

Another time David saw the king encamped with his armies; he decided to go and steal Shaul's spear. David wished to show the king that he bore him no ill feelings, that even when he had had the chance to kill him he had left him unharmed. When everyone was fast asleep, David slipped into the camp. Stealthily, he went to the king's tent. Avner ben Ner, the king's general, a giant of a man, was sleeping in the entrance. Avner's feet were spread wide apart and David had no difficulty reaching over and snatching -the king's canteen. Suddenly, Avner moved his legs, imprisoning David between them with a grip of iron. He panicked. If the king found him here, he would surely kill him! He prayed to *Hashem* and just then a wasp flew into the tent and stung Avner on the leg. Avner did not

wake up; he moved his feet, and David was free. David ran for his life. He had been saved by a wasp.

When he was safe once more, David prayed to *Hashem*, saying, "Master of the world! Who shall compare with Your deeds and Your might! All of them are praiseworthy!"

*According to Otzar Hamidrashim 77*

Look around does anyone see special signs of nature around us? (responses)

Does anyone know a Jewish song about signs? (responses)

How about Simon Tōv Umazol Tōv?

I-arwy lklv vnl ahy bvt Nms

Simon tōv umazol tōv  
umazol tōv u Simon tōv  
y'hay lonu (3X)  
ulchol yisro-ayl

May we and all of Israel have good signs and good fortune.

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

The world is filled with wonder and marvelous things to explore. Does anyone know any Jewish prayers about nature? (response)

All the blessings begin the same way. Can someone tell us how?

Mlv/eh Kl'm vnyqla "h h[a Kvr̄b

Boruch atoh adonoy, elohakaynu melech ho-olam  
Blessed are You oh L-rd our G-d king of the universe

When one sees lighting, strong winds, mountains, large bodies of water and other wonderous natural sights they say:

[ywarb hwem hwe

ōseh ma'asay v'rayshis ...whose marvelous creations fill the universe

If you hear thunder or experience an earthquake or tornado you'd say:

Mlv/e alm v[r̄bgv vxkw

shekōchō ugvuroso molay olam ...whose power and might fill the world

After the rains have fallen and one sees a rainbow...

Vrmamb Myqv v[irbb Nmanv [yrbh rk vz

zōchayr habris v'ne-emon bivrisō v'ka-yam b'ma-amorō  
Who remembers the covenant, fulfills His pledge and keeps his word

If one sees the ocean for the first time in thirty days...

lvdgh Myh [a hwew

She-osoh es ha-yam hagadōl ....who made the great sea

While hiking or just walking around one sees a tree blossoming for the first time of the year...

[vnhl Mybvt [vnlyav [vbvt vb arbv rbd vmlveb rsx alw Mda ynb Mhb

shelō chisar b'ōlamō davar uvorah vō b'riyōs tōvōs v'ilonōs tōvim l'hanōs bohem b'nay odam

...who let nothing lack from His world, but created in it beautiful creatures and good trees for people to enjoy.

Everyday we experience the many wonders of creation and forget to thank Haqshem for all the goodness. Many times we feel so small, but we can always express ourselves to the holy One, blessed be He.

Lets sing the Hebrew song, Min haMaytzar

Min hamaytzar korosi koh,  
ononi (3X)  
v'merchov koh.

From the depths I called to Hashem, His wide open spaces was His reply

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

The world has much beauty and as we hike we appreciate the wonders of nature. What can we do to preserve these for our children? (responses)

The Boy Scouts dedicate themselves to protecting the areas used for hikes, camping and outdoor activities through the Outdoor Code.

## **The Outdoor Code**

**As an American, I will do my best to -**

**Be clean in my outdoor manners.**

I will treat the outdoors as a heritage.

I will take care of it for myself and others

I will keep my trash and garbage out of lakes, streams, fields, woods, and roadways.

**Be careful with fire.**

I will prevent wildfire.

I will build my fires only where they are appropriate.

When I have finished using a fire, I will make sure it is cold out.

I will leave a clean fire ring, or remove all evidence of my fire.

**Be considerate in the outdoors.**

I will treat public and private property with respect.

I will use low-impact methods of hiking and camping.

**and**

**Be conservation minded**

I will learn how to practice good conservation of soil, waters, forests, minerals, grasslands, wildlife, and energy.

I will urge others to do the same.

Throughout Judaism we learn respect, preservation and protection of the world around us. Every action we take should be to consider the effects upon the environment.

Come closer and I will tell you how a holy rabbi taught his son about the important connection between ourselves and nature.

## ***The Torn Leaf***

*Everyone that is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, I have formed him, I have made him (Haftorah Parashas Bereishis, Yeshayahu 43:7)*

It was summertime. A time for relaxation, for restoring one's strength. A holy rabbi was spending some time with his son in the fields and forest outside their village. The two used to take long walks through the countryside, marveling at the beauty of *Hashem's* world.

The fields were ripe with their golden harvest of wheat. The swollen sheaves swayed gently, promisingly, in the gentle breeze, swishing softly to and fro. It felt good to be alive!

They walked along in silence, enjoying the peace of the area, suddenly the father turned to his son, saying, "Just look at the marvel of nature! See how *Hashem* has a plan and a purpose for every single stalk of wheat, every puff of wind, the swaying of each blade of

grass! Everything is included in *Hashem's* overall master plan of creation! Is it not marvelous that One so exalted and mighty should consider every tiny, minute speck on this world?!"

They continued along the country road, breathing in the fresh air, each one silent with his own thoughts. Soon they came to a forest and continued walking leisurely among the trees. Engrossed in his thoughts, the boy absent-mindedly plucked a leaf off a branch. He held the leaf in his hand and from time to time would unconsciously tear off a bit and throw it away.

His father noticed what he was doing and commented, "I don't understand how you can do something destructive like that without thinking. Don't you know that even a leaf is part of creation, that it has its purpose? Did I not just tell you how *Hashem* guides the destiny of every tiny thing, even a leaf? Don't you realize that a leaf is also a living thing; it breathes and grows. Why is the 'l' of a leaf any different than the 'l' of a human being? To be sure, you can think and speak while it is only a plant. Still, just as you, a human being, have a task to fill in this world, so does this leaf have a purpose to accomplish during its lifetime on this world!"

Let's join together in a song

*Kol ha'olam kulo*

Kol ha'olam kulo  
Ghesher tsar me'od **(3x)**  
Kol ha'olam kulo  
Ghesher tsar me'od **(2x)**  
Veha'ikar veha'ikar  
Lo lefached  
Lo lefached klal  
Veha'ikar veha'ikar  
Lo lefached klal

The whole world is a very narrow bridge, but what matters is not to be at all afraid.

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

The Boys Scouts try to leave camp sites and the trails they travel in the most natural way so that those who come after can enjoy the beauty and be inspired by the wonders to be found along the way.

We learned in a Baraita: A person should not throw stones from his own property into public grounds. It happened that a person was throwing stones from his property into public grounds. A pious man who happened to be passing by said to him, "Fool, why are you throwing stones from ground that does not belong to you into ground that does belong to you?" The man laughed at him. As time went by, he had to sell his field, and when he was walking on those public grounds, he stumbled over his own stones. He then

exclaimed, "That pious man was right when he said to me, 'Why are you throwing stones from ground that does not belong to you into grounds that belong to you!'"

Bava Kamma 50b

The words of the Talmud are so true. Hashem created a world full of life, mystery, wonder and beauty and gave it to man to fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth." (Genesis 1:28) This does not mean that man should use the environment as he likes depleting the resources and destroying ecosystems. Man should safeguard and preserve the world for those who come after.

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

Has anyone seen any birds?

What kinds?

How are birds described in the T'NaCh?

"There are things too wonderful for me, which I do not understand: the way of an **eagle in the air**, the way of a *snake upon a rock*..." (Proverbs 30:18-19)

"My beloved's locks are flowing, black like a **raven's**." (Song of Songs 5:11)

"As the **sparrow** finds a home and the **swallow** has a nest where she rears her young, so do I seek out your altars, Hashem." (Psalm 84:3-4)

"My **dove**, hiding in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliffs." (Song of Songs 2:14)

"Does the **hawk** soar by your wisdom and stretch her wings towards the south?" (Job 39:26)

"If you happen upon a **bird's nest** on your way...you shall not rake the mother with the young,' (Deuteronomy 22:6)

Do you know that the Jewish people have been described as a "little bird" protected by eagles?

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on **eagles wings** and brought you to me." (Exodus 19:4)

Join me in a song about the Little Bird:

## THE LITTLE BIRD

The little bird is calling,

it wishes to return.

The little bird is wounded,  
it cannot fly but yearn.  
It's captured by the vultures,  
crying bitterly, "Oh, to see my nest again,  
Oh, to be redeemed."

The little bird of silver,  
so delicate and rare,  
still chirps amongst the vultures,  
outshining all that's there.  
How long, how long it suffers,  
how long will it be.

When will come the eagle,  
and set the little bird free.

The little bird is Yisroel,  
the vultures are our foes,  
the painful wound is Golus (exile),  
which we all feel and know,  
the nest is Yerushalayim,  
where we yearn to be once more,  
the eagle is Moshiach,  
who we are waiting for.

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

Throughout this hike we have seen many trees and plants.  
Can anyone identify any of the plants or trees?

As an **apple tree** among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the sons." (Song of Songs 2:3)

"I went down to the **nut** garden to see the green shoots of the valley, to see whether the **vines** have budded..." (Song of Songs 6:11)

"By the rivers of Babylon...we hung our harps upon the **willows**." (Psalm 137:1-2)

"How good and how lovely when one hears the song of the **grass** It is therefore a precious thing to conduct oneself with piety when strolling among them. (Rabbi Nachman of Breslov)

"He shall blossom as the **lily** and cast forth his roots as Lebanon..." (Hosea 14:6)

As the days of the **tree** shall be the days of My people." (Isaiah 65:22).

"What kind of tree? A **sycamore**, which lives in the earth for 600 years, and if it is cut down...it will begin to live again." (Genesis Rabbah 12:6)

It is taught of R.Elazar ben Azariah that:

He used to say: When our wisdom (learning) exceeds our deeds, we are like a tree whose branches are many, whose roots are few. And the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down. But when our deeds exceed our wisdom, we are like a tree whose branches are few, but whose roots are many, so that even if all the winds of the world were to come and blow against it, it could not be budged from its place, as it is said in the Torah:

“For you shall be as a tree planted by waters, that spreads its roots by the river, and it shall not notice the heat's arrival, but its foliage shall be green; it shall not dread the year of drought, neither shall it cease yielding fruit”.

Pirke Avot 3:22

(Allow 5-6 minutes to pass as the hike continues)

When Hashem created the first human beings, Hashem led them around the garden of Eden and said: "Look at my works! See how beautiful they are. How Excellent! For your sake, I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world: for, if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.

Kohelleth Rabbah on 7:13

How can we protect and preserve the works of Hashem?

End the Torah Flora and Fauna Hike by asking the group to reflect on the following teaching of the late Rabbi Avraham Yeshua Heschel in light of what they have experienced up to this point:

"There are three ways in which we may relate ourselves to the world - we may exploit it, we may enjoy it, we may accept it in awe."

What does each of these three ways mean? What are some "activities" that would fall under each category? How are they related?