

To Work and Protect

Topic

Challenge and Response, Torah & Text

Grade Level(s)

7th – 12th

Big Ideas

People are meant to use the Earth's resources for their benefit and people also have an obligation to tend to the Earth and protect its resources too.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Understand the call to Adam to work and protect *Gan Eden*
2. Explore how advances in agriculture and technology fit in with the call to work and protect the land
3. Develop an outlook and plan that will help them to live in accordance with the dual call to work and protect the land

Relevant Vocabulary

בְּרֵאשִׁית (<i>Beresheet</i>)	The Book of Genesis
קֹהֵלֶת רַבָּה (<i>Kohelet Rabbah</i>)	Ecclesiastes Rabbah (A Midrash collection from the 6 th – 8 th centuries)
אָדָם (<i>Adam</i>)	Adam, the first person
גֵּן עֵדֶן (<i>Gan Eden</i>)	The Garden of Eden
לְעֹבְדָהּ (<i>L'ovdah</i>)	To work it, to till it
לְשֹׁמְרָהּ (<i>L'shomrah</i>)	To guard it, to protect it
תְּהִלִּים (<i>Tehillim</i>)	The Book of Psalms

Materials / Technology Needed

- Objects of various origins for learners to think about where the objects came from. Some examples include:
 - Mobile phone
 - Box of cereal
 - Die cast car (either as a stand-in for an actual car or as a toy)
 - Pastrami sandwich (or a representation of one)
 - Banana
- [Poll Everywhere](#)
- Texts of [Beresheet 2:15](#) and [Kohelet Rabbah 7:13](#)
- Articles for learners to research their topics. Some examples include:
 - [Environmental Impacts of Food Production](#)
 - [Agriculture and the Environment](#)
 - [The Life of an iPhone](#)
 - [Revealed: how US transition to electric cars threatens environmental havoc](#)
 - [EVs Are Sending Toxic Tire Particles Into the Water, Soil, and Air](#)
- [Canva](#) or other Infographic maker
- The story of *Honi HaMagel* and the carob tree (originally found in [Tractate Ta'anit 23a](#))

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Background for Teachers

As part of the creation narrative in *Beresheet*, God placed Adam in Gan Eden with a dual purpose, *l'ovdah* and *l'shomrah* ([Beresheet 2:15](#)). The exact instructions that Adam received are subject to interpretation, but the basic idea seems to be that Adam both would work the land and protect it. In other words, Adam could derive benefit from the land; but he also had a responsibility to take care of it as well.

This dual relationship to the land is seen both in later biblical works (see [Tehillim 24:1](#) as opposed to [Tehillim 115:16](#)) and in rabbinic interpretations ([Kohelet Rabbah 7:13](#)) that demonstrate that people have been given dominion over the earth along with the responsibility to take care of it.

How these ideas play out in the modern world with agricultural and technological advancements is a topic on many people's minds. The questions arise of how much dominion people should have over the earth and at what point people need to sacrifice their own comfort in order to protect the earth. Trying to figure out how to balance these seemingly competing ethos can cause great stress to individuals and communities.

This activity asks learners to research a particular topic. As a result, learners might need more than one session to complete the activity.

Description of Activities

1. Place a mobile phone, a box of cereal, die cast car (as a stand-in for a real car), pastrami sandwich (or a representation of one), and a banana in front of learners.
2. Survey learners, either by raising hands or with Poll Everywhere:
 - a. Which of these items has the greatest environmental impact?
 - b. What element of you getting one of these items do you think has the most impact on the environment?
 - c. If you could pick one of these things to live without (note that the banana could be a representation of produce in general), which would it be?
3. Show learners *Beresheet 2:15*. Ask:
 - a. What is Adam supposed to do to and for Gan Eden?
 - b. What does it mean to work (or till) the land?
 - c. What does it mean to protect the land? What do you think Adam needs to do?
4. Learners research the environmental impact of the items presented at the beginning of the activity.
 - a. Divide learners into research teams. These can be teams of one.
 - b. Assign one item to each research team.
 - c. Learners discover what goes into producing each of the items and how people get those items. Some things to consider include:

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- i. What resources are used to produce the items?
 - ii. What other things are pushed out because of the production of these items?
 - iii. How does each component (including packaging) impact the environment?
 - iv. Where are the items produced, and how do they get to the people who use them?
5. Show learners the text of *Kohelet Rabbah* 7:13. Discuss:
 - a. According to *Kohelet Rabbah*, Why do people need to take care of the land? For whose benefit are they taking care of it?
 - b. What does *Kohelet Rabbah* add to the ideas presented in *Beresheet* 2:15?
 - c. Why do you think people should be responsible for those who come after them, if at all?
6. Learners use Canva or other app to create Infographics about their items. Infographics should include:
 - a. How their item is produced and delivered to consumers
 - b. The environmental impact of producing, delivering, and discarding the item
 - c. Ways in which their items uphold the biblical permission to use the Earth's resources in concert with the biblical command to protect the Earth.
7. Learners present their Infographics to each other.
8. Discuss, based on the Infographics, how people are using the earth's resources and protecting the Earth well and how they can do a better job of using and protecting the Earth.
9. Learners journal three ways in which they themselves use and protect the Earth and three ways in which they undertake to do a better job of using and protecting the Earth.
 - a. Learners may share their thoughts if they choose. Do periodic group check-ins about how learners are doing with their undertakings to do better.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Learners create a chart that shows how bananas are produced and get to consumers.

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- Learners look at [a representation of Gan Eden from the 16th century](#). Then they design their own artistic representation of Gan Eden.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Learners write commentary to [the story of Honi HaMagel and the carob tree planter](#) based on the biblical and rabbinic sources learned.
- Learners can also research other Jewish sources to use as commentary.