Flora in Jewish Tradition: Make a Jewish Program Utilizing Trees and Plants

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SUMMARY:

We will experience how a walk through the plants and trees of our world can connect us to our Jewish roots while offering us a glimpse into a secret and wonderful world that connects us too.

GOALS:

- To learn 2-3 names of the plants around camp (both here and on participants' camp).
- To learn how plants are part of the Jewish tradition.
- Learn 2-3 activities to use at camp for groups of campers to hone their attention towards trees/plants.

AUDIENCE: Any audience, totally open. Can be younger or older campers.

TIMING: 75 Minutes

MATERIALS: Knife, apple, Menorah and salvia comparison page, Plant *Hevruta* text study sheet, oak gall, dates

SET-UP: Outdoors. Can be in a forest, open field, parking lot (looking at weeds, etc.). With creativity you could even bring this indoors!

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:05 – Introductions
- 00:05-00:10 – Where is flora in the Torah?
- 00:10-00:45 – Group hike, looking at plants, games/activities
- 00:45-00:65 – Stories-*Hevruta* discussion
- 00:65-00:75 – Conclusion

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:05 – Say the Shema out loud with your hands cupped

Tell Oak Gall story and example

Introductions (name, pronouns, camp, favorite flower/tree at camp).

00:05-00:10 – Why is nature and specifically flora (plants) so important to us?

Who can identify why plants and trees are so important to life on earth?

- Medicine
- Food
- Beauty
- Oxygen
- Soil/erosion

00:15-00:45 –Plant Identification hike

Seek-Using your phone for plant identification (Lots of plant id apps, my favorite is Seek, but pick your poison, er, app!)

Identify Oak, Maple, plants, plantain

Play Meet A tree

MEET-A-TREE

Objectives:

1. To develop tactile, olfactory and other senses.
2. To foster the development of a personal relationship with nature.
3. To build a community of learners with a shared experience
4. To enhance trust amongst campers.
5. To introduce the tree as a symbol present in Jewish law, tradition and thought.

Type of activity: Game

Source: Adapted from Joseph Cornell

Time: 10-20 minutes

When to play: Day

Where to play: Outside

Age level: 7 years and up

Players needed: 6-20 (or more)

Materials needed: Bandanas are optional, area with trees. You can also use objects in a room if you don't have trees.

How to play:

- Have campers pair off and give each pair a blindfold.
- Blindfold one of the pair. The sighted camper leads their partner to a tree that interests him – s/he should lead their partner to the tree in an indirect way to make it more interesting.
- **Make sure the sighted camper takes care of their sight-impaired partner. There is a Jewish value here, and it comes from Leviticus 19:14, "do not place a stumbling block before the blind." THIS IS A HUGE SAFETY ISSUE!**
- The blindfolded camper explores the tree, trying to imprint the tree's characteristics in their mind so they will be able to find the tree again. Encourage the camper's exploration by suggesting that s/he:
- Feel for plants growing on or around it, feel for signs that animals use the tree
- Feel the bark. How thick is it? Is it rough or smooth?
- Put your arms around the tree to measure it
- Smell the tree
- Listen to the tree!
- To add humor, you can suggest campers can lick the tree, kiss the tree, speak with the tree, etc.
- Once the blindfolded camper feels they know the tree well, the sighted partner will lead her/him back to the starting place.
- Encourage campers to take a different route back, stepping over imaginary rocks, ducking under pretend branches, etc. – make it a fun challenge for the blindfolded camper to find his/her tree.
- Once back at the starting point, remove the blindfold and the camper tries to find the tree with his/her eyes open. Then have the partners switch roles.

Debrief:

There are a variety of discussions that can ensue once the group is back together again.

- Each camper can lead the group to his/her tree to showcase something unique about it. This can take a while, so you may ask for only 2-3 people to show their trees.
- Ask campers to talk about what senses they used to explore their tree.
- Ask campers to talk about what methods they used to figure out which tree was theirs once they opened their eyes – memory of their path, smell of the area, feeling plants around the tree, etc.
- Begin a conversation about the roles of trees in the environment – are there characteristics of their trees that help them understand those roles – nook used as a dwelling place for animals, leaves as the place of conversion of carbon dioxide to oxygen, roots holding the soil in place, etc.?
- Do the campers notice anything Jewish about the trees? Introduce examples of trees as symbols in Jewish law, tradition and thought. Here are a few examples:

- The Mitzvah of *Bal Tashchit* (the law against waste found in Deuteronomy 20:19),
- *Eitzim*– the "trees" on which the Torah scroll is rolled
- JNF and planting trees in Israel

- Why do we call the Torah *Etz Haim* (Tree of Life) in Hebrew?

Hints for success:

- Say it in your own words. You can speak your own words more clearly. Don't like the way this is written? Rewrite it!
- Perhaps read The Giving Tree or The Lorax before or after the program for campers to think more about trees.
- For more Jewish content, include a blessing like the "*She'hechianu*" for the first time playing this game or for the first
- Have fun, this is a game and should be treated like one!

Bezazel (in the shadow of God) and Andy Goldsworthy (Rivers and Tides) natural art utilizing plants and trees (only take of fruit from a plant1/4 rule)

Menorah and salvia (Show origins of Menorah)

Hebrew names and flora

- Tomer/Tamar-Date Palm
- Alon-Oak tree
- Neta-Seedling
- Shoshana-Lily/rose
- Hadassah-Myrtle
- Amir-Tree top
- Hadar-Citrus tree
- Ilana-Tree
- Oren-Pine Tree
    - Vered-Rose

Other ideas to share on hike:

- Lulav-Willow, myrtle, Palm frond-Water loving plants
- Mycelium
- Mushrooms/*Peetriot*
- *Tu b'Shvat*
- Tree of Life in Torah
- Shema (Listening to the trees and plants in the wind (*ruach*)
- Fish Poison Tree. Lots of trees will produce poison to stun fish.
- Cedars of Lebanon. Used to build the Temple in Jerusalem
- 7 species of fruits in Israel-wheat, barley, figs, pomegranates, dates, olives, grapes

00:45-00:65 Stories and *Hevruta* study

Read the apple tree story by Peninah Shram (need knife and apple)

Break out into groups of 2 (3 for the odd person out). Hand out text study sheets.

Come back together to share findings.

Say blessings over eating fruit and then eat fruit together. Hand out Dates.

Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam, borai p'ri haetz.

Blessed are You, Eternal (YHWH), Our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP

- Let's take last few minutes to design your program.
    - Sit by yourself and create a program
    - Write this down on paper
- Delineate your goals.
- What activities will get you there?
- Who is your audience?
- What activities will you use to help your audience achieve and attain your goals?
- What will help create community/*kehila*?
- How do you end your program?