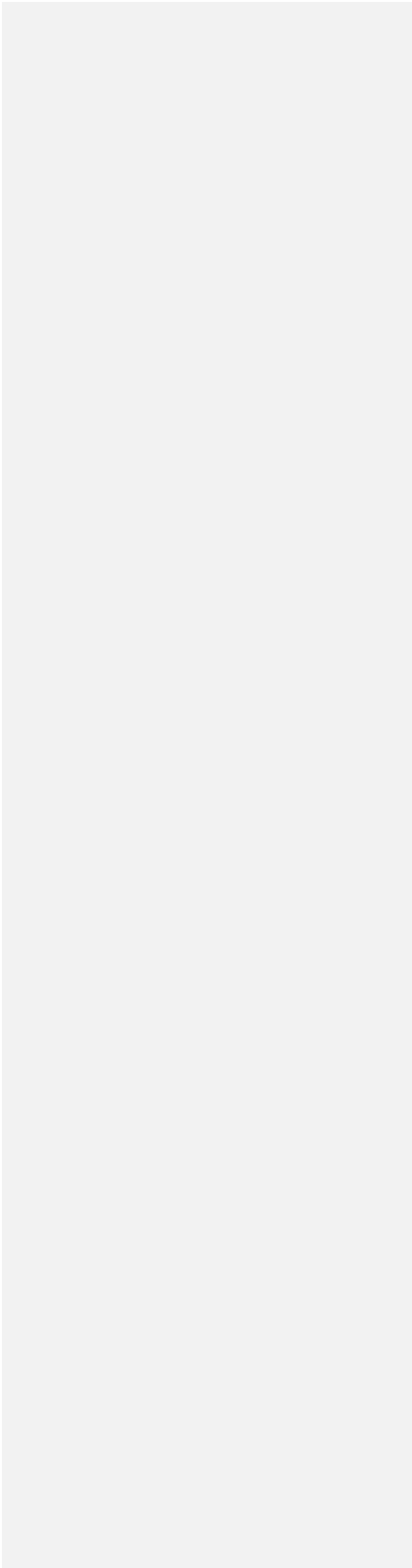

Our Relationship to the Land: Meaning of the Omer
A Curriculum Guide
Canfei Nesharim

Teacher's Guide

By Dr. Sandra Sterling Epstein

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Introduction and Rationale: Introduction and Rationale: Canfei Nesharim (“the wings of eagles”) provides traditional Jewish teachings about the importance of protecting the environment, and empowers educators and community leaders across the Jewish community to provide those resources to their students and synagogue members. In so doing, the relationship between the teachings and dictates found in traditional instructional Jewish sources and modern environmental issues is stressed and developed.

It is being suggested that in considering our connection and responsibility both to Jewish teachings and our environment and their interaction, there are timely links that can be used to make such connections natural and useful in the packed school calendar.

Rationale for Unit:

Students in our schools have learned or are at some point going to look at the intrinsic connection that a people should have to the land on which they depend and which provides for them. To be sure, this is a basic element of so many peoples and civilizations that we study in Social Studies and History.

Clearly, there is an established *system of interdependence* that is basic to the Torah in terms of the ongoing relationship between G-d as the Creator of all that is, the land that G-d has created and fashioned, and the people that live on and off that land. Specifically, within the laws as well as the narrative of the Torah and through the rest of the Tanach and the Talmud and so many other critical texts, there is ongoing expression given to the importance and critical nature of this relationship.

Simply put, we are commanded to maintain an ongoing awareness of the land and its resources as well as responsibly maintain and guard it carefully. Therefore, it is our responsibility to teach about this and to encourage our students and the

members of our community to work responsibly to be aware of, protect and guard our land and resources – in other words to actively promote and try to do our part to achieve Environmental Sustainability.

Big Ideas: *In this unit*, we will present materials and lessons that will address several BIG IDEAS that will run through all of the units and their lessons. These are:

1. Caring for the environment and active preservation of its elements and balance is a specific and important Jewish responsibility as indicated in our source texts (e.g. Torah, Talmud, etc.).
2. Awareness of and caring for the environment in a responsible manner reinforces our relationship to both the land that G-d created and the Creator of that land.
3. There are many precedents in our texts and history of awareness, need for, and practice of this responsibility.
4. Commitment to Environmental Sustainability is critical in insuring the safety and well being of future generations of mankind and the Jewish nation as part of that massive family.

Critical Themes: In exploring these BIG IDEAS, we will emphasize the following CRITICAL THEMES throughout these lessons as organizing principles:

Izzun/Balance – G-d created the world with an inherent balance and then gave us both the responsibility and instructions needed to maintain that balance. How do we mindfully and purposefully maintain this balance as a specific Jewish responsibility? While the world was originally created with this balance (see other lesson plans on **Bereshit and Noah**), it quickly fell into imbalance and disrepair due to the thinking and desires of human beings. How do we commit ourselves to and craft an ongoing program of maintaining this ***Izzun***, whereby we actively work to repair the world that G-d has given us and work towards reclaiming the originally intended balance that G-d had ordained in a way that is true to and informed by Torah teachings and text?

Bal Tashchit/Not Wasting Resources – We must remember that we have an infinite amount of desires and possible uses for the products of our environment

and earth but only a finite amount of resources and must use the land and its products appropriately and judiciously. This is a basic teaching in developing a Jewish approach to the environment.

Le'ovda U'Leshomra/Working and Caring for the Land – We are instructed to work and guard/maintain the land, with the goal of protecting it and its balance. This is truly a challenge and specifically demands that we balance a sense of self-interest with an understanding of and commitment to the greater collective good while purposely insuring the sustainability of our environment, while still recognizing our need to use it. How do we do this?

Critical Questions: In exploring and developing these BIG IDEAS, we will continually ask the following CRITICAL QUESTIONS, while confronting the challenges they present along with our students:

1. What does it mean for us to be aware of the land, care for the land and take responsibility for its welfare and health according to Jewish teachings?
2. How will observing these teachings and the practices they indicate lead to Environmental Sustainability?
3. How can I come to accept the responsibility and commit myself to a series of ongoing practices in increasing my awareness of the land and caring for the land that G-d has given us in a meaningful manner that is reflective of the Jewish teachings and dictates to which I hold myself accountable?

Learning Objectives: Our goals for the students who participate in these lessons are as follows:

1. Learn Torah-based texts that support and promote the Jewish responsibility to care for and nurture as well as interact meaningfully with the environment and its elements;
2. Identify Environmental Sustainability and its various components as a Jewish responsibility and connect this responsibility and its elements to holidays and Jewish seasons, which provide opportunities for heightened awareness of this responsibility; and
3. Engage in related activities that illustrate how our actions and raised consciousness can contribute to Environmental Sustainability; and commit to an ongoing plan of action for continued engagement.

Suggested Sources and Background Reading: It is highly recommended that the teacher and facilitator of these sessions do some background reading about the importance of Environmental Sustainability and the continual and collective need to protect the land on which we all depend.

Suggested resources include but are clearly not limited to the following:

Compendium of Sources in Halacha and the Environment, Ora Sheinson and Shai Spetgang, editors, Jerusalem: Canfei Nesharim Publication, 2005.

Etz Chayim Hee: A Torah Commentary for Environmental Learning and Action, Canfei Nesharim Publication, edited by Yonatan Neril and sponsored by the Gaia Fund, 2008. For this unit, it is specifically recommended to use the Parsha lessons for the following Parshiot: Shemini, Tazria, Metzora, Acharei Mot, Kedoshim, Emor, Behar, and Behchukotai (pp. 87 – 116). These are the Torah portions that are read during this period of *Sefirat HaOmer*. Note the use of this material in the lessons below.

In addition, please note that the website for Canfei Nesharim is www.canfeinesharim.org.

Additional websites that may be consulted and are indicated throughout this unit are:

[Holidays/a-tool-for-nature-consciousness/](#) (omer)
[tubshevat/the-land-is-mine/](#) (shmittah and relationship to land)
[Holidays/green-belt-of-torah/](#) (Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz on barley offering)
[Holidays/an-ecological-synthesis/](#) (omer)
[science/connect-food-land/](#) (land and food related action suggestions)
[science/native-species/](#) (connecting to your own land/backyard)
[torah/lech-lecha-justice-in-the-land/](#) (Avraham and Lot sharing the land)
[eikev-shivat-haminim-seven-fruits-israel/](#) (on the fruits of the land of Israel)
<http://www.greenflagschools.org>
<http://www.epa.gov/teachers/teachresources.htm>
<http://www.epa.gov/epahome/school.htm>
<http://www.localharvest.org>
http://forestry.about.com/cs/treedid/f/Tree_ID_Start.htm

Comment [n1]: In your review of this lesson plan, you wrote: "All the places where we cite specific sources on Canfei Nesharim's website will have to be changed, since our site is in the process of a major overhaul. If you could provide me a list of those URLs I can provide you with the updated ones. Alternatively, we could make this a job for an intern." So the 9 CN URLs below are the ones that need to be replaced, so please send me the corrected ones and I can put them in.