

## Kibbutz Lotan Program

1. Opening about Israel at 60, ideas to consider as Reform Jews in the Diaspora and our relationship with Israel

Leader:

This year we are celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel. For each of us, Israel can mean something different. Some have visited Israel. Some have lived there for a period of time. Some of us have relatives in Israel. Some have considered making *aliyah* to Israel. Some of us know Israel only from the headlines in the newspaper and on TV.

Our program today is to reflect on our connection with Israel as Jews and especially as Reform/Progressive/Liberal Jews inspired by a great project of Progressive Judaism in Israel, Kibbutz Lotan. Kibbutz Lotan, also A PROJECT of the Jewish National Fund, is a kibbutz in the Southern Arava of Israel (near Eilat) that identifies with the Progressive Movement, living by Progressive Judaism values. The kibbutz members live *tikkun olam* through creating an ecological sound community and spreading ecological values through their Creative Ecology Program for visitors and groups.

Today, we will learn about the Jewish values that inspire the work of the members of Kibbutz Lotan. We will learn about how the community brings these values to life. Finally, we will ourselves bring these values to life today and carry out an ecological project here.

As we learn together, I ask you to consider the following questions:

- What does Israel at 60 mean for the entire Jewish people? What does it mean for Progressive Jews.
  - What have we learned about Israel and where do we see it going?
  - Considering our own community and our own lives, where is the Jewish world today and where is it going? What is the place of Israel in the entire Jewish world?
2. Study of Jewish sources with guiding questions that encourage reflection of relations with Israel as opened in #1.
  3. Powerpoint presentation about the work of Lotan and discussion following. (have music playing in the background – preferably Israeli-style music)
  4. Activity making the seed balls.
  5. Closing, distribute info about workshops at Lotan.

Israel at 60 – Kibbutz Lotan Program Part I  
**Sharing -- The interconnectedness of life**

לְיֵהוָה, הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהָ; תִּבֹּל, וַיִּשְׁבֵי בָהּ.

“The Earth is of the Divine and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants.”  
Psalms 24:1

וְאִוְלָם--שֶׁאֵל-נָא בְהֵמוֹת וְתִרְבֵי; וְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וַיִּגְד-לָךְ.  
אוּ שִׁיחַ לְאָרֶץ וְתִרְבֵי; וַיִּסְפְרוּ לָךְ, דְּגֵי הַיָּם.

You need only ask the beasts and they will teach you,  
the birds of the sky will tell you,  
or speak with the earth and it will teach you,  
the fish of the sea will tell you stories.

Job 12:7-8

The whole world of humans, animals, fish and birds all depend on one another. All drink the earth's water, breathe the earth's air, and find their food in what was created on the earth. All share the same destiny -- what happens to one, happens to all.

Midrash Tanna de Bei Eliyahu Rabba 2

ת"ר אדם נברא בערב שבת ומפני מה...  
שאם תזוח דעתו עליו אומר לו יתוש קדמך במעשה בראשית...  
כדי שיכנס לסעודה מיד משל למלך בשר ודם שבנה פלטרין ושיכללן  
והתקין סעודה ואחר כך הכניס אורחין....

The rabbis taught: *Adam* (the human) was created on the eve of the Sabbath (i.e. last). And why?

So that if he becomes too haughty, he can be told: the gnat preceded you in the order of creation.

So that he could enter into a banquet immediately. This is similar to a flesh-and-blood king that built a palace, furnished it, and laid a banquet, and then invited in the honored guests....

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38a

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- The verse from Psalms tells us that “the earth is of the Divine”. In your opinion. What makes the earth God-like?
  - The verse from Job speaks of learning from the different creatures about the world – What do you think they teach us? What stories do they tell us?
  - The Midrash says that “what happens to one happens to all”. How do we see this occurring today in the world?
  - According to the Talmud, what is the place of the human being in the world?

## Stewardship: Our responsibility to the world

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, אֶת-הָאָדָם; וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֶן-עֵדֶן, לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ.

"And the Eternal God took the human, and set the human in the Garden of Eden to till it and to tend it."

Genesis 2:15

בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך

When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: "Behold how good and excellent are all the works that I have created. 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."

Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13

The meaning of awe is to realize that life takes place under wide horizons, horizons that range beyond the span of an individual life or even the life of a nation, a generation, or an era. Awe enables us to perceive in the world intimation of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

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- According to these texts, what is the relationship between the human being and the world? Is it a relationship of equals?
  - Do you live any of these statements in your life? If so, how? If not, would you want to? Why or why not?
  - What do you see as your role as a human being in the world?

## Building Sustainable Communities

אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל, אף על פי שתמצאו אותה מליאה כל טוב, לא תאמרו נשב ולא נטע, אלא הוּו זְהִירִין בְּנִטְעוֹת, שנאמר, ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל. כשם שנכנסתם ומצאתם נטיעות שנטעו אחרים, אף אתם היו נוטעים לבניכם. שלא יאמר אדם, אני זקן, כמה שנים אני חי, מה אני עומד מתיגע לאחרים, למחר אני מת.

The Holy One said to Israel: Even if you find the land full of good things, you should not say, "We will sit and not plant"; rather, be diligent in planting! Just as you came and found trees planted by others, you must plant for your children; a person must not say, "I am old, how many years will I live? Why should I get up and exert myself for others? I am going to die tomorrow." You must not excuse yourself from planting. As you found trees, plant more, even if you are old.

Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim

יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא אמר ליה האי עד כמה שנין טעין אמר ליה עד שבעין שנין אמר ליה פשיטא לך דחיית שבעין שנין אמר ליה האי [גברא] עלמא בחרובא אשכחתייה כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי שתלי נמי לבראי יתיב קא כריך ריפתא אתא ליה שינתא נים אהדרא ליה משוניתא איכסי מעינא ונים שבעין שנין כי קם חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה קא מלקט מינייהו אמר ליה את הוא דשתלתייה א"ל בר בריה אנא

One day Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked him, "How long does it take to bear fruit?" The man replied, "Seventy years." Honi further asked him, "Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?" The man replied, "I found this world provided with carob trees and as my forebears planted these for me, so I too plant them for my children.

Honi then sat down to have a meal, and sleep overcame him. As he slept, a small cave formed around him, which hid him from sight, and he continued to sleep for seventy years. When he awoke, he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and Honi asked him, "Are you the man who planted this tree?" The man replied, "I am his grandson."

Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 23a

מה תמרה זו אין בה פסולת אלא תמרים לאכילה לולבין להילול חריות לסינוך סנסנים לכברה שפעת קורות לקרות בהן את הבית כך הם סיבים לחבלים מקרא מהם בעלי משנה מהם בעלי ישראל אין בהם פסולת אלא מהם בעלי אגדה מהם בעלי מצות מהם בעלי צדקות.

As no part of the date palm is wasted its dates being eaten, its young branches used to ritual blessing, its fronds for covering a hut, its fibers for ropes, its leaves for sieves, its planed trunks for roof rafters-

So are there none worthless in Israel: Some are versed in Bible; others know Mishnah; some are masters of aggadah; others do good deeds; still others promote social equity.

Midrash Numbers Rabbah 3:1

- What are the qualities of trees that serve as an example of sustainability?
- What can it mean for us to plant for the future generations? Can this relate to other things besides trees?
- What does the date palm teach us about community?
- How can these Jewish sources help us in forming our values and taking action to perform *tikkun olam* (repairing the world)?



## **Making Seed Balls**

### **Aims**

- To teach a simple and practical tool for planting seeds and creating a garden
- To demonstrate some of the principles of Natural Farming
- To understand and appreciate seeds and the seed cycle

### **Materials**

- Pictures (or living examples) of stages of the plant cycle: plant, flower, fruit, seed
- Four large plastic bowls or similar container
- Assorted dry seeds such as tomato, lettuce, basil, flowers – quite a large amount is needed (around 1 cup per 15-20 people)
- Sieved, dry compost (found in garden supply stores or plant nurseries)
- Dry, powdered red/brown clay (found in art supply shops and dry river beds)
- Enough small plastic containers for each participant (the plastic containers that fruit and vegetables are sold in are ideal, so long as they don't have holes in the bottom)
- "Measuring cup" for each participant (the caps of plastic drink bottles are ideal)
- Bucket for washing hands
- Water

### **Introduction**

General overview about seeds and the seed cycle:

What is a seed?

- The living link between different generations of plants
- Product of fertilization process in seed plants, final stage of reproduction cycle
- Embryonic plant protected inside case with all the genetic information for growing into the adult plant

Seeds come in all shapes and sizes! They can range from tiny lettuce and tomato seeds to huge coconut seeds. Pass around different examples of seeds and/or seed pods. So much potential in such a small packet! If the class is to take place in a natural area, it is possible to have the participants walk around and look at plants in the area, see if they can collect seeds and/ or seed pods and bring them back to the group

What is the seed cycle?

- Plant >> Flower >> Fruit >> Seed >> Plant
- Use pictures or living examples to show different stages of cycle
- Optional group activity:  
<http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/Seed-FlowerStretch.html>



What does the seed need in order to germinate and grow?

- Water
- Nutrients
- Air
- (For the plant) Light

How are seeds propagated?

- Wind transportation
- Water transportation
- Animal transportation (stuck to birds, eaten and excreted by mammals)

What can happen to seeds to prevent their germination?

- They can get blown or transported to unfavorable environments (poor soil, no water etc)
- They can be eaten and digested by animals such as rodents or insects

In nature, individual plants produce hundreds or thousands of seeds because only a small proportion will reach maturity. Seed balls provide a method of protecting the seeds from predation and providing them with an ideal environment for germination, in order to give them the best possible chance for success in a natural system.

So with seed balls we are mimicking nature by sowing together a mix of different seeds, and providing them with nutrients to grow (compost) and protection from predation (clay shell). When the seed balls come into contact with water, the clay will absorb the moisture and the seeds will germinate within the ball, sending out roots and shoots into the ground and air. Each seed ball is like a miniature garden waiting to be born.

### **Making the seed balls**

Have set up on a low bench:

Large bowl/ container with mixed seeds

Large bowl/ container with dry, sieved compost

Large bowl/ container with dry, powdered red clay

Large bowl/ container with water

Also a good idea to have on hand: a bucket of water for washing hands in.

Give to each participant a container for making their seed ball mix, and a "measuring cup".

Go over the different ingredients. Remind the participants why we are mixing together different varieties of seeds, what the compost is for, what the clay is for.

Do a demonstration seed ball mix. The recipe is:

1 measure of seeds (if there are not enough seeds, take one or two pinches)



3 measures of compost  
5 measures of clay

Mix well the dry ingredients. Then *slowly* add water. We want seed balls, not seed soup! Start with one measure, then add another a little at a time. If the mix is still too dry, try just moistening slightly your fingers. Work the mix with your fingers until you can form it into one large ball. The point to aim for is when the clay becomes like plasticene – plastic and pliable, not too crumbly but not too moist.

***Alternative Method – good for small children***

*Put the ingredients (at a seed:compost:clay ratio of 1:3:5) in a few big tubs and have groups sit around them and mix the materials up together.*

Once the material is in one large ball, break off small amounts and roll them into the seed balls. They should be about the size of coins or chocolate balls. Using plastic bottle caps as measures, we generally get around 7-8 seed balls from one set of ingredients.

Participants can take their seed balls home in the same containers they used to make them. The seed balls need to dry out for at least 24 hours before they are “sown”. But they can keep for months. Remember, they don’t need to be buried, merely place on the surface of the garden or plot of land. If non-native species are used, such as vegetables, place them in the garden near irrigation pipes. If you are using native species to regenerate natural areas, sow them wherever they will do the most good.

Finish the activity with another excerpt from “On A Green Mountain With Masanobu Fukuoka, Sensei of Natural Farming” by Jim Bones.

"God's love grows plants. Nature grows crops. Birds sow seeds. In three years, even the soil starts changing spontaneously. There are no ideas like big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, in Nature. No idea like 'the struggle for existence'. There are bugs and diseases, but they do not cause problems. Many kinds of bugs co-exist in natural harmony. We cannot know why plants grow. I dare say, God's love. For example, the soil on my mountain is the same as that in the deserts and was not green fifty years ago. But now, even though I have not changed the soil, plants grow there."

"Sow seed balls with a child-like mind whenever, wherever, without judging the first year. During the second year birds or bugs will carry the seeds from the plants and sow them naturally for you. So in the third year you will get a natural design. Children sometimes sow seeds in unexpected places, and that brings us to a big discovery that we never even considered. Even if ninety-nine per cent fail, and only one percent succeed, that will take us to new possibilities. If you use human wisdom, you will only achieve the result you expect."

**For further Interest:**

**Explanation of Natural Farming and the idea behind seed balls**

Read selected excerpts from “ON A GREEN MOUNTAIN”.

"Cultivating land is not good. It removes the green cover and exposes the bacteria to sunshine. Just as we need clothes to protect our skin from sunshine, our planet needs green. I have used



my farm for fifty consecutive years. There is no need to let it take a rest because I have never cultivated it. If you just sow clay seed balls with one hundred kinds of seeds, do not worry about water. Where there is green, water comes. Do not think I do this, for only God has created perfect things."

"You know that daikon radish seeds are in hard shells, well, I noticed that when they drop on the ground, they decay as they start to sprout. So I realized if they need a shell like that, then clay can be the shell for a ball with many seeds inside."

Amazed, I said, "So they do not have to sprout on the surface, they have the protection of the clay shell to begin with, and soil and moisture. Its a small earth, a miniature earth, how beautiful, and so simple." He regarded us carefully then said, "Many people are interested in seed balls, but they do not act. I love best to give children boxes of seeds as gifts because they scatter them so innocently."

"Seed balls need at least one hundred kinds of seeds," he then asserted. "One seed eventually makes ten thousand seeds. If you sow seed balls, and wait three years, you will understand what Nature is. It works much better than reading books about Natural Farming. Seed balls are a small universe in themselves. I have written six books, but I was unable to express what Nature is in words. So I decided to manifest Nature in form. A seed ball is a one centimeter model of a Natural Farm, with trees, fruits, vegetables and grains. I do not say my one hundred kinds of seeds are the best. It is just an entrance to Natural Farming."

"In the beginning, man-made deserts were also green," he cautioned, "And the most important thing is to stop the advancement of arid lands around the world today." He said we can do this quickly by spreading seeds, hundreds of different kinds suitable to each locality, by the ton, from airplanes. His method involves making half inch balls like those we had found, containing hundreds of mixed seeds, microbes and humus, all rolled inside protective clay coatings. Clay shells defend the seeds from drought, insects, rodents and birds that would otherwise eat them before they sprout. Timely rains then release the seeds and no matter where they land something appropriate inside will grow. Once established, the resulting plants naturally reseed themselves with the help of gravity, wind, water, insects and larger animals."

"Most of the trees on my mountain are six or seven years old. The acacias are ten years old. I forgot when, but a man who planted trees in the Himalayas for sixteen years, and a man who planted trees in Bangladesh for four years came to me and learned how to make seed balls. Also there was an American woman and a Japanese priest. They came because they realized that they could not keep up with the speed of desertification by planting trees. They cut eight Japanese cypress on my mountain and made a place to stay. Japanese cypress are very expensive, so usually people do not use them to make a temporary lodge. But we did it to let people know that if you sow seed balls, it is easy to build houses made from the trees from your own mountains. You can plant only three hundred trees a day, but you can sow seed balls one hundred times faster. The cost is one-one/hundredth that of planting trees. Seed balls are the only way to catch up with the speed of desertification on our planet."

"Food, clothing and shelter are very easy. If you sow seed balls for just one hour in your life, you can have enough wood to build a few houses in your lifetime. You can make clothes from your plants. You can get food. One day of sowing for trees, one day for vegetables and fruit, one day for grains. If you sow seed balls of rice and barley in an area of one thousand square meters, you can get six hundred kilograms of each grain, which is enough for one family of five people for one year. If you work three or four days a year, you can have a good life."

"The power of Nature is great, because the natural structure is solid, three dimensional, not horizontal or two dimensional. Some of my mountain peach trees have kiwis climbing on them, and above the kiwi vines, there is a kind of melon. So three kinds of fruit exist together at different heights. I get one or two kilograms of fruit from one square meter of ground. This is a good sustainable yield. Natural production is greater than man-made production, because the structure is solid."



"On my mountain there is a place where I sowed seed balls twenty years ago and now it is like a jungle. But there are fruit trees and there are kiwis. Now I know that even in a place like a jungle, kiwis can grow. Humans are just destroying the power of Nature. We have only one-fourth of the growing power of Nature left. We are not increasing fertility or production, but rather trying to prevent production from failing by using fertilizers."