

# Jewish Learning - BioDiversity


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## Goals:


- Understand how the many species on the planet are intertwined
- Understand the responsibility of humans to allow and encourage biodiversity
- Understand how the Jewish tradition has interpreted and seen the importance of biodiversity

**First Activity: 50-50:** On the way to the waterfall, everyone should pick up one loose piece of nature- a pine needle, a feather, a flower that is already off its stem, etc- and bring it to the circle. We will go around and say a one word description of our object- ie, “feather.” Then, we will go around again and each say one word about nature that is inspired by our object, ie, “majestic.” This will set the tone for our exploration multiplicity of nature as understood in biodiversity.

## Texts:


 If, along the road, you chance upon a bird’s nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life. (Deuteronomy 22:6-7)

 Torah doesn’t permit a killing that would uproot a species, even if it permitted the killing [of individuals] in that species. And here, the one who kills the mother and the child on the same day... it’s as if that person has made that species extinct. (Nachmanides, 13<sup>th</sup> Century Spain, Commentary to Deut. 22:6)

 The desire of the Blessed One is for the continuance of the species, and therefore no species from among all those created will ever become extinct—for supervised in this matter by the Eternally Living and Enduring One, it [each species] will find its continuance through God...

The continual existence of the species in the world—of which not one has become extinct or lost, from lice eggs to buffalo horns, since the day they were created--- it is all by God’s word and desire concerning this.

(*Sefer HaChinuch*, 13<sup>th</sup> Century Germany; 545)

 One who sees fine creations [people or animals] and fine trees says, “Blessed is the One who has it like this in God’s world!”... Whoever goes out during the days of Nisan (that’s us, everyone!!!) and sees trees which are budding should say, “Blessed is the One who left nothing out of God’s world, and created in it wonderful creations and fine trees by which humanity enjoys itself.”

(Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brakhot, 58b)

### Seeds for Discussion:

How does the commandment about the mother bird and its young reflect the relationship of humanity, sometimes seen as caretakers of the Earth, and the natural world? What are our responsibilities? Why might we “have a long life” by following this commandment?

What is Nachmanides’ message about killing an individual versus a species? Do you agree with this principle? Can and should it be implemented today? Is it ever used as an excuse?

How do you reconcile the views in the *Sefer HaChinuch* with the realities in today’s world? As a modern Jew, is it possible to echo this statement of faith?

Why is this final text included with these other learnings about human responsibility for protecting God’s creation? How does the commandment to bless God’s creation help us develop our own environmental awareness?

When we contemplate the physical creation as a whole, we realize that it is all as one organism, that the parts are linked in varying gradations to each other. We see this in every plant, in every living being... The realization dawns on us that were it not for the lower beings, the uncouth and the unseemly, the higher beings could not have emerged in their splendor, their esteem and their luminous quality. We continually become more conscious of the integration and unity of existence. (Rav Kook, *Orot Hakodesh II*, 431)