Session 1: Brachot for Nature

Jewish tradition contains blessings for seeing rainbows and hearing thunder, for eating food, smelling flowers and sighting the first buds of spring. The opportunity for reciting blessings are constant, so we must be empowered with the knowledge to know the blessings so we can recite them and follow in the custom of saying 100 blessings a day.

Goal: to become alert an aware of one's surroundings, to experience team work, to create blessings and recite them for sensory experiences.

Goal: to learn and incorporate brachot for nature into your everyday life...

Did you know that there are special brachot for different occasion of seeing nature ex. Rainbows, thunder, etc?
Do any of you say daily blessing when things happen?
What do you think would be a meaningful experience to recite a blessing about on a daily basis?

Pass out one blessing card to each USYer. Have each individual think about how the translation correlates with what the blessing is about.
Then have all of the USYers with same blessings get into group together and make up a skit, song poem or cheer ... explaining what there brachot was about without saying the actual object that the Bracha is for.

After the presentations ask...
Do you think God appreciates your blessings?
Does the object appreciate your blessing?
Does saying a blessing change us?
What would you be like if you said blessings more often?
What is another way you can experience wonder and gratitude if you do not feel comfortable reciting blessings to God?

Now that you know Brachot will you say them?
If you know them and choose not to say them are you wrong?

If you could create a Bracha for something in nature what would it be for?

On seeing something magnificent:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁכָּכָה לוֹ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, shekachah lo ba'olamo.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has things such as this in God's world.

On smelling dried herbs or spices:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי בְשָׂמִים.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, borei minei v'samim.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates various spices.

On smelling the fragrance of grasses or plants:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עִשְׂבֵי בְשָׂמִים.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, borei isvei v'samim.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates fragrant plants.

Before eating fruit:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

Questions to Ask Hikers:

- How many things were you able to notice and experience? Were you surprised by the amount?
- What was it like to say a blessing for almost everything you experienced?
- Do you think God appreciates our blessings? What about the flower, animal, and so on, over which the blessing is said?
- Does saying blessings change us?
- What would you be like if you said blessings more often?
- What is another way you can experience wonder and gratitude if you do not feel comfortable reciting blessings to God?

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Questions to Ask Hikers:

- Was it easy to find the thing you were assigned to bless?
- Do you think God appreciates our blessings?
- Does the flower, tree, animal, etc. being blessed appreciate our blessings?
- Does saying a blessing change us?
- Will you remember your assigned blessing? Why?

Birchot Hanehenin:

On experiencing shooting stars, earthquakes, lightning, thunder, and storms:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁכֹּחוֹ וּגְבוּרָתוֹ מָלֵא עוֹלָם.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, she'koḥo ug'vurato malei olam.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, whose power and might fill the entire world.

On seeing natural wonders—mountains, valleys, oceans, rivers, and wilderness:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, עֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, oseh ma'asei v'reishit.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who makes the wonders of creation.

On seeing trees in blossom for the first time in a season:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁלֹּא חִסַּר בְּעוֹלָמוֹ דָּבָר,
וּבָרָא בוֹ בְּרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְאִילָנוֹת טוֹבִים לְהַנּוֹת בָּהֶם בְּנֵי אָדָם.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, shelo ḥisar b'olam davar uvarah vo briyot tovot v'ilanot tovim l'hanot bahem b'nei adam.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has withheld nothing from the world and who has created beautiful creatures and beautiful trees for humans to enjoy.

On seeing rainbows:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, זוֹכֵר הַבְּרִית וְנֶאֱמָן בִּבְרִיתוֹ
וְקַיָּם בְּמַאֲמָרוֹ.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, zocher habrit v'ne'eman bivrito v'kayam b'ma'amaro.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who remembers the covenant, is faithful to it, and keeps God's promise.

Over rain and over good news:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,הַטּוֹב וְהַמֵּטִיב.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam, hatov v'hameitiv.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who is good and does goodness.

Session 2: Prayers , Poems and Neshamot (Souls)

Jewish Traditions are filled with beautiful poems and prayers about nature. In this activity USYers will have a chance to read some and express there feelings and create there own.

Goals: To become familiar with poems about nature from Jewish tradition

Read the following text:
" In order to serve God , one needs access to enjoyment of the beauties of nature, such as the contemplation of flower - decorated meadows, majestic mountains, and flowing rivers. For all these essential to the spiritual development of even the holiest people."

Discuss the text and explain how religious matters used nature as a way to nourish their neshamot and as a means to reach God.

Distribute the sheet with the following 3 stories.
Break the group up into smaller groups of 5 or 6.
Have them read over the three.

It is special to go out into the fields at the start of spring.
When nature awakens from her sleep,
And to pour out a prayer there.
For every fresh blade of grass, every new flower,
All join themselves with prayer,
For they too yearn and long for God.

_Maggid Sichot
Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav

Master of the Universe
Grant me the ability to be alone:
May it be my custom to go outdoors each day
Among the reeds and the grass,
Among all growing things;
And there may I be alone
To enter into prayer
Talking to the ONE to whom I belong.

May I express there everything in my heart.
And may all the foliage of the field awake at my coming,
To send the powers of their life
Into the words of my prayer,
So that my speech is made whole
Through the life and spirit of all growing things,
Which are made as ONE by their Transcendent Source.

_ Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav

The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow... And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles.

- Diary of a young girl , Anne Frank

How does reading Jewish prayers or poems about nature change your view of Judaism? Of Nature?

Acts of Recycling in Judaism

There are many case in Judaism where recycling is practiced and encourage ...Here are a few that I thought were interesting to share.

*the lulav (willows and myrtles that are waved on Sukkot) are put away and later used for fueling the fire that burns the chametz (leavened products) on Erev Pesach.
*The etrog from Sukkot is poked full of cloves and used to make a fragrant pomander for the Havdalah service at the conclusion of Shabbat.
*The old worn tzitzit fringes, when replaced, are used as bookmarks in chumashim, etc.
Olive oil from the Land of Israel is hung in the Sukkah as a representative of one of the seven species of the land. It is then saved to use for lighting the Chanukah lights. In addition, a small amount is squeezed out of the wicks, and is eaten six weeks later on Tu B'Shevat.
*A tallis is used for the chuppah at a Jewish wedding and then becomes the prayer shawl for the husband. Sometimes a portion of the wine over which the blessings are said during the marriage ceremony is saved and used for the cup of blessing at the brit milah ceremony of that same couple's son.
Here are three more examples, one from a primary source, the second a minhag, and the third a minhag that results from a halakhah.

1. In the Mishnah (Tractate Sukkah 5:3) there is a description of Simchas Beis Hashoeva, a celebration in which tall menorot (candelabras) were lit that illuminated every courtyard in Jerusalem so much so that a woman would have been able to see well enough by the light to sort her wheat grains. The wicks for these flames were made from the worn out garments of the cohanim (priests who served in the Temple in Jerusalem).
2. In several books from Hungarian Rebbes, I learned that there is a minhag (custom) of using the leftover challah to make a kugel for the following Shabbat.
3. The cup of blessing that was used at the third Shabbat meal for Birchat HaMazon is may not be drunk until after Havdalah. That cup of wine, therefore, becomes the cup over which Havdalah is made.

What are ways you can reduce , reuse and recycle on Shabbat? at a USY convention?
Both Spiritually and Materialistically...

Extras....

Awareness

We thank you...for your miracles that are with us each day, and for your wonders and goodness that are with us every moment. -Siddur : Amidah

Interconnectedness

Even those Creatures that you deem superfluous in this world, such as flies, fleas and gnats, nevertheless have their allotted task in the scheme of Creation. - Shemot : rabbah 10:2

Responsibility

When the Holy One, blessed be God, created the first human...God said to Adam, 'See my works how good and praiseworthy they are? And all that I have created I made for you. [But] Be mindful then that you do not spoil and destroy My world - for if you do spoil it, there is no one after you to repair it.'
Kohelet Rabbah 7:13

Community

The Torah cannot be acquired except in fellowship.
Talmud, Berachot 63b