

# בל תשחית

## Bal Tashchit Text Study

### For older children

This is the Torah source for Bal Tashchit:

“When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down...Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed.” Deuteronomy 20:19-20

1. Why do you think that even in the time of war against a city we are commanded to not destroy the trees?
2. Why would we not be allowed to cut down trees that bear fruit?

Another anonymous rabbinic view (13th c., Spain):

The purpose of this mitzvah [bal tashchit] is to teach us to love that which is good and worthwhile and to cling to it, so that good becomes a part of us and we will avoid all that is evil and destructive. This is the way of the righteous and those who improve society, who love peace and rejoice in the good in people and bring them close to Torah: that nothing, not even a grain of mustard, should be lost to the world, that they should regret any loss or destruction that they see, and if possible they will prevent any destruction that they can. (Sefer Ha-Hinukh, #529)

The underlying idea of this law is the recognition that everything we own was in some way created by God and belongs to God. When we are wasteful and unkind to the natural environment, we damage God’s creations. We are obligated to consider our energy uses and the sources from which they come

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Midrash Rabbah, Kohelet 7:13 — “At the time that God created Adam the first [human], He took him and toured him amongst all the trees of the Garden of Eden. He said, ‘See My works, how pleasant and fine they are! And all that I have created, I have created for you. Set your mind not to ruin and destroy My world, for if you ruin it, there is none who can repair it after you.’”

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## Discussion Questions for Children and Families

1. What do you recycle in your house?
2. What does recycling mean? What happens to the items in recycling bins?
3. Why is recycling important?
4. How can we help take care of oceans, rivers, forests and trees? Why is it important to care for nature?
5. What types of destruction and misuse of the environment have you seen?
6. What can we do to make sure that people take good care of the earth?
7. How can we reduce (cut back on) the amount of water or electricity that we use at home?
8. What else can your family do to protect the earth from harm or damage?

## Suggested Activities

- o Plant a garden in your community — invite families to plant and work in the garden.
- o Participate in a gleaning project: Help to pick and gather what remains in the fields of a local farm (ensuring that no piece of food is wasted).
- o Make crafts using recycled materials; make treasures from trash.
- o Invite families to participate in a park, playground, beach, or neighborhood cleanup.
- o Decorate cloth grocery bags.
- o Make cloth bags from old T-shirts.
- o Make conservation reminder signs, such as “Last one out shut the lights” and “Hush while you brush” (Turn off the water while you brush your teeth). Make them with recycled materials.
- o Hold a repair fair where families can repair old books, old toys, old furniture, etc.
- o Organize a toy or clothing swap where families can exchange used toys or clothes with one another.
- o Contact an organization that will provide a truck/crate for collecting families’ old electronic devices and computers.
- o Foster concern for the environment by helping children spend time playing outdoors, where they can explore and fall in love with the environment. For example, hold a family nature hike or scavenger hunt at a local pond, forest, beach, stream, etc.
- o Make paper with older kids (ages 7 and up), thereby increasing their understanding of recycling.

All of Me Do Not Destroy (Bal Tashchit):

The Importance of Conserving and Protecting Nature

The Global Day of Jewish Learning November