

## 6.4.1 *Achrayut* אֶחְרַיּוּת

### Complete Lesson Plan

### *Havurah* or Online Class

Responsible stewardship of natural resources is a Jewish behavior that goes all the way back to the biblical era. Given the realities of our world, responsible stewardship is clearly the responsibility of all human beings.

#### Suggested Settings

- Arrange a field trip to a recycling station for a tour of the plant and process. We suggest that the group does the first two activities (the Mitzvah of Stewardship and *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית text study and activity) and then goes on a tour of the recycling station.
- Alternative activity: take a tour of a sustainable farm. Visit [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org) to find a local farm. (6.4.1 LocalHarvest)

#### Learning Goals

- Participants will recognize their responsibility as stewards of the environment.
- Students will be able to refer to the prohibition of wasting resources in nature by the Hebrew expression *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית.
- Participants will be able to speak about recycling/sustainability efforts as a *mitzvah* מצוּוּה/moral imperative.
- Students will understand that their actions can have an impact on the environment.

#### Activities & Guiding Questions

##### *Welcome Warm Up*

**Time Allotment: 5 Minutes**

**Class: Online and *Havurah***

This is an optional ice breaker to engage and excite students in the process of learning. Participants select one out of three questions to answer, unless time and interest enable more discussion.

##### **Discussion Questions**

- What is a way you show responsibility?
- What are three regular chores you are responsible for at home?
- Who is one of your role models? Why?

For an online class, ask students to get a fruit or nut from their kitchens at home. We will eat these snacks together at the end of class.

##### *Introduction to Achrayut* אֶחְרַיּוּת

**Time Allotment: 15 Minutes**

**Class: *Havurah* and Online**

Students begin by answering questions about responsibility and then read about Judaism's definition of *achrayut* אַחֲרָיִוּת, which is how we respond, answer, or account for our decisions and actions. The root of *achrayut* אַחֲרָיִוּת is "acher," meaning "other." This highlights the responsibility that we have for others and how our actions have a direct impact on others.

Say, "You've heard your mother, your grandmother, your dad, your aunt, your teacher, and/or your coach remind you of 'your responsibility!' What do we mean by that word responsibility?" Ask students to brainstorm their ideas of the definition of responsibility. Allow two minutes.

For online classes and classes that have access to mobile devices, this activity can be done as a Word Cloud. Responses to the next prompt can be added. This can also be done on AnswerGarden.com

Ask students to think of the most responsible person they know and why they consider them to be responsible. Share the answers on the whiteboard or in the chat box for online classes. Example: Mom is the most responsible person I know because she is never late. Teacher can write "Never Late" on the board as a characteristic of a responsible person.

Ask students to share a personal experience of responsibility, relating what might have happened without responsibility being taken.

What are the benefits of being a responsible person at home, school, or part of a team? Are there benefits to being irresponsible? What are they?

**How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understanding:** Students will begin to understand the many layers of personal responsibility and how *achrayut* אַחֲרָיִוּת connects responsibility for "self" with responsibility for the "other."

Tags: responsibility, others, accountability, actions, *havurah*, online

### *The Mitzvah of Stewardship*

**Time Allotment: 10 Minutes**

**Class: *Havurah* and Online**

Inform students that one place where we can show responsibility is to the environment, the land, and the planet.

Ask students what they have done so far today that impacts the environment. Encourage them to think about how their daily choices (e.g did they ride in a car, walk, or bike? Did they recycle? Take a l-o-n-g shower?) impact the environment.

Ask students: Is it a *mitzvah* מִצְוָה (a commandment) to take care of the environment? Does Judaism care about how we treat the environment?

The answer is YES! Study *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* 7:13 where God tells Adam in the Garden of Eden to have *achrayut* אַחֲרָיִוּת for the natural world (stewardship).

When God created the first human beings, God led them around to all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said: “Look at My works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! 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.”

### Discussion Questions

- If God created the world for us to use, does that mean that we can use it however we please?
- Are we responsible for preserving our natural resources?
- How do we show that we appreciate the natural resources that we have been given?
- How can we balance our need and desire to use modern technology and disposable products with our concern for the environment?

Tell students that we are stewards or the caretakers of the earth. Ask students to write a detailed description of a natural place they think is beautiful. Then, have the students write some of the activities of stewardship that are necessary to keep that place beautiful, natural, and healthy. Students should include the term stewardship and its definition in their writing.

Share some of the students' responses.

**Additional Option:** As students are describing their beautiful place, the class can work on drawing what is being described.

**How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understanding:** We have a responsibility to look beyond ourselves and protect the environment.

**Tags:** stewardship, environment, *Kohelet Rabbah*, repair, Garden of Eden, *havurah*, online

### Brain Break

**Time Allotment:** 10 Minutes

**Class:** *Havurah* and Online

Take a quick trip around your classroom or school. Identify areas that need stewardship, someone to take responsibility. Think creatively about which areas need care and what you can do to help! Ideas can include: board eraser, bookshelf arranger, turns off lights, playground or cafeteria cleanup, waste reduction and recycling coordinator, junior water-conservation manager, student stewardship ambassador to school, landscaper, etc.

This can be done at home for a virtual class.

### *Bal Tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית **Text Study**

**Time Allotment:** 20 Minutes

**Havurah** and Online

**Materials Needed:** poster board or butcher paper for *havurah* session, markers, *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית sources handout (Online class will use online resources, such as Padlet.com, to complete the assignment).

It may come as a surprise to your students that Jewish law considers wasting/needless acts of destruction/*bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית to be a sin. Study the source for the law of *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית, the prohibition against wasteful destruction, in *Devarim/Deuteronomy (Devarim 20:19-20)*. (6.4.1 *Bal Tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית *Devarim/Deuteronomy 20*) While the Biblical source mentions only one example of wasteful destruction (fruit trees in wartime), the rabbis consider any wasteful destruction to be prohibited. Students apply their newly acquired knowledge about *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית to describe situations of waste or needless destruction they may encounter in their own lives.

The commandment known as *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית (do not destroy) is based on the following text from *Devarim/Deuteronomy 20:19-20*:

“When in your war against a city you must 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. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siege works against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.”

### Discussion Questions

- Where do you see waste in your everyday life?
- How do you feel when you see others wasting food or resources? Does it bother you? Do you notice?
- What do you think is worse? Wasting time or wasting resources?
- Think about the *midrash* of Adam in the Garden of Eden from *Kohelet Rabbah* that we studied at the beginning of class. Why do you think that the Torah sees *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית as such a terrible thing?

Ask students to list in their *Cheshbon Hanefesh* journal or on a piece of paper, the ways you waste at home or school. Circle three things you will commit to stop wasting or destroying.

Have students share their three items and list them for everyone to see. See if students can identify the top three actions on the list that would have the largest, positive impact on the environment.

Review and discuss the three examples of *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית in the slide deck.

### Discussion Questions

- What do you think is worse? Wasting time or wasting resources?
- Think about the *midrash* of Adam in the Garden of Eden from *Kohelet Rabbah* that we studied at the beginning of class. Why do you think that the Torah sees *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית as such a terrible thing?

**How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understanding:** We have a responsibility to look beyond ourselves and protect the environment.

**Tags:** *bal tashchit* בַּל תִּשְׁחִית, *halacha*, waste, destruction, environment, *havurah*, online

**Video: Am Ha’Aretz**

**Time Allotment: 10 Minutes**

**Class: Havurah and Online**

Watch this 2:19 minute video *Am Ha’Aretz* <https://safesha.re/21h> (6.4.1 Am Ha’Aretz) and learn about an organic farm grown at the University of Maryland, which contributes to Judaism and the environment.

**Discussion Questions**

- In what ways did planting a garden make an impact?
- How did Am Ha’Aretz get started?
- What is something you are interested in or passionate about, that could help the environment?

If your *havurah* is meeting at the recycling station, take a tour of the recycling plant. If your *havurah* is meeting at a sustainable farm, take a tour of the farm with a focus on sustainability.

**Discussion Questions**

- How are the people who work at this recycling plant/ sustainable farm doing a *mitzvah* מצוה?
- How can we learn from their actions?
- What can we do to “take care of the garden” in our homes, schools, and community?

**How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understanding:** We have a responsibility to look beyond ourselves and protect the environment.

**Tags:** farming, *Havdalah*, produce, recycling, sustainability, field trip, *havurah*, online

**Values in Action: Bal Tashchit בל תשחית Assessment**

**Time Allotment: 10-20 Minutes**

**Class: Havurah and Online**

Take a walk around your synagogue/JCC/home where the class is meeting (if you have not gone off-site for the *havurah*). If this is an on-line class, ask students to walk around their house and then come back to the computer in three to five minutes prepared to report on what they found. Ask students to try to find five ways that the facility can improve its stewardship of the environment (i.e., more recycling bins, don’t use plastic bags or disposables, filter water rather than using bottled water, use recycled paper, replace incandescent bulbs with CFLs, wash clothes in cold water, etc.) Write a letter to the synagogue/JCC/your parents with some ideas on how to guard the environment better.

**How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understanding:** We have a responsibility to look beyond ourselves and protect the environment.

**Tags:** values in action, green living, environment, *tikkun olam* תיקון עולם, *havurah*, online

## **Tu B'Shvat טו בְּשֵׁבֶט Snack**

**Time Allotment: 10 Minutes**

**Class: Havurah and Online**

Teachers can watch the following video prior to class and share some of the highlights about the significance of the fruits that are about to be eaten: *What is a Birthday for the Trees?*” <https://safesha.re/21i> (stop at 6:12) (6.4.1 Tu B'Shvat טו בְּשֵׁבֶט)

As a special Tu B'Shevat טו בְּשֵׁבֶט snack, serve foods made with the seven species of the Land of Israel (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranate, olives, and dates). Talk about Tu B'Shevat טו בְּשֵׁבֶט as the holiday when we remember our *achrayut* אַחֲרָיִית to trees and the natural environment.

Remind students of the blessing for fruits, “Borei Pri Ha’etz” and say the blessing together before eating.

For an online class, tell students to eat the fruits or nuts that they took from their kitchens at the beginning of class.

**How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understanding:** Our Jewish values and traditions connect us to the environment.

**Tags:** food, values, trees, *havurah*

### **Car Talk**

What are some things we could do as a family as an expression of our commitment to the value of *achrayut* אַחֲרָיִית to the environment?