

BAL TASHCHIT



ACTIVITY:
RECYCLE ROUNDUP: How many uses can you think of for unwanted items?
This game is for 3 players or more: Two teams or two individual players plus a Host.
You'll need: • three unwanted items (for example, an empty paper cup, an old shoe, an empty box) • paper and pencil for each team • timer
How to Play: The game begins when the Host shows one unwanted item to the teams. Teams have one minute to think of all the uses they can for the item and write them down. At the end of the minute, each team reads its list. If both teams have thought of the same idea/use, it gets crossed off of the list. Count how many items are left on each list. The team with the most ideas wins the round. The team that wins two rounds out of three is the winning team.



INTRODUCTION:
Jewish law prohibits wasteful consumption and needless destruction. This is referred to as *Bal Tashchit*, do not destroy. When people waste resources, they violate the law of *Bal Tashchit*. The laws of *Bal Tashchit* are the foundation for preventing human actions that are harmful to the environment. Below is the law from the Torah, followed by its development in the [Mishneh Torah](#) by the [Rambam](#).



TEXT 1:
GRADES 3-5 through ADULT:
19 When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you may not destroy its [fruit-bearing] trees by swinging an axe against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down.

כִּי־תָצוּר אֶל־עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֶם
עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצָהּ לְנֹדָחַ
עָלֶיו גֵּרְזֹן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֹתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת



TEXT 2:
14 Not only one who cuts down a fruit tree, but anyone who destroys household goods, tears clothing, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or ruins food deliberately, violates the prohibition *bal tashchit*, “you must not destroy.”
Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars 6:14

וְלֹא הָאֵילָנוֹת בַּלְבָּד, אֲלֵא כָל הַמִּשְׁבֵּר
כְּלִים, וְקוֹרֵעַ בְּגָדִים, וְהוֹרֵס בְּנֵיִן, וְסוֹתֵם
מַעֲיִן, וְמַאֲבֵד מֵאֲכֻלוֹת דֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁחִתָּה —
עוֹבֵר בְּלֹא תִשְׁחִית



CONVERSATION:

- How does Rambam expand the original prohibition of cutting down fruit trees?
- What are the similarities and differences between this expanded list and the original prohibition against cutting down a fruit tree?
- How might we understand this law in modern times?
- What does this mean for our lives today?