

Environmental Mitzvot Lesson 1: Ba'al Tashchit (Do Not Destroy)

Opening Reflection

Ba'al Tashchit (Hebrew: בל תשחית) means "do not destroy"

Think about these questions and write your initial thoughts:

Question:	Response:
Where do you think this concept comes from?	
What things shouldn't be destroyed?	
What makes this concept specifically Jewish?	
How is being wasteful different from or similar to "do not destroy"?	

Text Study: Deuteronomy 20:19

"When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them, for from them you will eat, and you shall not cut them down. Is the tree of the field a man, that it should enter the siege before you?"

Reflection Questions:

1. Why is it important that even in wartime you do not destroy your enemy's trees?

2. What does this teach us about environmental responsibility?

Modern Applications

Research Activity: Look up information about modern Jewish environmental organizations and Israeli environmental practices. Fill in what you discover:

Hazon Organization:

What they do: _____

What stands out: _____

Environmental Practices in Israel:

Water management: _____

Shmita (sabbatical year): _____

Peah (corner of fields): _____

 Group Activity: Ba'al Tashchit in Practice

Work with your assigned group to brainstorm practical ways to follow Ba'al Tashchit in different settings:

Group Assignment: _____

Action Level	What We Can Do	How It Helps
Small Steps		
Medium Steps		
Large Steps		

Personal Commitment

Based on today's learning, what is one specific way you will practice Ba'al Tashchit this week?

Closing Reflection

1. What surprised you most about the Jewish approach to environmental responsibility?

2. How does understanding Ba'al Tashchit change how you think about waste and destruction?

3. What questions do you still have about this topic?

Environmental Mitzvot Lesson 2: Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim (Animal Welfare)

Opening: Different Types of New Years

List different ways we count "New Years" in our lives:

Type of New Year	When It Occurs	What It Marks
Secular New Year	January 1	Calendar year
Birthday		
School Year		
Jewish New Year		
Other: _____		

The Four New Years in the Mishna

Fill in what you know about each:

Rosh HaShanah (1 Tishrei): _____

Tu B'Shevat (15 Shvat): _____

1 Nisan: _____

1 Elul - Rosh Hashanah le Behemah: _____

Define "Tithing" in your own words: _____

Why was there a New Year for Animals when the Temple stood?

Text Study: Animal Welfare in Jewish Sources

Text 1: Deuteronomy 22:10- "You shall not plow with an ox and an ass together."

What is this text trying to prevent? _____

Text 2: Deuteronomy 22:6-7 (The Mother Bird) - "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. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life."

What relationship between humans and animals does this text establish?

What suffering is this text preventing?

Text 3: Exodus 20:8-10 (Sabbath for Animals) - "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements."

What does it mean that animals also get to rest on Shabbat?

Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim means "Prohibition Against Cruelty to Animals"

Based on the texts above, what are the key principles of Jewish animal welfare?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Why do you think these laws needed to be written down? Isn't this just common sense?

Bringing Back Rosh Hashanah le Behemah

Why do you think this holiday was lost over time?

Brainstorm: How could we celebrate animals in our lives today?

Animals We Have Close Relationships With (Pets):	Animals That Help Us:	Animals That Provide Sustenance:

Personal Reflection

1. How do you currently interact with animals in your daily life?

2. What is one way you could better practice Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim?

3. If you were to create a modern Rosh Hashanah le Behemah celebration, what would it include?

- _____ - _____

- _____ - _____

🧐 Closing Questions

1. What surprised you most about Jewish teachings on animal welfare?

2. How do these ancient texts apply to modern issues like factory farming, pet ownership, or wildlife conservation?

Environmental Mitzvot Lesson 3: Environmental Justice

Text Study

Avot d'Rabbi Natan 31b

"Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai used to say: If you have a sapling in your hand and are planting it, and someone should say to you that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting, and only then go to greet the Messiah."

What is the importance of planting trees in this teaching?

What does this teach about our environmental responsibilities?

Reading 3: The Story of Honi and the Carob Tree

Summarize the story in your own words or drawings:

Will Honi live to eat the fruit of the tree he planted?

What lesson did Honi learn?

Creative Expression Activity

Choose one of the three texts above and express its meaning through ONE of these creative methods:

- ☐ **Modern Retelling:** Write the story in your own words as a modern tale
- ☐ **Visual Art:** Draw, paint, or create a paper mosaic scene
- ☐ **Musical Expression:** Create a rap or song about the text

My Creative Work Plan:

Text I chose: _____

Creative method: _____

Key message I want to convey:

Creative Work Space:

Use this space for your creative expression (writing, sketching ideas, song lyrics, etc.)

Group Discussion Preparation - prepare to share your creative work by answering:

1. What does your chosen text teach about Jewish environmental values?

2. How did creating this artistic expression help you understand the text better?

3. What surprised you most about this text?

Shmirat HaGuf Lesson 1: Understanding Self-Care

Opening Reflection

Shmirat HaGuf (שמירת הגוף) translates to "guarding of the body"

Question:	Response:
How do you currently take care of yourself?	
What do you do for yourself as a teenager that is your own responsibility?	
Who makes or picks out your food?	
Do you have a say in what you eat?	

Text Study: Jewish Perspectives on Body Care

Reflection Questions for Texts:

Question:	Response:
What is this text saying about our bodies?	
How should we take care of ourselves?	
Why might there be a prayer for after using the bathroom?	

The Asher Yatzar Blessing: This traditional blessing reflects on the miracle of the human body's complex systems.

Transliteration Exercise: Write out the transliteration of the Asher Yatzar blessing:

Personal Health Tracker

Area of Self-Care	Current Practice	Goal for Improvement
Physical Health		
Emotional Well-being		
Nutrition		
Sleep		
Mental Health		

Reflection and Discussion

1. What does Judaism teach about how we should treat our bodies?

2. Why is self-care important?

3. What are some barriers that might prevent you from taking good care of yourself?

Personal Commitment

Based on today's lesson, what is one specific way you will practice better self-care this week?

What surprised you most about the Jewish approach to body care?

How can understanding Shmirat HaGuf help you make better choices about your health?

Shmirat HaGuf Lesson 2: Yetzer Tov and Yetzer Hara

Opening Reflection

Yetzer Tov (יצר טוב) = Good Inclination

Yetzer Hara (יצר הרע) = Bad Inclination

What do you think each of these words mean?

Text Study

Text 1: I Samuel 16:15-23

What is happening with Saul in this text?

What is suggested to help Saul feel better?

What are things YOU can do to make yourself feel better when you are physically and mentally down?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Text 2: Genesis 4:6-7 (Cain and Abel)

"And the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you distressed, and why is your face fallen? Surely, if you do right, there is uplift. But if you do not do right Sin couches at the door; Its urge is toward you, yet you can be its master.'"

What does this text teach about managing our inclinations?

Two-Pocket Approach Activity

Rabbi Simcha Bunim teaches: "In every coat there should be two pockets. In one pocket should be a piece of paper that reads, 'For my sake was the world created.' In the other should be a piece of paper that reads, 'I am only dust and ashes.'"

Left Pocket	Right Pocket:
"For my sake was the world created"	"I am only dust and ashes"
What does this perspective mean to you?	What does this perspective mean to you?
How might this perspective guide your decisions?	How might this perspective humble you?

Support Network Mapping

Who can you turn to when you need guidance?

Type of Support	Name/Role	Why They Help
Spiritual Guidance		
Emotional Support		
Family Support		
Community Resources		
Professional Help		

Personal Reflection

1. How do your good and bad inclinations show up in your daily life?

Good: _____

Bad: _____

2. What strategies can you use to listen more to your Yetzer Tov?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. When might you need help managing your Yetzer Hara?

Shmirat HaGuf Lesson 3: Values and Decision Making

Opening Reflection on Values

1. What is a value?

2. Which values are important to you?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. Which values are important to your parents or family?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. Finish the statement:

We have values because _____

Watch the video: "Making of a Mensch"

Video Reflection Questions:

1. What values stood out to you in the video?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

2. What surprised you about the values discussed?

Text Study: Values and Challenging Decisions

Exploring Texts on Drugs and Alcohol

1. I think Rabbis need to have commentary on these subjects because _____

2. How might you use Jewish texts and values to guide decisions about drugs and alcohol?

Decision-Making Framework

Scenario Planning

For each scenario, apply the two-pocket approach and Jewish values:

Scenario	Potential Choices	Yetzer Tov Perspective	Yetzer Hara Perspective	Best Choice
Peer Pressure				
Substance Use				
Social Situation				

Personal Value Commitment

1. Create Your Personal Value Statement:

"I commit to living by the values of _____ by doing the following specific actions: _____

_____”

2. Identify Potential Challenges to Living These Values:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3. Strategies to Overcome These Challenges:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Who can help you stay true to your values?

Name	Role/Relationship	How They Support You

 Closing Reflection

1. How can Jewish values help you make difficult decisions?

2. What is one specific way you will apply these lessons this week?

Racial Justice Lesson 1: Introducing Race, Centering Jewish People of Color

Understanding Race: What is Race?

1. Race is a social construct designed to _____
2. Scientific consensus: Race has no _____
3. Racial identity is _____
4. In the United States, everyone is assigned a _____

1. What does race mean to you?

2. How do you think race impacts people's lived experiences?

Social Identity Exploration: Identity Mapping

Identity Aspect	My Reflection
Race	
Ethnicity	
Religion	
Gender	
Other Identities	

Privilege Checklist

Reflect on the following statements. Place a checkmark (✓) if the statement applies to you:

- ☐ I can easily find media representations that reflect my identity
- ☐ I feel comfortable in most social and professional spaces
- ☐ I do not worry about being judged based on my appearance
- ☐ I have never been followed in a store due to my appearance
- ☐ I feel safe interacting with law enforcement

What surprised you about this checklist?

Discussion: Race in the Jewish Community

1. How does race play a role in the Jewish community?

2. What is privilege?

3. What do you understand about white privilege?

Voices of Black Jews

Read a response from a Black Jew about a significant social event

1. Who is the speaker?

2. What are they conveying?

3. What surprises you about their perspective?

Personal Reflection

One new thing I learned about race and identity today is_____

2. What questions do you still have?

3. How might you continue learning about these topics?

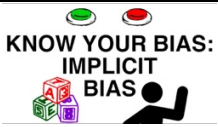
Racial Justice Lesson 2: Anti-Semitism and Racism

Brainstorming Activity

Create two bubbles: one for Racism and one for Anti-Semitism

Racism	Anti-Semitism
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Definitions Exploration: Define the following terms using the ADL resource:

Term:	Image:	Definition:
Prejudice		
Racism		
Anti-Semitism		
Bias		
Implicit Bias		
Stereotyping		

Media Analysis

Listen to or read the NPR story about recent anti-Semitic violence

Question:	Response:
How are the interviewees feeling?	
What are their primary concerns?	

White Nationalism Study

1. How do White Nationalism and racism impact people of color and Jews?

2. What connections did you observe between racism and anti-Semitism?

Comparative Analysis

Aspect	Racism	Anti-Semitism	Similarities	Differences
Definition				
Historical Context				
Impact on Communities				

Personal Reflection

1. How do these forms of discrimination intersect?

2. What surprised you most about the connections between racism and anti-Semitism?

3. What questions do you still have?

Racial Justice Lesson 3: What Does the Torah Say About Racial Justice?

Gallery Walk: Torah Texts on Justice

Instructions for Gallery Walk:

1. Move around the room and read different texts
2. Use Post-Its or write directly on the sheets to respond

Reflection Prompts for Each Text:

- What do you like/dislike about this text?
- What is meaningful to you?
- How does this text relate to racial justice?

Text Analysis Worksheet

Text	Key Message	My Reflection	Connection to Racial Justice
Text 1			
Text 2			
Text 3			

Chevruta (Partner) Discussion

Discuss the following questions with your partner:

Question:	Brainstorm:
What do these texts teach about human dignity?	
How do these texts challenge ideas of superiority or discrimination?	
What surprised you about these texts?	

Personal Interpretation

Choose ONE text and reinterpret it for today's context:

Original Text:

My Modern Interpretation:

Broader Reflection

1. What do Jewish texts and traditions say about racial justice?

2. How are these ancient teachings relevant today?

Creative Expression

Choose ONE way to express what you've learned:

- Write a poem, create a visual artwork, write a story, compose a song or rap

My Creative Expression:

Racial Justice Lesson 4: Taking Action

Human Barometer Activity

Move to different areas of the room based on your response to these statements:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school has a diverse student body	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students at my school regularly socialize with students from different backgrounds	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable socializing with students from different racial or ethnic groups	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that my race impacts my life daily	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our synagogue community has a diverse population	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our Jewish community is doing good work to help others	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think there is more we can do as a community to help others	☐	☐	☐	☐

Reflection on Statements:

Action Planning

Writing to Your Representative

1. Find Your Representative:

Name: _____

Contact Information: _____

2. Brainstorm Key Points for Your Letter:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. Draft Your Letter:

Dear _____,

Sincerely,
(your name)

Local Volunteer Opportunities

Research local organizations that help underserved communities:

Organization Name	Mission	Volunteer Opportunities	Contact Information
1.			
2.			
3.			

Personal Commitment

My Racial Justice Action Plan:

Short-Term Goal (Next Month):

Medium-Term Goal (Next 6 Months):

Long-Term Goal (Next Year):

Final Reflection

1. What does taking action for racial justice mean to you?

2. How will you stay committed to this work?
