



## From the Seidman Educational Resource Center Files

# בל תשחית

## ***BAL TASHHIT, DO NOT DESTROY NEEDLESSLY*** **BACKGROUND AND SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES\***

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**\*From among the Project Ideas included, the additional editors have identified at least one project for each of Dr. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences listed below. These are indicated by a green category note. We encourage you to further analyze the remaining activities and to create programs that span the spectrum of Intelligences. In this way each child can function to his or her strength.**

- 1. Verbal/linguistic**
- 2. Logical/mathematical**
- 3. Visual/spatial**
- 4. Body/kinesthetic**
- 5. Musical/rhythmic**
- 6. Interpersonal**
- 7. Intrapersonal**
- 8. Naturalist**

## I. **BACKGROUND/SOURCE OF MITZVAH, BAL TASHHIT**

### A. **From the Bible**

1. "The Lord, God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. And from the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food . . ." (Genesis 2:8-9)
  - Who created the garden? The trees? The man?
  - According to the Torah, for what reason do we have trees?
  - If you believe trees are created by God, can you cut down trees needlessly?
  - How should this belief direct your actions regarding the environment?
  
2. "The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to till it and tend it." (Genesis 2:15)
  - What was man's job in the Garden of Eden?
  - If the man's instructions are to till and tend the garden, can the man ruin the garden?
  - In what way do we live in the Garden of Eden? What is our responsibility to this garden?
  
3. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God." (Leviticus 19:9-10)
  - If you own this land, meaning it belongs to you, why should you have to share some of its products with others?
  - According to Jewish belief, does the land truly belong to the farmer? Who does it really belong to? Compare the *berakha - HaMotzi*.
  - If you believe that the land truly belongs to God, what does that teach us about the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*?
  
4. "Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath of complete rest, a Sabbath of Adonai: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard." (Leviticus 25:3-4)
  - What happens in the seventh year?
  - Why is seven an important number?
  - Why does the land need a Shabbat? Why do people need a Shabbat?
  - By following the mitzvah presented in this text, how are we doing the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*?

5. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me." (Leviticus 25:23)
  - Why can the land not be sold off forever?
  - To whom does the land belong?
  - If the land does not belong to us, how does that limit our rights to do what we want with it?
6. "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 axe 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 siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced." (Deuteronomy 20:19-20)
  - How can people do both - use the world for their needs, but at the same time save it? (***Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues***) Use the above verse as a basis for your answer.
  - What does a fruit tree symbolize? What is its importance?
  - What is the difference between fruit trees and non-fruit trees according to this verse?
  - What is the meaning of "Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city?"
7. "If you see your fellow's donkey or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it; you must help him raise it." (Deuteronomy 22:4)
  - How are animals important to people? Why are they important to you?
  - What does this verse tell us to do to care for animals? In what ways can you do this mitzvah?
8. "How many are the things You made, O Lord; You have made them all with wisdom; the earth is full of Your creations." (Psalms 104:24)
  - What "many things" do you think the text refers to?
  - How are these many things created with wisdom?
  - How does this verse teach us to do the mitzvah of Bal Tash<sub>hit</sub>?
9. "The righteous shall flourish like a date palm." (Psalms 92:13)  
(Discussion questions come from ***JNF-Trees in the Bible: A Guide for Classroom Teachers***)
  - What kind of a tree is a palm tree?
  - How would you describe a "righteous person?"
  - Make two lists from the answers above. Compare the two lists. Do you see any relationships between the answers given for the palm tree and for the righteous person?
  - Can you find the connection between the idea of the righteous flourishing and the date palm?

10. "But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the sky, they will tell you, Or speak to the earth, it will teach you; the fish of the sea they will inform you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?" (Job 12:7-9)

- What will the animals and the earth teach us?
- What does it mean to say "the hand of the Lord?" Does God really have a hand?
- What has the hand of the Lord done?
- What experiences have you had in your life when you felt that God's hand had done something for you?

## B. From Rabbinic Literature

1. "Whoever breaks vessels, or tears garments, or destroys a building, or clogs a well, or does away with food in a destructive manner violates the negative mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*." (Kiddushin 32a)

- What actions violate the commandment of *Bal Tashhit*?
- What is wrong with each of these actions?
- This law from the Talmud is based on the verse about fruit trees from Deut. 20:19-20. How does this second text relate to the first one? What inferences about caring for the environment today can we make from these two texts?

2. "Rabbi Huna said, 'A scholar is forbidden to live in a town that has no plants.'" (Eruvin 55b) because a "dwelling place should be beautiful in the eyes of its inhabitants." (Sota 47a, quoted in "Keshet" BJE of San Francisco, et al)

- Why is a scholar forbidden to live in a town without plants? Isn't the scholar too busy studying to notice his or her surroundings?
- What would it be like to live without plants and trees?

3. "Blessed be He who did not let His world lack anything, who created for it beautiful creatures, and these beautiful trees, that man may see them and be filled with joy." (Talmud, Berakhot 43b, translated by Olga Marx, quoted in "Keeping Posted," p. 4)

- In what ways did God create a world that does not lack anything?
- Do we appreciate this world properly? How could we show our appreciation?
- What experiences have you had with nature that have "filled you with joy"?
- This is considered a blessing for springtime. How is this an appropriate blessing?
- According to this blessing, for what purpose are trees? If accept this purpose, what do you learn about the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*?

4. "We are forbidden to give animals possibly polluted water to drink." (Tosafot, Bava Kamma 115b, quoted in "**Earth Day is Every Day,**" Women's League for Conservative Judaism)
  - What do we learn about the way we are supposed to treat animals from this verse?
  - If animals are not supposed to drink polluted water, what does that teach us about humans?
  
5. "Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said, three things are of equal importance, earth, humans and rain. Rabbi Levi ben Hiyat said: . . . to teach that without earth, there is no rain, and without rain, the earth cannot endure, and without either, humans cannot exist." (Genesis Rabba, 13:3, quoted in ***To Till and to Tend***)
  - Why are these three things of equal importance?
  - What do we learn about "inter-dependence" from this text?
  - What do people need to exist?
  - How could you use this text for a public service announcement against pollution or littering?
  
6. "An ancient Jewish legend teaches that when Adam was created, God took him around the Garden of Eden for an orientation. This was humanity's first vision of Eden: " 'See how beautiful all my creations are,' said God. 'All has been created for your sake . . . So reflect on this, and take care not to foul or destroy my world. For if you do, there will be none to repair it after you. And what is worse, you will bring death even to righteous people in the future.' " (Ecclesiastes Rabba, 7:13, explained by Rabbi Gordon Tucker, in his article, "***Visions of Eden: Living and Serving in God's World,***" in the Fall 1997 publication of ***Coejl - Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life***, New York)
  - Why did God take Adam around the Garden of Eden for an orientation?
  - For what purpose did God make these beautiful creations?
  - What consequences do Adam's actions have?
  - Who else does this text teach about besides Adam?
  - What will happen to the world if we do not take care of it?
  - How could our actions bring death to righteous people in the future?
  
7. "Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai . . . used to say: if you have a sapling in your hand, and someone should say to you that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting, and then go to greet the Messiah." (Avot de Rabbi Nathan, 31b)
  - How does this text teach us about the importance of planting trees?
  - Why is planting trees so important? In what ways do our lives benefit from trees?

8. Those who are mindful of the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*, “will not destroy even a mustard seed in the world, and they are distressed at every ruination and spoilage that they see; and if they are able to do any rescuing, they will save anything from destruction, with all their power.” (Quoted in *It’s a Mitzvah!*, attributed to a medieval rabbi)
  - Would it be so terrible to destroy a little mustard seed? Why is such a small act singled out here?
  - How can we save anything from destruction?
  
9. “Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone, may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass and all growing things, and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer.” (Nachman of Bratzlav, Maggid Sichot, 48, quoted in ***To Till and to Tend***)
  - How does being outside in nature help people enter into prayer?
  - How would your life be affected if you were unable to go outside among the growing things?

## II. PROJECT IDEAS FOR SCHOOL AND FAMILY

### A. School

1. Convince students from another class to help you pick up litter on the grounds of your synagogue. What arguments will you use to try to convince them? (***Doing Mitzvot***, p. 79) - **INTERPERSONAL**
  
2. Each student brings in one item of trash. Brainstorm ways each of these items might be reused or recycled. Design a recycling guide. Copy it for students in other classes. (***Doing Mitzvot***, p. 143) - **LOGICAL/MATHEMATICAL**
  
3. Plant a biblical garden. Research the flora of ancient Israel, then choose seedlings or seeds of those plants and create a small garden patch. Depending on the climate and the time of year, you may need to plant your garden indoors. When teaching the children how to weed, water, and cultivate their plants, discuss how farmers take care of the world. Relate to the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*. (***Teaching Mitzvot***, p. 143) - **BODY/KINESTHETIC AND NATURALIST**
  
4. Plan a trip to a recycling center. In preparation, consider the following questions:
  - What is recycling?
  - Why should we do it?
  - How do we go about recycling?
  - How is recycling related to *Bal Tashhit*? (***Teaching Mitzvot***, p. 143)

5. Read ***The Giving Tree*** by Shel Silverstein. Discussion questions include:

- When the boy was young, what did he and the tree do?
- As he got older, what happened between the boy/man and the tree?
- Was the boy/man fair to the tree?
- Did the boy take advantage of what the tree had to offer?
- What happened at the end of the story? How do you feel about that ending?

Relate the story to the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*. (***Teaching Mitzvot***, p. 144)

6. Have each student create a "cause button" advertising some aspect of the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*. Some examples: Save the Whales; Be Astute, Don't Pollute; It's Our World - Don't Litter; Get on the Green Team. (***Teaching Mitzvot***, p. 144)

7. Establish a synagogue recycling center. Organize publicity both within the synagogue and in the local community which focuses on the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*. (***Teaching Mitzvot***, p. 145)

8. There are many secular environmental projects children can do to work toward the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*. Several ideas are listed below. Two good secular resource books are listed in the bibliography; there are many others available at bookstores and teacher resource centers. The essential component is for the teacher and/or parent to clearly tie in the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit* with the secular project.

- Donate toys to a worthy cause (instead of adding to the mountains of trash).
- "Turn off the lights" - put stickers near light switches; if the last person out of a room forgets to turn the lights off, he or she should donate a nickel or dime toward an ecological cause.
- Visit a recycling center.

(Ideas from ***Going Green: A Kid's Handbook to Saving the Planet***)

Several other easy environmental actions are as follows: ("Kadima and the Environment")

Stop junk mail by asking to be removed from junk mailing lists. One site where you can do this online is: <http://www.dmaconsumers.org/offmailinglist.html>.

- Use both sides of your paper
- Pick up scraps of newspaper, cans, etc. and recycle.

The following suggested projects were contributed by Nancy M. Messinger of the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education (***"Recycling in Hebrew School - Some Suggested Projects"***)

- Create a recycling corner in the classroom.
- Create posters around the synagogue - "Save electricity," "Do Not Waste Water," and use appropriate quotes from Jewish tradition.

- Create a set of environmental “Ten Commandments” and publish in the synagogue bulletin, giving each a source in Jewish tradition.
  - Write an anti-pollution class pledge: “I pledge to help the earth by . . .”
  - Set up an ecology bulletin board with quotations from Jewish texts and current news articles related to environmental issues.
  - Conduct an ecology-oriented seder for Tu BiShvat.
9. Do research into different Israeli trees, such as almond, date, palm, sycamore, and olive. (JNF, Canada)
  10. Learn the seven species of the Land of Israel as listed in Deuteronomy 8:8. Learn to sing a song with the seven species.
  11. Make a “tree of life” collage. Children collect twigs and leaves. Using arts and crafts supplies, they create a collage. Hang it in the classroom or at home with appropriate Jewish environmental quotations. (***A Teacher’s Guide to Listen to the Trees***) - **VISUAL/SPATIAL**
  12. Students share their own experiences with nature - camping trips, visiting the Grand Canyon, etc. Ask them to imagine what the world would be like without these natural sites.
  13. Not only when we eat fruit do we enjoy trees. This exercise tells of other ways that we enjoy trees. Fill in the blanks. (JNF, Canada) - **INTRAPERSONAL**  
I sat \_\_\_\_\_  
I played \_\_\_\_\_  
I ate \_\_\_\_\_  
I read \_\_\_\_\_  
I drank \_\_\_\_\_  
I slept \_\_\_\_\_  
I took \_\_\_\_\_  
I used \_\_\_\_\_  
I wrote \_\_\_\_\_  
I saw \_\_\_\_\_
  14. Based on Psalm 104, write your own psalm of appreciation for nature and the cycle of the world. (***The World around Us***)
  15. Using the verse from Psalms 92:13 as a model, “The righteous shall flourish like a date palm” (see Section I, #8, for discussion questions based on this verse), have children compose their own quotations utilizing trees as metaphors, and to illustrate quotations in posters, pictures, or diorama. (JNF, ***Trees in the Bible: A Guide for Classroom Teachers***) - **VERBAL/LINGUISTIC, VISUAL/SPATIAL , INTRAPERSONAL**

16. Present to the class a selection of stories from the Bible that feature trees: (JNF, *Trees in the Bible*)
- Trees were created by God in the creation story.
  - Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge.
  - A dove brought an olive branch.
  - Abraham served his guests under a tree.
  - Deborah judged under a tree.
  - Absalom was caught by his hair in the branches of a tree.
  - Discover which kind of tree was mentioned in each story.
  - What do we learn about the tree in each story?
  - What do we learn about the characters and how they relate to these trees in each story?
  - What does each tree represent?
17. Read the creation story and list elements in the order in which they were created. Draw the food chain. Compare and contrast the food chain to the elements of creation. (from "*Kesher*," Battat Educational Resource Center)
18. List the different Jewish holidays that have an environmental connection. What seasons do they fall in? What environmental rituals are relevant? (from "*Kesher*," Battat Educational Resource Center)
- **Sukkot** - Fall: Gathering harvest - Rejoicing over the gathering of crops already harvested; Building a Sukkah; Praying for rain for the next season.
  - **Tu Bi Shevat** - Winter: Blooming - Planting trees; Tithing.
  - **Passover** - Spring: Barley harvest; Praying for dew; Bringing the *Omer* (barley offering)
  - Shavuot - Summer: Wheat harvest; *Bikkurim* (bringing the first crops offering)
19. \*Create a "*Shuk Tiv'i*," an Environmental Marketplace for family education. Families can visit as many stops as possible at the "*Shuk*." Stations include:
- "Parsley Planting" (to be used at the family's seder)
  - "Poster Gallery" (Order posters of Israeli trees and scenes from J.N.F. Participants "browse" through the poster gallery and answer prepared question sheets about environmental connections to the posters.)
  - "Berakha Bee" (Learn about the meaning of blessings in environmental appreciation and match blessings with their stimuli)
  - "Treevial Pursuit Game" (Play the Tu BiShvat family version of Trivial Pursuit and enjoy trivia in a new light; game created by and only available from Penina Hoffnung, family educator of Federation of Southern New Jersey)
  - Biblical Scavenger Hunt (Learn how to use the Tanakh to discover environmental references, based on an activity by Rabbi Dan Fink of Shomrei Adamah)
- [\*Note: This Family Education Activity was created by Cantor Arlyne Unger and the Beth Tikvah-B'nai Jeshurun Family Education Committee, in consultation with Margaret Presley, 1995 ACAJE Wind Fellow.]

20. "Forest Musical Chairs": Use this simple activity to teach your students about the importance of trees and forests. Explain that when people cut down too many trees, many homes for animals are destroyed. In addition, trees are necessary to keep moisture in the soil. To make the point of how it feels to live in the forest and have your "home" taken away, set up chairs just would to play musical chairs. Tell you students that each chair represents a "tree" in the forest and that each of them is an animal that lives in the forest. Start the music and let the children walk around the chairs or "trees." As they are walking, take a "tree"/chair out of the circle and tell them someone has just cut down a tree. Stop the music and ask them how they feel - is someone left without a home? Do they feel more crowded? As the students get further into the game, they will feel more crowded as fewer of the "animals" have homes. (**"Branching Out"**) - **BODY/KINESTHETIC AND MUSIC**

## B. Family

1. Familiarize yourself with "recycled" symbols.
  - Make new objects out of items you would normally trash, e.g. used cans make good nail holders
  - Start a recycling program in your school(Ideas from ***365 Ways for You and Your Children to Save the Earth One Day at a Time***)
2. "Meet your environment." Blindfold your child and a friend and take them for a short walk. After the walk, ask them about all the sounds they heard. Walk them again. This time ask about the smells they experienced. Remove the blindfold and have them walk again. Ask them about what they saw and heard. Did they see everything they had smelled and heard? (***A Teacher's Guide to Listen to the Trees***) - **NATURALIST**
3. Have children cut out "natural" scenes from magazines (e.g., the beach, forests, children at play in a park). Have them write captions for each scene, including an appropriate Jewish quotation that relates to the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*. They can also write fictional stories based on the pictures they have chosen. The stories should include an appropriate quote from Jewish tradition.
4. Discuss how the following Jewish values reflect the values of *Bal Tashhit*: Shabbat, *kashrut*, reciting *Birkot Ha-Nehinin* ("blessings of enjoyment"). (***It's a Mitzvah!***)
5. Begin reciting appropriate *Birkot Ha-Nehinin* ("blessings of enjoyment.") These can be found in various prayer books, such as ***Siddur Sim Shalom***, pp. 708-713; ***Gates of the House***, pp. 19-23; ***The Complete Artscroll Siddur***, p. 224. This will help children to become sensitive to the wonders of nature. These blessings include things to say when smelling fragrant spices; when smelling trees, shrubs, fruit, or fragrant oils; when witnessing wonders of nature: hearing thunder; seeing a rainbow, the ocean or trees in blossom. (***It's a Mitzvah!***)

6. Have the children make nature cards for family and friends on recycled paper for Tu B'Shvat (or Rosh HaShanah or Purim). Recycled or natural items should also be included wherever possible. (***"Earth Day is Every Day"***)
7. For Lag B'Omer, organize an ecological picnic. Pack a lunch that will produce as little garbage as possible: cloth napkins, reusable cutlery, juice in a thermos, etc. Recycle left-over garbage as much as possible. (***"Earth Day is Every Day"***)

### III. **SELECTED STORY BOOKS ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUBJECTS (with overview and discussion questions)**

Read story books about environmental subjects in the classroom. There are several listed in Section IV: Reading Books for Students/Parents. Below are overviews and discussion questions for these story books. [All these books are available for loan at the Seidman Educational Resource Center Kossman Early Childhood Lending Library at Auerbach CAJE. Although these books are found in an "Early Childhood Library," they can all be appreciated on a third-grader's level.]

#### A. ***Shimon's Field and the Public Road*** - Based on Baba Kama 50

"Every person has his or her own private property - a house, yard or field. But there is also public property - roads, parks and town squares - which belongs to everybody. Our wise sages said: Every person is responsible for public property. Thus, everyone must take care of both private and public property. This story is about a person's responsibility for property - private and public alike." (p. 2)

- How does the concept of private vs. public property relate to the mitzvah of *Bal Tashchif*?
- What was wrong with Shimon's plan to clear his field of stones by putting them in the public road?
- The story ends with questions: What do you think Shimon and his family did? How could they take care of this problem?

#### B. ***Trees Grow in Eretz Israel*** - based on Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim 8

"Our wise men used to say: There is no greater mitzvah than that of planting trees in Eretz Israel. Even if the country is covered with shade trees and fruit trees planted before you were born, you should plant some for your children, for your children's children, and for all the generations to come . . . This legend, ***Trees Grow in Eretz Israel***, tells about an old man who planted a fig tree in Eretz Israel many, many years ago. (p. 2)

- Why should people plant trees whose fruit they may never enjoy?
- What are some environmental choices you can make from which others can benefit?
- Why should we plant trees in Israel?
- Why was the old man laughing at the end? Do you think he learned his lesson?

C. ***The Never-Ending Greenness***

This book may be used in connection with Yom HaShoah or Tu BiShvat. It tells the story of how a family escaped from the ghetto of Vilna during the Holocaust, settled in Israel and how the young boy helped rebuild the land by planting trees.

- In what way did trees have an impact on the boy's life before the war?
- In the ghetto?
- When escaping?
- How did the young boy help rebuild Eretz Israel?
- What is the meaning of the title?

D. ***Something from Nothing*** - adapted from a Jewish folk tale

This book tells the story of how Joseph's baby blanket is transformed and preserved by his grandfather so that it always has a use, and is never thrown out.

- What were the different transformations in the life of Joseph's baby blanket?
- How did Joseph's grandfather do the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit* - not wasting?
- Do you like to save things?
- Can you transform your "trash" into something usable?

E. "Ouch! You're Hurting Me!" from ***The World Among Us***

What would the earth say, the oceans, and the atmosphere about our different actions when we pollute?

F. God's "Creation" (based on ***To Till and To Tend***) - Discussing our Relationship with Nature

1. Read the first story of Creation (Genesis 1-2:3).

- What were things like before the work of creation was begun?
- What is God's attitude toward creation?
- Does God give people certain privileges or responsibilities?

2. Read the second Creation story (Genesis 2:4-2:24). Repeat the same set of questions.

- What does it mean to be created in God's image?
- Is it possible both to master the land and tend the garden?

Consider the following quotation from the late philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel: "There are three ways in which we may relate ourselves to the world exploit it, we may enjoy it, we may accept it in awe." (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 1955)

- What does each of these three ways mean?
- What are some activities that would fall under each category?
- Does one or another fit more closely with Genesis 1? Genesis 2?

G. "To There It Returns": Compost (taken from *To Till and To Tend*, based on a program written by Elisheva Kaufman.)

Using the passage from Ecclesiastes as a point of departure, this program can also open into a larger discussion about how nature can replenish itself through a life cycle of birth-death-rebirth.

1. Collecting "trash"  
Outside, have the children collect items that have been used before (candy wrappers, leaves, apple cores, "garbage"). Make certain they have gloves or plastic bags on their hands for safety. Also, have them collect some soil and leaves or grass clippings. Discuss what the children have collected and how these things have been used by people, plants, or animals in the past, before becoming "garbage."
2. Studying circles  
Read the following verse from Ecclesiastes:  
"All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place from which the water flows, there it returns." (Ecclesiastes 1:7)  
What does it mean for the water, or for other organic material, to return from where it came?  
Look at the recycling symbol - why was it chosen?
3. Discuss:
  - What is "garbage"? Is it good for anything?
  - Discuss what "biodegradable" and "compost" mean. (Bio-degradable: human-made material that can break down into small, organic parts with the aid of natural weathering processes and bacteria. Compost [noun]: the rich, organic material created when materials such as leaves, grasses, manure, and food, are broken down by bacteria; can be used as garden fertilizer; [verb]: to prepare material so that it will become compost.)
  - What parts of our garbage could be "naturally recycled" (composted) and returned directly to the soil (leftover food, clippings, other organic materials)? What parts need to be sorted out and recycled in other ways (aluminum, glass, plastic, paper)?
  - What happens to garbage that does not decompose and is not or can not be recycled? (It can remain garbage for millions of years!)

#### 4. Making the compost

Cut the tops off plastic bottles and punch a few holes in the sides to let the contents breathe. Make two sorts of bottles. In one, layer the bottle with the soil, the food, leaves and more soil. In the second, put non-biodegradable trash, such as candy wrappers, metal, etc. Stir the contents of each bottle, and set the bottles on a tray to catch the water in it. Children can draw the recycled symbol and place it on the bottle. Ask the children what they think will happen in the bottles. Check the bottles periodically. After about two months, the contents of the bottle with food should turn into a rich compost that can be used as a fertilizer in a garden.

#### IV. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

- A. What are some things that you have been given for which you feel responsible? How do you take care of these things? (*Doing Mitzvot*, p. 77)
- B. In Deuteronomy, chapter 20, we find the question, "Are trees of the field human?" In what ways are trees similar to human beings? (*Doing Mitzvot*, p. 77)
- C. In Deuteronomy, chapter 11 (which is also the second *Shema* paragraph) we read God's promise to reward us with rain and sufficient food if we follow the mitzvot. What does this promise have to do with caring for the environment? ((*Doing Mitzvot*, p. 77)
- D. Read Psalm 148. How does this psalm teach us the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*? ("Keeping Posted")
- E. Why did God speak to Moses out of a lowly thorn bush? (According to *midrash*, to teach us there is no space free of God's presence, not even a lowly thorn bush.) Explain how this *midrash* is connected to the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*.
- F. Why was the first human being called Adam? According to a *midrash* (from Midrash Hagadol Bereshit) Rabbi Yehuda explains, "By virtue of the earth (*adama*) from which Adam was taken." (Quoted in "*Kadima and the Environment*") What environmental message do we learn from the connection of Adam and *adama*?
- G. Tell the story, "The Old Man and the Pear Tree" from *Listen to the Trees*. Questions to discuss (*A Teacher's Guide to Listen to the Trees*):
  - Why would a person near the end of his life choose to spend time planting trees he won't live to enjoy?
  - Although planting is a difficult task, the old man does not consider it so. Why not?
  - Why did he choose to plant a fruit-bearing tree?
- H. What behaviors in your own life can you personally change to strive toward performing the mitzvah of *Bal Tashhit*? What changes can you try to bring in other people's lives?

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