

Ba'al Taschkit Text Study (+2 points)

1

Conserving natural resources is a Jewish value found in the Torah. In Hebrew, we say “*ba'al taschkit*.” This value comes from the Torah’s prohibition of cutting down trees unnecessarily during war, but it means much more than just that. When we study *ba'al taschkit* and put conservation values into practice, we are linking the ancient, holy words of Torah with our actions today. This activity is to help you to think about one of the ways that you can bring words of Torah into your everyday lives.

Activity

Read the text from the Torah below and then answer the questions that follow.

When in your war against a city and you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy (“lo tashchit”) 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 give food may be destroyed. (Devarim 20:19-20)

1. Restate these words from the Torah in your own words. What is God saying to Israel?

2. Why do you think that we are allowed to cut down trees that do not give fruit, but not trees that do give fruit?

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2

Ba'al taschkit is so important that we have other Jewish texts about it. All of nature is important, not just fruit trees. Read the text below and answer the questions that follow.

God said to Israel: "Even though you find the land filled with plenty, you should not say: 'We shall stay and not concern ourselves with planting.' Just as others planted for you, so shall you plant for your children." (Leviticus Rabbah 28)

3. Restate this Midrash in your own words. What is God saying to Israel?

3. What would happen if we did not plant trees and plants for future generations?

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3. How have the generations before you affected the earth we live in now? In what ways have they made things better for you? How could they have done better?

4. What does your family do now that demonstrates the Jewish value of *ba'al taschkit*?
