

FROM CHAI MITZVAH GRANDPARENTS AND BEYOND  
SOURCEBOOK 2: JUDAISM & THE ENVIRONMENT

# RECYCLE ROUNDUP

## 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*, which are the foundation for preventing human actions that are harmful to the environment. On the next page you'll find the law from the Torah, followed by its development in the [Mishneh Torah](#) by [Rambam](#).

**TEXT 1:**

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 לְהִלָּחֵם  
עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצֶיהָ לְנִדְחַח  
עָלֶיהָ גֵרְזֹן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֵתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת

**CONVERSATION:**

- According to this law, what is permitted? What is forbidden?
- Why do you think the law is only for fruit trees? How might we understand this law in modern times?

**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*

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**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?



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