



Tinkering and Text on Tu B'Shevat

Topic

Tu B'Shevat, Mitzvot and Middot

Grade Level(s)

K – 4

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Connect the *mitzvah* of בַּל תִּשְׁחִית (Bal Tashchit, not destroying useful objects) to ט"ו בִּשְׁבַט (Tu B'Shevat)
- Upcycle items in various states of disrepair to create tools they can use for planting
- Consider ways that they can be careful about *Bal Tashchit*

Materials needed

- Age-appropriate book about repurposing worn-out materials; options include:
 - *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat*
 - *My Grandfather's Coat*
 - *Something from Nothing*
 - *Bit by Bit*
- Items in various states of disrepair. These items could include torn clothing, used paper, broken electronics, plastic cartons, water bottles. They will be used for building, art, etc. Remember: no sharp objects.
- Glue, multi-colored duct tape, markers, pencils, etc. (optional). These items can be used for enhancing, connecting, etc. the items in disrepair.

Background for Teachers

While *Tu B'Shevat* (the 15th day of the month of Shevat) has long been the date on which all trees celebrate their birthdays (*Mishnah Rosh Hashanah* 1:1), it has taken on greater prominence as a day for environmental awareness in recent years. As such *Tu B'Shevat* has become linked to the *mitzvah* of *Bal Tashchit*.

The *mitzvah* of *Bal Tashchit* prohibits destroying or wasting items that could be useful. The most basic form of the *mitzvah* proscribes cutting down trees that produce fruit while permitting non-fruit-bearing trees to be cut down for other purposes (*Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 20:19-20). However, rabbinic interpretation extends the prohibition to include other things that have value, like oil and animals (Tractate *Shabbat* 67b and Tractate *Hullin* 7b).



Tinkering and Text on *Tu B'Shevat*

With greater emphasis being placed on taking care of the environment, *Bal Tashchit* takes a position of greater prominence, especially with the modern imperative to “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.” Just how far does the obligation not to destroy something extend? When is recycling enough? How much do people need to go out of their way to preserve something instead of throwing it out? Addressing these questions can lead to a more nuanced understanding of what it means to take care of the environment and to fulfill the mitzvah of *Bal Tashchit* (and it can also encourage great acts of creativity).

For some examples of upcycled garden implements, check out [this video](#).

For some examples of upcycled lawn art, check out [this link](#).

Prepare in Advance

- Collect items to be used for making things to help with planting or creating art for beautifying a garden:
 - Ask parents to donate broken and/or torn items that they are thinking about throwing out. Remind parents not to send in sharp objects.
 - Gather old, broken, disrepaired items from around the synagogue. Remember, no gathering God’s name!
- Lay out the disrepaired objects for students to see and to access.

Description of Activities

1. Read selected book about repurposing used materials to the class.
2. Discuss:
 - a. What did the grandfather/tailor keep doing? [Repurposing fabric to create something new for Joseph to wear]
 - b. Why did he do this? [e.g. Because he wanted to use something that was useful instead of throwing it out]
3. Share *Devarim* 20:19-20 with the class. Two options:
 - a. Read the verses (included below).
 - i. Ask: According to the Torah, what does God command about trees? [Not to destroy fruit-bearing trees. May cut down non-fruit-bearing-trees for other purposes.]
 - ii. Explain that this is the mitzvah of *Bal Tashchit*, not destroying. The Rabbis understood this to mean that Jewish people should not destroy other useful things like clothing.
 - b. Explain that, in the Torah, God commands the Jewish people not to cut down fruit trees, which is the basis for the *mitzvah* of *Bal Tashchit*, not destroying. The Rabbis understood this to mean that Jewish people should not destroy other useful things like clothing.
4. Show students the different items in their various stages of disrepair.



Tinkering and Text on Tu B'Shevat

5. Challenge students to tinker with the items and create something that can help with planting or creating garden art.
 - a. Divide students into groups of 2-4.
 - b. Examples of possible new recreations include watering cans, trowels, and garden decorations.
6. Groups present their creations to each other and demonstrate how they have repurposed the items at their disposal.
 - a. Outdoor Option: If there is an available garden, take the class outside to test out their creations.
7. Reflect on the upcycling project and ask what else in their own lives students can find new purposes for? [e.g. using glass jars to hold markers, repurposing old cardboard as bases in a baseball or kickball game]

<i>Devarim</i> (Deuteronomy) 20:19-20	דברים כ: יט-כ
<p>¹⁹When you [surround] a city... to make war on it and to capture it, do not destroy its trees... You may eat from them but you may not cut them down. Is a tree of the field [like] a person [who can escape] from you [by running] into the [surrounded] city?</p> <p>²⁰Only a tree that you know does not yield [fruit] you may... cut down. You may build [machines to help you defeat] the city... until you [defeat] it.</p>	<p>ט^ככִּי־תִצּוֹר אֶל־עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצָהּ לְגֹדֶחַ עָלֶיו גֵּרֶזֶן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאַתּוּ לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם עַץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹא מִפְּנֵיךָ בַּמִּצּוֹר: כ^כרִק עַץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְעַ כִּי־לֹא־עַץ מֵאֲכָל הוּא אֲתוּ תִשְׁחִית וְכָרַתְתָּ וּבְנִיתָ מִצּוֹר עַל־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה עַד רֹדְתָהּ:</p>