

We speak about "humanity" and "nature" as if we exist in one way, and the rest of the world exists in a different way. This dichotomy between man and nature is neither simple nor accurate. Granted, nature without the presence of man would be very different; yet humanity, although unique and distinct, is still part of nature. Whether we define nature as the totality of existence, or as the set of laws that govern it—we are included in it.

—Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz



## Environment



**The World is a Human Responsibility  
Is a Man a Tree of the Field?  
The PJ Library: Joseph Had a Little Overcoat**

# The World Is a Human Responsibility

There are two callings with which humanity struggles. One is the human tendency to conquer nature. This desire motivates much creativity, from the domestication of animals in ancient times, to genetic engineering and other technological wonders in our day. However, the other pull we feel is to protect nature for posterity. Is nature's duty to fulfill human needs? If so, why do we need to protect our world?

The Torah uses different descriptions when presenting the creation of Adam in Chapters 1 and 2 in Genesis. Let's look at these differences in the original sources.

## Genesis 2:5-15

וְכָל שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יְהִי בְּאֶרֶץ וְכָל עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח, כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר ה' אֱלֹהִים עַל הָאָרֶץ, וְאָדָם אִין לַעֲבֹד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה... וַיִּצַּר ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֶפְרוֹ מִן הָאֲדָמָה, וַיַּפֵּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים, וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה. וַיִּטֶּע ה' אֱלֹהִים גֶּן בְּעֵדֶן מִקְדָּם, וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם אֶת הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר... וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיְנַחֲהוּ בְּגֵן עֵדֶן לַעֲבֹדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָה.

*And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground...And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed...And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it.*

## Genesis 1:26-28

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים: נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ, וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הַרְמֵשׁ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל הָאָרֶץ. וַיְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ, זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים, וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים: פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹשׁוּהָ, וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל חַיָּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת עַל הָאָרֶץ.

*And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."*

### Genesis Navigator

- For what purpose was Adam created according to the description in Chapter 1? How is his role described in Chapter 2?
- Do these two descriptions complement each other? Do they contradict each other, or do they complete each other? Explain.
- How is the creation of Adam described in both of these sources?
- What is the connection between how Adam was created, and the description of his role in the world according to each one of the sources?

# The World Is a Human Responsibility

## Midrash Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) Rabba 7:13

בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן, ואמר לו: ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן! וכל מה שבראתי – בשבילך בראתי. תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך.

When the Holy One created Adam, He took him for a tour of all the trees in the Garden of Eden, and He said to him: "See how My works are so glorious and pleasant! All of this, I have created for you! Make sure that you do not ruin and destroy My world, for if you do, no one will be able to fix it after you are gone!"

### Kohelet Rabba Navigator

- If everything is created for Adam, why can't he do whatever he wants with it?
- Why was this commandment given to humanity? What makes us different than any other creature?

## Deuteronomy 20:19-20

כִּי תִצּוּר אֶל עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְּסָהּ, לֹא תִשְׁחִית אֶת עֵצָהּ לְנִדַּח עָלָיו גֶּרֶז, כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֵתוּ לֹא תִכְרֹת, כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְבָא מִפְּנֵיךְ בְּמִצּוֹר. רַק עֵץ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְעַ כִּי לֹא עֵץ מֵאֲכָל הוּא – אֵתוּ תִשְׁחִית וְכָרְתָּ, וּבְנִית מְצוֹר עַל הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה עַד רִדְתָּהּ.

When you shall besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by forcing an ax against them; for you may eat of them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man that it should be besieged by you? Only the trees which you know are not trees for food, you shall destroy and cut them down; and you shall build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued.

### Deuteronomy Navigator

- Why can't fruit trees be destroyed according to these verses?
- What is the purpose of destroying trees that do not bear fruit, according to the Torah?
- What approach to nature do these verses suggest?
- How can we reconcile the approach from these verses when compared with what we have learned from the verses in Genesis?

## Maimonides, Rambam, The Laws of Kings and Their Wars 6:8-10

אין קוצצין אילני מאכל שחוץ למדינה ואין מונעין מהם אמת המים כדי שייבשו, שנאמר "לא תשחית את עצה", וכל הקוצץ לוקה. ולא במצור בלבד אלא בכל מקום כל הקוצץ אילן מאכל דרך השחתה לוקה. אבל קוצצין אותו אם היה מזיק אילנות אחרים, או מפני שמזיק בשדה אחרים, או מפני שדמיו יקרים, לא אסרה תורה אלא דרך השחתה.

כל אילן סרק מותר לקוץ אותו ואפילו אינו צריך לו, וכן אילן מאכל שהזקין ואינו עושה אלא דבר מועט שאינו ראוי לטרוח בו, מותר לקוץ אותו...

ולא האילנות בלבד, אלא כל המשבר כלים, וקורע בגדים, והורס בנין, וסותם מעין, ומאבד מאכלות דרך השחתה, עובר בלא תשחית.

English translation and navigator on following page

# The World Is a Human Responsibility

## Continued: Maimonides, Rambam, The Laws of Kings and Their Wars 6:8-10

It is forbidden to chop down fruit trees and to deny them water so they will dry, as it says in the Torah, “Do not destroy its trees.” And anyone who does so will be given lashes. This applies not only during a siege, but in all instances that one chops down a fruit tree in a destructive manner, but one may destroy a fruit tree if it is harming other trees, or it is harming the field of others, or if its maintenance is expensive. The Torah only prohibits destroying trees for the sake of destruction. Any non-fruit bearing trees one is allowed to destroy, even for no purpose. One can do the same for a fruit tree that has aged and bears little fruit and is not worth maintaining. It is permissible to cut it down.

This is true not only of trees. Whoever breaks vessels or rips clothing or destroys a building, or blocks up a water source, or destroys foodstuffs, in a destructive manner has violated the prohibition of bal tashchit—do not be wasteful...

### Rambam Navigator

- When does Rambam allow for the destruction of fruit trees? From what word in the Torah does Rambam base his conclusion?
- Does the Rambam allow for the destruction of non-fruit bearing trees without cause?
- What is the nature of the relationship between humanity and nature according to the Rambam's position?

### Talmud Sanhedrin 38a

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן [שְׁנוּ חֲכָמִים]: אָדָם נִבְרָא בְּעָרֵב שֶׁבֶת בְּסוֹף הַיְצִירָה, וּמִפְּנֵי מָה? שֶׁלֹּא יְהוּ מֵיְנִינִים אוֹמְרִים: שׁוֹתֵף הִיא לֹא אִדָּם לְהַקְדֹּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּמַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית. דָּבָר אַחֵר: שֶׁאִם תְּזוּחַ דַּעְתּוֹ עָלָיו (יִתְגַּאֵה) הָאָדָם, אוֹמֵר לוֹ: יִתּוֹשׁ קִדְמָךְ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית, שֶׁהָרִי אֶתְּהָ נִבְרָאת אַחֲרוֹן. דָּבָר אַחֵר: כִּדִּי שֶׁיִּכְנַס לְמַצֵּהָ שֶׁל שְׁמִירַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיָּד. דָּבָר אַחֵר: כִּדִּי שֶׁיִּכְנַס לְסַעֲוָה מִיָּד, שֶׁכָּל הָעוֹלָם מוֹכֵן לִפְנֵיו לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בּוֹ. מְשַׁל לְמַלְךְ בָּשָׂר וְדָם שֶׁבָּנָה פְּלִטְרִין (אַרְמוֹן) וְשִׁיכְלָלוֹ, וְהִתְקִין סַעֲוָה, וְאַחֵר כִּדִּי הַכְּנִיס אוֹרְחִין, כִּדִּי הָאָדָם בָּא אַחֲרוֹן לְעוֹלָם מֵתוֹקֵן.

Our Rabbis taught: Adam was created [last of all beings] on the eve of Sabbath. And why? — Lest the heretics say: “The Holy One, blessed be He, had a partner [Adam] in His work of creation.” Another answer is: In order that, if a man's mind becomes [too] proud, he may be reminded that the gnats preceded him in the order of creation. Another answer is: That he might immediately enter upon the fulfillment of a commandment, the observance of the Sabbath. Another answer is: That he might straightway go in to the banquet. The matter may be compared to a king of flesh and blood who built palaces and furnished them, prepared a banquet, and thereafter brought in the guests. So too, Adam was created in a world that was already prepared.

### Your Sanhedrin Navigator

- Does the Talmud reflect what we have seen as the two approaches to humanity's role in the world?
- Does the parable of preparing a banquet meal for Adam fit the approach to creation as rendered in the first chapter of Genesis? Refer to page 1.

### Talmud Bava Metziya 85a

יְסוּרֵיוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי (ר' יְהוּדָה הַנְּשִׂיא) עַל יְדֵי מַעֲשֵׂה שְׂגָרָם הוּא עֲצָמוּ בָּאוּ, וְעַל יְדֵי מַעֲשֵׂה אַחֵר הֵלְכוּ. וּמִפְּרָטִים: עַל יְדֵי מַעֲשֵׂה בָּאוּ מֵאִי הִיא [מֵהוּא, מֵהָ הִיא הַדְּבָר]? דִּהְיָהוּא עֲגָלָא דְהוּוּ קָא מְמַטּוּ לִיהָ [עַגַל אֶחָד שֶׁהָיוּ מוֹלִיכִים אוֹתוֹ] לְשַׁחֲטָהּ. אֲזַל תְּלִיא לְרִישִׁיהָ בְּכַנְפֶיהָ [הֵלֶךְ תְּלָה הָעַגַל רָאשׁוּ בְּתוֹךְ כַּנֵּף בַּגְדוֹ] שֶׁל רַבִּי וְקָא בְּכִי [וּבִכְהָ]. אָמַר לִיהָ [לוֹ] לַעֲגַל: זִיל [לֶךְ], לְכָךְ נּוֹצְרֶת לְשַׁחֲטָהּ. אָמְרִי [אִמְרוּ] מִשְׁמַיִם: הוֹאִיל וְלֹא קָא [וְאִינוּ] מִרְחָם עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת לִיתּוּ עָלֶיהָ [שִׁיבּוּאוּ עֲלֵינוּ] יְסוּרֵין. וְעַל יְדֵי מַעֲשֵׂה אַחֵר הֵלְכוּ יְסוּרֵין, וּמִסְפְּרִים: יוֹמָא חַד הָוָה קָא בְּנָשָׂא אֶמְתִּיהָ [יוֹם אֶחָד הִיתָה מֵטֹאטָא שְׁפַחְתוּ] שֶׁל רַבִּי בֵּיתָא [אֶת הַבַּיִת], הָוָה שְׂדִיא בְּנֵי פְּרָכוּשְׁתָּא וְקָא בְּנָשָׂא לְהוּ [הָיוּ מוֹנַחִים שֶׁם בְּנֵי חוֹלְדָה וְהִיתָה מֵטֹאטָא אוֹתָם]. אָמַר לָהּ: שְׁבִקִינָהוּ [הַנִּיחִי אוֹתָם], הָרִי כְּתִיב [נֹאמַר]: “וְרַחֲמֵיו עַל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיו” (תְּהִלִּים קמ"ה, ט). אָמְרוּ מִשְׁמַיִם: הוֹאִיל וּמִרְחָם בְּרַחֲם עָלֶיהָ [עֲלֵינוּ], וְאִזּוּ פִּסְקוּ יְסוּרֵין.

English translation and navigator on following page

# The World Is a Human Responsibility

They [these horrible afflictions] came to him [Rebbe] because of something that once happened.

What happened? — A calf was being taken to the slaughter, when it broke away, and hid his head under Rebbe's skirts, and cried [in terror]. Rebbe said to him “Go! For this you were created.”

Thereupon they said [in Heaven], “Since he has no pity for others, let us bring suffering upon him.”

And the afflictions departed from him: How did this happen? — One day Rabbi's maidservant was sweeping the house; [seeing] some young weasels lying there, she started to sweep them away.

“Let them be,” said he to her, “It is written, ‘and his tender mercies are over all his works.’” They said [in Heaven], “Since he has shown compassion, let us be compassionate to him.”

## Bava Metziya Navigator

- Rebbe says, “For this you were created.” From all that we have seen, what approach does this statement reflect?
- What does this narrative teach us about humanity and nature?
- Using all these sources, synthesize a concise description of how humanity should interact with the natural world.

# Is a Man a Tree of the Field?

## Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki

The word “for” here indicates a question. [That is to say]: “are trees of the field human beings able to come against you in a siege?” They are tormented with hunger and thirst like the people of the city under siege. Why should you destroy them?

## Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra

This is its meaning: Because you eat from [trees], you shall not cut them down. For a human being is the tree of the field—This means the life of humans is the tree of a field... You shall not destroy a fruit tree which brings life to humans, you are only allowed to eat from it, and it is forbidden for you to destroy it in order to besiege a city.

## Ramban, Nachmanides

Rabbi Abraham (Ibn Ezra) understood this verse beautifully, [when he understood this verse as a statement and not a question] . . . for the meaning of “for a human being is a tree of the field” is a way of emphasizing humanity’s dependence on trees, just

as it is written, “A handmill or an upper millstone may not be taken in pawn, for that would be taking someone’s life in pawn,” (Deuteronomy 24:6). Our Sages in the Talmud understood this verse differently. They maintained that it is allowed to cut a fruit tree to build a siege, and the Torah says, “Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed...” to teach that one should cut barren trees before fruit trees.” Their understanding of this section is that the Torah warned against cutting trees for the sake of destruction and not out of necessity for the siege, as other armies do... You should not do this, for you trust in God that He will give your enemies to you “for man is the tree of the field” which means from it you shall eat and live, and with it [the trees remaining intact] the city will fall to you in siege. That is to say, you will live from it after you capture the city...

## Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 48b

Rabbi Hezekiah said in the name of Rav: A person will have to give judgment for everything that he laid eyes upon and did not eat.

## Haketav ve-haKaballah, Rabbi Jacob Zevi Meklenburg, 18th Century

Even if the intention in cutting the tree is not to be destructive, but for constructive purposes such as building a ladder or capturing a city, it is still forbidden to cut the tree. The reason for this prohibition is that it is not proper to use any of God’s creations for the opposite of that which it was intended. A fruit tree which is intended to feed and sustain people should not be used in a siege, which is intended to defeat one’s enemies by starving them... It seems more fitting to me to translate the word *ki* as “like.” So the meaning of the verse is “Just like man, so is the tree of the field” concerning the enemy coming in siege. Just as you are forbidden to destroy people who are

besieged if they offer you peace and agree to pay a tax to you, so too are you warned against destroying fruit trees, for you have benefit in eating its fruits... Trees are just like besieged people. Just as you are forbidden to destroy people because of the benefit of the tax, so too you shall not destroy fruit trees because

you have benefit in enjoying their fruit.

## Midrash Sifre Devarim

From the simple reading of the verse, I would only think that it is forbidden to cut down trees using an ax. How do we know that it is even forbidden to destroy trees by drawing water away from them? Because it says “not to bring ruin on its trees,” by any means.

## Maimonides, Rambam, The Laws of Kings and Their Wars

It is forbidden to chop down fruit trees and to deny them water so they will dry, as it says in the Torah, “Do not destroy its trees.” This applies not only during a siege, but in all instances when one chops down a fruit tree in a destructive manner...

This is true not only of trees, but whoever breaks vessels or rips clothing or destroys a building, or blocks up a water source, or destroys foodstuffs, in a destructive manner has violated the prohibition of *bal tashchit*—do not be wasteful...

# Is a Man a Tree of the Field?

## Deuteronomy and Subsequent Commentary Navigator

Jewish practice most often rests on the interpretation of verses from the Torah. The chapter from which this verse in Deuteronomy is taken limits what one is allowed to destroy when besieging an enemy city. The Hebrew word *ki* has four different definitions. It can mean “for,” “because,” “lest,” or “perhaps.” The verse changes meaning depending on how the verse is translated. In the translation above, it is translated as “for are the trees of the field human beings, (able) to come against you in a siege” and is formulated as a question. However, not all the commentators understand the verse in this way.

Go through Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, and Haketav ve-haKaballah, and see how they parse this verse and, more importantly, what they derive from it.

- Which interpretation do you find more appealing, and why?
- The Maimonides source is also used in the other class on the environment. Why do you think he applies this verse to refer to waste in general and not the specific circumstances of war?

# Is a Man a Tree of the Field?

## Hebrew Sources

כִּי תִצּוֹר אֶל עֵיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ, לֹא תִשְׁחִית אֶת עֵצָה לְגִדַּח עָלֶיךָ גֶרְזֵן, כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֵתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת, כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְבָא מִפְּנִיךָ בַּמִּצּוֹר.

דברים כ"ט

**כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה** – הרי כי משמש בלשון דילמא: שמא האדם עץ השדה להכנס בתוך המצור מפניך להתיסר ביסורי רעב וצמא כאנשי העיר? למה תשחיתנו?

רש"י שם

**כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה** – ...וזה פירושו: כי ממנו תאכל ואותו לא תכרות, כי האדם עץ השדה. והטעם, כי חיי בן אדם הוא עץ השדה, וכמוהו "כי נפש הוא חובל" – כי חיי נפש הוא חובל. "ואותו לא תכרות" דבק עם "לבא מפניך במצור". הנה לא תשחית עץ פרי שהוא חיים לבן אדם, רק מותר שתאכל ממנו ואסור לך להשחיתו כדי שתבא העיר מפניך במצור. והעד על זה הפירוש שהוא נכון, שאמר "וכרת ובנית מצור".

אבן עזרא שם

**כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה** – יפה פירש רבי אברהם כי שיעור הכתוב, כי ממנו תאכל כי האדם עץ השדה, ואותו לא תכרות לבא מפניך במצור. וטעם "כי האדם עץ השדה" כמו "כי נפש הוא חובל" (להלן כד ו). אבל על דעת רבותינו (ב"ק צא:) מותר לכרות עץ מאכל לבנות מצור, ולא אמרה תורה "רק עץ אשר תדע כי לא עץ מאכל הוא" וגו' אלא להקדים ולומר שאילן סרק קודם לאילן מאכל. אם כן, פירוש הפרשה לדעתם, שהזהירה תורה לא תשחית את עצה לכרות אותם דרך השחתה שלא לצורך המצור, כמנהג המחנות. והטעם, כי הנלחמים משחיתים בעיר וסביב הארץ אולי יוכלו לה, כענין שנאמר (מ"ב ג יט) "וכל עץ טוב תפילו וכל מעיני מים תסתמו", ואתם לא תעשו כן להשחיתה, כי תבטחו בשם שיתן אותה בידכם, כי האדם עץ השדה הוא, ממנו תאכל ותחיה ובו תבוא העיר מפניך במצור, לומר אתה תחיה ממנו אחרי שתכבוש העיר. וגם בהיותך במחנה לבא מפניך במצור תעשה כן, וטעם "אותו תשחית וכרת", כי מותר אתה לכרות אותו לבנות המצור וגם להשחיתו עד רדתה, כי לפעמים תהיה ההשחתה צורך הכבוש, כגון שיהו אנשי העיר יוצאים ומלקטין עצים ממנו, או נחבאים שם ביער להלחם בכם, או שהם לעיר למחסה ולמסתור מאבן נגף.

רמב"ן שם

# Is A Man A Tree of A Field?

## Hebrew Sources

לא תשחית לנדוח. לא אמר בקיצור לא תדח עליו גרזן, להורו' שאין האיסור לבד בנדיחת גרזן שהוא בפועל ממש בידים, כי גם גרם ההשחתה אסור וכדאי' בספרי שאסור למשוך המים מעץ מאכל כדי ליבשו למעט בו המח' ליושבי המצור. והוסיף ואתו לא תכרות, אף שאין המכוון בהשחתת האילן, רק לכרו' אותו לבנין

הסוללה והדיק כדי לכבוש את העיר גם זה אסור לעשו' בעץ מאכל (לשון כריתה ישמש גם לכריתה שלצורך בנין כמו (דה"ב ב' ז') לכרות עצי לבנון, כורתי עצים). וטעם האיסור, שאין ראוי לשמש בדבר מן הנבראים אל הפך המכוון ממנו בבריאה... עץ המכוון בבריאתו לעשות פירות למאכל בני אדם להחיותם, אין לעשות בו דבר המשחית את האדם ומאבדו ולהיות שהמכוון בהשחתת אילני מאכל ובבנין סוללה ודיק סביב לעיר מצור למנוע מהם מקום מביא מאכל ומשקה למחיתם... ויותר נ"ל לפרש מלת כי להשתוות והתדמות כמלת כמו... וטעם המקרא, כמו האדם כן עץ השדה לענין ביאת האויב מפניך במצור, כמו שאתה מזהר מלעשות השחתה באנשים שבמצור אם שלום תענך העיר ופתחה לך להיות לך למס, כמבואר בפרשה הקודמת, הנה נמנע אתה מלהשחית את האדם אחרי שיגיעך תועלת המס, ככה אתה מזהר מלהשחית עץ מאכל כי יש לך תועלת אכילת פירותיו.

הכתב והקבלה שם

לא תשחית את עצה. אין לי אלא ברזל, מנין אף למשוך ממנה אמת המים? ת"ל" לא תשחית את עצה – בכל.

ספרי דברים, פסקא ס

(ח) אין קוצצין אילני מאכל שחוץ למדינה ואין מונעין מהם אמת המים כדי שייבשו שנאמר לא תשחית את עצה וכל הקוצץ לוקה ולא במצור בלבד אלא בכל מקום כל הקוצץ אילן מאכל דרך השחתה לוקה אבל קוצצין אותו אם היה מזיק אילנות אחרים או מפני שמזיק בשדה אחרים או מפני שדמיו יקרים לא אסרה תורה אלא דרך השחתה:

(ט) כל אילן סרק מותר לקוץ אותו ואפילו אינו צריך לו וכן אילן מאכל שהזקין ואינו עושה אלא דבר מועט שאינו ראוי לטרוח בו מותר לקוץ אותו וכמה יהא הזית עושה ולא יקוצנו רובע הקב זיתים ודקל שהוא עושה קב תמרים לא יקוצנו:

(י) ולא האילנות בלבד אלא כל המשבר כלים וקורע בגדים והורס בנין וסותם מעין ומאבד מאכלות דרך השחתה עובר בלא תשחית ואינו לוקה אלא מכת מרדות מדבריהם:

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים ו, ח-י

רבי חזקיה ר' כהן בשם רב: עתיד אדם ליתן דין וחשבון על כל שראת עינו ולא אכל.

תלמוד ירושלמי קידושין ד, יב



# Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

*Joseph Had a Little Overcoat*  
By Simms Taback

**Age Appropriate:**  
2-4 year olds

**Class Length:**  
Approximately 45 minutes



## Look Closely and Select a Book

### WHY THIS BOOK WAS SELECTED

- Bright, colorful pictures
- Simple text
- Highly relevant and developmentally appropriate topic for young children who love/need to possess favorite transitional objects—objects such as blankets, teddy bears, cloth diapers, etc. that they cling to before bed or during the day for comfort

## Identify Big Ideas

### VALUES TO HIGHLIGHT

1. **Bal tashchit:** Not wasting, not destroying needlessly
2. **Recycling**
3. **Cherishing objects:** Remembering that there is “no thing in the world without its place” (Pirkei Avot 4:3)

### GOALS OF PROGRAM

1. Highlight and connect the major themes of this book to daily life.
2. Involve families in a fun recycling project.
3. Encourage families to think about ways to incorporate recycling and the mitzvah of *bal tashchit* into their daily family life.



This book-based Program curriculum was developed by The PJ Library.

The **L-I-S-T-E-N** rubric was initially developed by Ina S.G. Regosin, Director, Hebrew College, Early Childhood Institute, with input from Rachel Raz and Sherry Grossman.

Program submitted by Vivian Newman, Western Massachusetts: [vivian@hgf.org](mailto:vivian@hgf.org)

## Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

## Set the Scene

## { Intro Activity }

## Patchwork Clothing Props

## LEADER INTRODUCTION

Today we'll be reading a story about a man named Joseph who owned a special coat that he loved very much. Joseph loved his coat so much that he never wanted to throw it away—not even when it became old and full of holes. Instead of throwing his coat away, Joseph tried to recycle it. First he patched it—he covered every hole with a small square of material. When the coat became full of patches, Joseph cut with his scissors and sewed with his needle and turned that coat into something else. You can look around at all the tables in the room and see some of the different things that Joseph made from his coat. Right now, we want you to try to be like Joseph. Pick a table and start working on the piece of clothing that's on that table. Cover the clothes with patches and help Joseph recycle and reuse it. In a few minutes, when we read our book, we're going to use all of these patched and fixed items of clothing to help us tell our story.

## Materials Needed

- Poster board
- Scraps of material cut into small squares
- Stapler
- Clear contact paper
- 5–6 round tables
- Plastic or paper bowls

## Advance Preparations:

- Using large size poster board, cut out a large coat, jacket, vest, tie, and scarf.
- Cut numerous holes in each item of poster board clothing.
- Using a stapler, attach contact paper (adhesive side facing up) to each poster board clothing.
- Remove backing from contact paper so that a sticky surface now covers each piece of clothing.

## Directions:

1. Place each poster board clothing item at a different table. For the youngest children, one clothing item can be placed on the floor.
2. Fill small bowls with squares of materials—2–3 children can share a bowl, although the activity usually works best if no sharing is required.
3. Arrange several bowls of material squares around each item of poster board clothing.
4. Encourage children to work in small groups, covering both the holes and the entire surface of the piece of clothing with patches (cloth squares).

## Adaptations for Group Size and Age

## Larger Groups

Give each child his/her own clothing item to decorate. These clothing items will be smaller than the poster board clothing items described above, about the size of an 8.5 x 11 in. piece of paper. Cut out each item in advance, as most young children will glue over any drawn lines, making it difficult to identify the completed clothing item. Glue sticks can be used to attach patches.

## Older Children

Clothing items can be cut out of cloth or felt. The child's task will be to sew patches onto the clothes. Some children and parents may require a brief "how-to-sew" lesson.

## Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

## Tell the Story

## { Props }

- Large drawing of Joseph wearing pants and suspenders
- Patchwork clothing items made by children



## READER'S INTRODUCTION

Now it's time for us to open our book, and meet this man named Joseph who loved his coat and never wanted to throw it away. As we read, I'm going to show you some of the wonderful things that Joseph made from his old beloved coat. Many of you have already helped me by fixing and patching some of Joseph's clothes, but as we read, I'm going to need **even more** help from you. Can you help me name each of the pieces of clothing that Joseph makes?

## ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Reader will hold up each of the child-made patchwork props (the patched coat, jacket, vest, etc.) as he/she reads aloud the corresponding text. The reader will pause and allow listeners to excitedly chime in the name of the clothing item that is being displayed.

## EXAMPLE:

"Joseph had a little overcoat. It got old and worn."

*(Pause in reading text and add)*

"But Joseph loved that coat, and he certainly didn't want to throw it away. Joseph was very smart. He knew that everything has a purpose, and that almost anything can be recycled and turned into something else. So Joseph cut and sewed and made that coat into something a little smaller. Let's see what he made. He made a \_\_\_\_\_."

*(Reader holds up poster board jacket and waits for children's response.)*

*(Reader then turns page and continues reading.)*

"Yes, he made a jacket out of it and went to the fair."

*(Continue reading text and showing corresponding props.)*

## Adaptations for Group Size and Age

## Larger Groups

Ask children to hold up their individual paper item of clothing as that item of clothing is described and depicted in the book.

## Older Children

Ask several children to stand next to the storyteller, proudly displaying the clothing item that they have made. When the storyteller reads about a clothing item, the child holding that item will step forward and wave the item in the air, encouraging all others who have made that type of clothing to display it as well.

## Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

## Enhance the Experience

## { Follow Up Activity }

## Recycled Shape Sorters

## SAMPLE INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVITY

When I looked in my basement, I found many surprising things, (Show cans, jar lids, etc.) At first, I thought, “Hmm...here’s a lot of trash, maybe I should throw it all away? Then I thought, no, I can’t do that. That would be going against something that we refer to in Hebrew as **bal tashchit**—not wasting things.” When I looked at all of these things, I decided that, like Joseph, I too needed to recycle. I needed to take all of my trash and reuse it, and turn it into something else.

I covered these cans with colored paper. Can you decorate my cans with stickers and markers? Then maybe you can decide which of the items in front of you might fit into your can (items include baby food jar lids, plastic lids, plastic eggs).

So instead of saying that these jar lids and cans are “garbage” that needs to be thrown away, we’ll turn these objects into a very special shape sorter that you can take home with you.

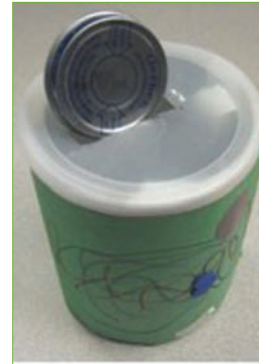
**Adaptations for Group Size and Age****Larger Groups**

Children can use recycled cans and boxes to make a tzedekah box. Only one size slit to accommodate coins will need to be cut in the lids by adults beforehand.

**Older Children**

Children can use recycled materials to make sculptures, toys, tzedekah boxes, and/or other items of their own design. Children will have access to glue, scissors, construction paper, glitter, stickers, etc., and will be encouraged to use their imagination and ingenuity to create their own project.

## { Follow-up Activity }

**Materials Needed:**

- Empty coffee cans, cereal boxes, shoe boxes, etc.
- Construction paper for covering cans and boxes
- Baby food or yogurt lids, cardboard circles (made from boxes), other found items (empty film canisters, pieces of Styrofoam packing, etc.)
- Stickers
- Markers, crayons, etc.
- Scissors

**Advance Preparations:**

- Cover can or box with construction paper

**Directions:**

1. Encourage children to decorate can or box with stickers and markers.
2. Adults cut slits in plastic top of can or on top or into the side of the box. (Slit should be large enough to allow selected items to pass through.)
3. Adults demonstrate how to drop circular lids or other shapes into shape sorter, and how to open sorter in order to retrieve the shapes.

## Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

## Nurture the Family

{ Try This at Home }

### Ideas for Other “Recycled Art” Projects

[www.kinderart.com/recycle](http://www.kinderart.com/recycle)

### Recycling Songs

[www.everythingpreschool.com/themes/recycling/index.htm](http://www.everythingpreschool.com/themes/recycling/index.htm)

### Take-Home Sheet

A recycling checklist that families can use at home:

[www.bubhub.com.au/todo-eco-friendly-family-checklist.php](http://www.bubhub.com.au/todo-eco-friendly-family-checklist.php)