

Jewish Teachings on Climate Change

***Ba'al Tashit* – Do not waste:**

Wasting anything is a shame, especially when it's so easy to use less electricity or get better mileage. Based on laws of behavior during war, the Jewish law of Ba'al tashcit teaches us not to waste.

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it for a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its fruit trees. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. (*Devarim* Deuteronomy 20:19-20)

"Righteous people ... do not waste in this world even a mustard seed. They become sorrowful with every wasteful and destructive act that they see, and if they can, they use all their strength to save everything possible from destruction. But the wicked ... rejoice in the destruction of the world, just as they destroy themselves." (Sefer HaChinuch 529; 13th Century)

Rav Zutra said: "Whoever covers an oil lamp, or uncovers a naphtha lamp, transgresses the law of *bal tashchit*." (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 67b, on actions that make fuel burn inefficiently.)

Discussion Questions

1. What is the moral or message of these laws?
2. Why do you believe waste is discouraged so heavily in Jewish law?
3. What are some lessons we can learn from these laws to apply to our lives today? Be specific, what is the modern wasteful equivalent of:
 - a. Cutting down fruit trees in war
 - b. Wasting a seed
 - c. Covering an oil lamp
4. What are some specific examples of things we can do different in our lives to better follow these laws.

After discussing the questions above, create a 30 second commercial or 'public service announcement' that teaches the lessons and morals of the texts above.

Make sure your commercial or 'public service announcement' includes:

- Reading at least one of the texts
- The teaching/moral of the texts
- Practical suggestions on how to live better according to these laws

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***Pikuach Nefesh* – Saving lives:**

Global warming has the potential to kill millions of people worldwide through issues such as natural disasters, rising sea levels, new diseases, agricultural loss (desertification) and more. The laws of Pikuach Nefesh commanded us to save human lives above almost all else.

"One is forbidden from gaining a livelihood at the expense of another's health."
(Rabbi Isaac b. Sheshet, Resp. 196, 14thC)

"A burning coal/object left in a place where the public can be injured by it - one is allowed to extinguish it [even on Shabbat]." (Yosef Caro in *Shulchan Aruch*, Orech Hayim 334:27)

"G*d created food and water; we must use them in staving off hunger and thirst. G*d created drugs and compounds and gave us the intelligence necessary to discover their medicinal properties; we must use them in warding off illness and disease." – Maimonides

According to Jewish tradition, you may break any law to save a life, with the exception of idolatry, adultery and murder.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the moral or message of these laws?
2. Why do you believe protection of human life is Valued so highly in Jewish law?
3. What are some lessons we can learn from these laws to apply to our lives today?
Be specific, what is the modern equivalent of:
 - a. Gaining a livelihood at someone else's expense
 - b. Object left in a public place that can hurt someone
 - c. Intelligence necessary to discover...
4. What are some specific examples of things we can do different in our lives to better follow these laws.

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Species preservation:

Climate change will drastically affect the ecological diversity of our planet, driving many species to extinction. Species that were once saved by Noah and now need to be saved by us.

"Even those creatures you deem superfluous in the world - like flies, fleas, and gnats - nevertheless have their allotted task in the scheme of Creation (*Breshit*)." (Midrash Exodus Rabbah 10:1)

"It should not be believed that all beings exist for the sake of humanity's existence ... [rather,] all the other beings, too, have been intended for their own sakes..." (Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III:13)

"From all lives, of all flesh, two of each shall you bring to the ark to keep alive with you; they shall be male and female. From each bird according to its kind [*l'meenayhu*],, from each animal according to its kind, and from each thing that creeps on the ground according to its kind, two of each shall come to you to keep alive."

Genesis 6: 19 - 20

Discussion Questions

1. What is the moral or message of these laws?
2. Why do you believe individual species are so important in Jewish law?
3. What are some lessons we can learn from these laws to apply to our lives today? Be specific, what is the modern equivalent of:
 - a. The importance of all species
 - b. The intrinsic value of all things
 - c. Noah's role in preserving species
4. What are some specific examples of things we can do different in our lives to better follow these laws.

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***Tzedek tzedek tirdof* -- Justice, justice, you shall pursue:**

We in the US are 5% of the world's population, yet cause nearly 25% of all greenhouse gases. And who will rising sea levels and other effects of climate change harm most? Poor people in developing nations. We must pursue justice on their behalf by doing what we can to stop climate change.

"*Tzedek tzedek tirdof* -- Justice, justice, you shall pursue, in order that you may live... "
(Deuteronomy 16:20)

"G*d loves righteousness and justice; the Earth is full of G*d's loving-kindness." (Psalm 33:5)

"Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor ... Love your neighbor as yourself."
(Leviticus 19:16, 19:18)

Discussion Questions

1. What is the moral or message of these laws?
2. Why do you believe pursuing justice is important in Jewish law?
3. Why do you believe you must pursue justice "so that you may live"?
4. What are some lessons we can learn from these laws to apply to our lives today?
Be specific, what is an example of:
 - a. An earth full of loving-kindness
 - b. Justice that we must pursue
 - c. Standing idly by
5. What are some specific examples of things we can do different in our lives to better follow these laws.

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Precautionary Principle:

Jewish law teaches us to be careful. Take precautions towards possible negative outcomes even before they happen.

"When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet (fence) for your roof, so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone should fall from it." (Deuteronomy 22:8)

The Rambam deduces, "Similarly with all potentially dangerous objects. Remove them far from yourselves and from the way of the community." [MT Hilchot De'ot], 12th Cent.)

"... We don't need an expert [to save a life by violating other laws like Shabbat], since ... [even] doubtful danger to human life [makes the law] lenient. And it's forbidden to delay the thing [treatment]... " (Tur, 14thC Spain, OH 328 - to which Caro adds, "the one who rushes to do so, look, this is praiseworthy! But the one who [stops to] ask, look, this is a murderer.")

Discussion Questions

1. What is the moral or message of these laws?
2. Why do you believe Jewish law is precautionary?
3. What are some lessons we can learn from these laws to apply to our lives today?
Be specific, what is the modern equivalent of:
 - a. Protecting your house from 'bloodguilt'
 - b. Removing potential dangers from your community
 - c. Dangers which we must act upon without thought
4. What are some specific examples of things we can do different in our lives to better follow these laws.

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