

Lesson Two: V'Achalta V'Savata U'Verachta – Using Today's Resources Wisely

Goals and Purpose of Lesson: This forty minute lesson will address students' appreciation and recognition of the resources that we have and the need to be aware of the vulnerability of our ecosystem and its various elements. Further, we will look at the tool of the *Beracha*, a Jewish practice of which we are all aware but may not recognize its power to encourage us to be more alert and attentive to the needs and resources of our environment.

In the following activities and discussions students will:

- Learn and appreciate the power of the *Beracha* in increasing our awareness of our surroundings and the resources on which we are so dependent
- Understand and internalize the message that there is a *balance* in using our resources and appreciating them while also being thoughtful about the impact of that use on our environment
- Learn that Judaism teaches us to not be wasteful and that this too is an important *mitzvah* – we call it *Bal Tashchit*
- Appreciate the value of committing one's self to proper balance in using our resources wisely

Introduction: The lesson begins with the teacher asking students to think about what resources and elements of our environment they value the most and what would be most painful to lose (e.g. what foods, what natural resources, what recreational activities due to changing coastlines or contaminated waters, etc.). Students should be encouraged to keep adding things to the list and these items can be listed on the board or an easel chart for easy visibility.

This Introductory Discussion should take about five minutes.

At this point, the teacher should distribute Student Handout #1 on **Berachot and Appreciation of Resources** to all members of the class, working through it with the students.

This activity should take about fifteen to twenty minutes, dependent on students' understanding of and interest in the notion of Berachot. It would be greatly enhanced by some pictures or slides that show some of the things and resources indicated. JNF produced series of pictures of resources of the land of Israel or some local exhibit would serve this purpose.

The Teacher Continues: There is a joke that goes like this.

How many Jewish grandmothers does it take to change a light bulb?
The answer is none at all.
Don't worry dear, its okay, I'll sit in the darkness.

What is the message of this joke? Is it meant for us to be austere and not enjoy use of the resources that were put here for our use? Let students discuss this question for a few moments.

The Teacher Continues: Clearly that is not what Jewish tradition teaches us. In fact, the whole point of the *Berachot* we just talked about is to encourage us to enjoy, use and appreciate the resources that we have. As the title of this lesson suggests, *V'Achalta, V'Savata U'Verachta* – you shall eat, you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless G-d. This is why we have such a joyous way of acknowledging the food that we eat by saying *Birkat HaMazon*, the Blessing after Meals.

Now, part of that enjoyment is to be responsible about the use of our resources so that others can enjoy as well. How many times have you heard the following statement: "Please take what you want to eat but eat what you take." What is the meaning of this teaching? Again, allow time for students to react.

There is a *mitzvah*, a Jewish commandment to NOT WASTE our resources. We call this *mitzvah* "*Bal Tashchit*." How does this play out in our lives?

What can we do to use our resources responsibly, enjoy them and at the same time not waste them, but "use what we take?" Here are some actions to consider. Can you think of others?

- Checking for organically grown food when making purchases
- Insuring that our use of resources does not needlessly or excessively hurt our environment and lead to diminished resources
- Watching how products are packaged, and choose purchases accordingly
- Watching for the wasteful use of resources in producing what we buy
- Proper disposal of waste and composting when possible
- Supporting the growth and production of local products
- Watching and guarding endangered species and elements in our system of interdependence of which we are a part
- Using natural resources as much as possible instead of chemical substitutes
- Turning off the lights and unplugging all appliances when leaving the room and not in use
- Washing dishes and laundry with full loads
- Buy new appliances that carry the EnergyStar logo

- Use CFL Light Bulbs
- Use LED nightlights
- Reduce driving by carpooling, walking, bicycling, use of public transportation, combining trips, etc.

Reducing Chemicals

- Begin to Buy Organic: Top 12 fruits and vegetables: apples, bell peppers, celery, cherries, imported grapes, nectarines, peaches, pears, potatoes, red raspberries, spinach, and strawberries.
- Choose eco-friendly cleaning products and air fresheners
- Eat less red meat.
- Eat more sustainable seafood. Be aware of which seafood is contaminated with mercury and other chemicals and eat less of it.

Reduce Waste

- Buy recycled paper with the highest “post-consumer waste” percentage available.
 - Stop buying bottled water and use tap water (with filter, if needed).
 - Use real dishes and cloth napkins rather than disposable. If you must use disposable, look into more eco-friendly disposables such as those made from PLA or bagasse.
- And so much else...

Allow students to add items to this list and to share what is added. Distribute Student Handout #2 and follow processing indicated on the handout, as scripted here.

Now, go back over this list. Can you see yourself actually trying to be more aware of at least two of these actions in your own life?

Think About This: If everyone in this class commits themselves to some action that is related to the *mitzvah* of ***Bal Tashchit***, think of the difference we can make collectively!

This should take about ten minutes.

You might want to suggest that students watch a clip of An Inconvenient Truth or other visual/media clip that is well chosen (if time permits), or

alternatively check the following websites for some suggested actions and/or other film clips for students to check out later.

www.localharvest.org

www.storyofstuff.org

http://www.greenflagschools.org/mshs/project_areas/

The teacher brings this lesson to a close: Let's consider the following teaching from Kohelet Raba 7:20:

After creating the first humans, G-d, took Adam and led him around the trees and plantings and wonder of the Garden of Eden, saying to him, "Look at all that I have created, how beautiful and commendable it is! For your sake I created them all – the trees, the wonders, the resources. Take care that you do not spoil or destroy My world, for if you do, there is no one to come after you and repair it."

So, here we are so many years later after that walk in the Garden of Eden. What condition is our environment in today? How is this different from twenty years ago? Fifty years ago? Hundreds of years ago? Are we working to keep in safe and viable? Are we showing the appropriate appreciation to G-d for all that G-d has done? Are we showing this appreciation in words (our *Berachot*) and in deed (observing the *Mitzvah* of *Bal Tashchit*)? Or..... will the generations after us not be able to repair what we are not safekeeping?

As we all get ready to enjoy the relaxation and recreation of the summer months, let us commit ourselves to safeguarding all that we use so that it will be there next summer, and the summer after that and so on...

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Student Handout #1: Berachot and Appreciation of Resources

We learn in our Jewish Sources that we are *supposed to use and enjoy the resources that our environment holds for us*. We as Jews do not take vows of abstaining from such use but are to use these resources wisely and enjoy them.

We learn from our sages that we should say the appropriate *Beracha* before enjoying and/or partaking of any parts of the land's produce and resources. By doing so, we are asking for permission to use these things from G-d. According to *Berachot 35a* in the *Talmud*, before we say a *Beracha* the item we are holding belongs to G-d. Only after we say the *Beracha* is it ours to enjoy and use.

- Do you understand this notion?
- Why are we taught this importance of *Berachot*?
- What does this allow us to do?
- How does this practice allow us to concentrate on what we have and where it comes from?

Now, look at this listing of *Berachot* with your class. What do you think this adds to our conscious use of resources by repeating: Blessed are You, G-d, our Lord, King of the World, who ...

Gives us Bread...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמּוֹצֵיא לָחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Gives us cakes, cookies, crackers, and other good things ...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיַּי מְזוֹנוֹת.

Gives us the fruit of the vine...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Who gives us fruits that grow on trees...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

Who gives us fruits that grow from the ground ...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

Who gives us all sort of things that come from different places...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדָבָרוֹ.

Who makes fruits that smell so wonderful...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, הַנוֹתֵן רֵיחַ טוֹב בַּפְּרוֹת.

Who creates all types of trees that smell so wonderful ...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עֲצֵי בְשָׂמִים.

Who creates so many different grasses that smell so wonderful ...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עֲשָׂבֵי בְשָׂמִים.

Who creates so many different spices and aromas...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי בְשָׂמִים.

Did you know about all of these blessings/*Berachot*? What strikes you as significant about them?

How/can saying the appropriate *Beracha* for each thing that we use and enjoy increase our awareness of our environment and its elements that G-d has given us as part of the land on which we live and depend?

Did you know that there are also *Berachot* to say when one sees a rainbow, a beautiful mountain range and any number of other natural phenomena? Why do you think that this is the case?

Let's think about this together: What purpose can these *Berachot* serve in reminding us of the many different things that are part of the land and resources that G-d created? How can this practice help us to better appreciate the resources and land that is so much a part of our lives and not take it for granted?

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Student Handout #2: The *Mitzvah* of *Bal Tashchit*

There is a *mitzvah*, a Jewish commandment to NOT WASTE our resources. We call this *mitzvah* “*Bal Tashchit*.” How does this play out in our lives? Think about this for a moment – what is your initial reaction?

What can we do to use our resources responsibly, enjoy them and at the same time not waste them, but “use what we take?” Here are some actions to consider. Can you think of others?

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Add some more ideas here:

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