

Bal Tashchit (Do Not Destroy) and the Great Garbage Hunt:

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The prudent use of natural resources is a strong Jewish value. The mitzvah *bal tash'hit* (literally, "do not destroy") commands us not to waste natural resources or anything else and only to use that which we truly need. *Bal tash'hit* also commands us not to pollute the earth. Hikers can practice *bal tash'hit* not only by not littering, but also by picking up trash left by others. In this way, they are also practicing *tikkun olam*-helping to repair the world.

Ages: 4+

Hikers' Goals:

- to sharpen observation skills while walking slowly in the wilderness
- to better understand the mitzvah of *bal tashchit*

Time: near the beginning of a hike

Materials:

- fifty-foot length of rope or string
- fifteen to forty objects not normally found in natural settings-some should be obvious, like aluminum cans, others more subtle, like toothpicks or pennies
- garbage bag

Procedure:

This activity relates to the discussion toward the end of the essay on municipal solid waste, and involves placing garbage in nature to illustrate the point. In advance of the activity and out of sight of the participants, mark a course by laying a fifty-foot length rope or string alongside trees and/or bushes. Place fifteen to forty objects not normally found in nature (some should be obvious, like aluminum cans, others more subtle, like toothpicks or pennies) on one side of the rope, on the ground and in bushes and trees. Some should be plainly visible and others partially hidden. All the items should be visible from the other side of the rope.

Bring the participants to one end of the rope and explain that they must walk along the rope, on the side without the objects, and silently count how many objects they see. At the end of the rope, have them whisper to you how many items they saw. After everyone has a turn, ask those who found five or more objects to raise their hands; then ten or more, fifteen, twenty, and so on. Most likely all the hikers will have their hands up at the start and will soon become surprised that they missed so many items. At this point, have them go through a second time. At the end of the second time, instruct them to pick up all the objects.

Variation: Put only ten to fifteen objects on the trail, and go through the procedure only once.

Debriefing:

Discuss the differences in the participants' approach to looking for objects each time they walked through. The second time, the hikers most likely walked more slowly and were more observant. Stress that this is how they should always hike along the trail.

Talk about how camouflage helps animals hide from prey by blending into the environment. Discuss the hasidic idea that God is hidden in works of creation. How can walking through nature with an enhanced awareness help us find God in works of creation? Ask what we can do to fulfill the mitzvah of *bal tash'hit*.

Take out the garbage bag and encourage the hikers to pick up litter as they continue the hike.