

Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School

Solving Habitat Destruction with The Bay Institute and Enacting Bal Tashchit

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Would you want to destroy your own home? Make it unlivable? Well, then why would humans destroy the Earth, even though it is our home? The Jewish value I chose to study is Bal Tashchit and the social issue I chose to study is habitat destruction because we are not the only creatures on Earth. When making our own homes, we destroy other homes and that's not right. The value Bal Tashchit and the social issue habitat destruction connect because Bal Tashchit is about not destroying the planet, and by enacting this value, we can slow down or even stop habitat destruction. The most important way of enacting Bal Tashchit is through supporting habitat destruction because the earth is our home and other creatures live here. We should not take away their homes just because we want more homes; The Bay Institute works on supporting this issue by cleaning up the bay, and by educating people about why they should take care of the earth, which is why they should get an elevated donation.

There are numerous reasons why Bal Tashchit should be supported. The Jewish value Bal Tashchit/בל תשחית means to not destroy and to take good care of the world. The value Bal Tashchit is important to me because my class watched a documentary in JS class that talked about trash in the ocean. In the documentary, it said that there will soon be more plastic than fish in the ocean. I found this very shocking because I didn't know that it was so bad that there would be more plastic than fish in the ocean soon. Additionally, Recently, there were fires in Napa Valley, that people assume they were from broken power lines by the 50 mph winds at the time,

and the smoke traveled from there to my house. I could smell how awful the air quality was for that week. These were really terrible fires and if what people assumed was correct, it would be because we built power lines, and the wind knocked down a tree that broke the power lines. This example shows that this value is important because we need to stop construction, and let the earth regrow. We are destroying trees faster than they can grow back, and we are contributing to the rise in forest fires. The Jewish value, Bal Tashchit, is the most important value to enact, personally and as a society, because if we don't, the Earth will plunge into war over who will control the natural resources we have.

Jewish texts inform us that we need to not destroy the Earth. A central Jewish text that explains this is: Ellen Bernstein's "Rereading Genesis: Human Stewardship of the Earth." Ellen Bernstein says: "Humanity's role is to tend the garden, not to possess it; to "guard it and keep it" (Genesis 2), not to exploit it; to pass it on as sacred trust, as it was given. Even though we are given the authority to have dominion over the earth and its creatures, we are never allowed to own it, just like we can't own the waters or the air. "The land cannot be sold forever, without end." The land is the commons, and it belongs to everyone equally and jointly. In the biblical system, private property does not even exist because God owns the land and everything in it... The blessing of mastery over the earth calls us to exercise compassion and wisdom in our relationship with nature so that the creation will keep on creating for future generations. We use nature everyday in everything we do; nature provides our food, shelter, clothing, energy, electricity, coal, gas. "Mastering" nature involves determining how much land to us, which animals should be designated for human use, how to manage the development of civilization, and what should remain untouched" (Lev. 25:23). This demonstrates the importance of Bal Tashchit

because it says that we should not needlessly destroy because the Earth is God's and we merely take care of it, like a gardener. A gardener would not burn down your whole garden, he just makes sure your garden does not overgrow. Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 20:19 - 20, it says: "When in battle against a city you have to besiege it for a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees by striking an axe against them. While you may eat from them, you may not cut them down. Is a tree of the field a person, who can flee from you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know are not fruit producing trees you may destroy, and you may cut them down and use them for building a blockade against the city which is waging war against you, until it falls." This is a great example because it shows that deforestation and destruction is atrocious. The trees can't escape or hide or defend themselves from us. It would be like killing hundreds of blind people who are in wheelchairs. We would consider this awful. But we don't consider killing hundreds of trees wrong. We should not think of trees as lifeless lumps of wood, but almost like humans in a way that they breathe, live, and die. These are two texts that help support why we should help tend to the Earth. There are multiple more texts that tell us not to destroy the Earth because it belongs to God and we have a responsibility to protect and restore it.

Bal Tashchit should be supported because it is vital to the survival of the ecosystem. The definition of habitat destruction is the destruction of a habitat in which animals live. The Washington Post says: "By 2050, there will be more plastic than fish in the world's oceans." In the same amount of time, a study from the nonprofit research organization Center for Global Development, predicts that "as much as 2,890,000 square kilometers — or over a million square miles — of tropical forest could be lost to deforestation." As seen in these examples, "Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans." ~

Jacques Cousteau. Humans are treating oceans and trees like they belong in a garbage truck.

Habitat destruction is a problem that needs to be solved so that we can repair the damage we caused. By destroying the environment, people are ruining habitats, and it is displacing animals.

According to *Impact of Habitat Loss on Species*, “The world's forests, swamps, plains, lakes, and other habitats continue to disappear as they are harvested to be used and cleared to make way for agriculture, housing, roads, pipelines and the other hallmarks of industrial development.”

Because of this, the net loss in global forest area, during the 1990s, was about 94 million habitats (equivalent to 2.4% of total forests). Humans are destroying habitats for their own benefit, at the expense of everyone and everything else. As a result of that, habitat loss poses the greatest threat to species. In the same article, it talks about how habitat destruction is identified as a main threat to 85% of all species described in the IUCN's Red List (those species officially classified as "threatened" and "endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature) (Impact of habitat loss on species). As tropical forests contain at least half the Earth's species, clearing one hundred seventy billion square meters of tropical forest each year is a dramatic loss.

Orangutans, tigers, elephants, rhinos, and many other species are increasingly isolated, and their sources of food and shelter are in decline. If people enacted Bal Tashchit more, the environment would be healthier, which would allow animals to live in harmony.

An organization that helps with Bal Tashchit, is called The Bay Institute. On The Bay Institute's website, it states that “Our mission is to protect, restore, and inspire conservation of San Francisco Bay and its watershed, from the Sierra to the Sea.” We should support this organization because they don't just try to clean up the trash in the bay, but they also educate people about habitat destruction, this helps more people to be aware of habitat destruction and

take action against pollution. What's more, The bay institute educates people about pollution in the water, along with helping clean up the bay. They offer classes about the effects of environmental degradation and what people can do about it. By offering education, people can become inspired to do something about habitat destruction. The Bay Institute has events where people can volunteer to help clean up the bay. This organization should be supported because it educates people on this issue and with the knowledge that they learn, people can make a difference in the world.

The Bay Institute has 3 different programs. The coast and ocean program is one of these programs. It has multiple subprograms in it. On their website, it states: "The Film & Lecture Program is one of the most effective tools that reach and educate the public about ways to help protect the San Francisco Bay Watershed from the Sierra to the Sea. We lead by example serving only sustainable seafood at the events and provide films, book releases, and lectures that address challenges protecting the watersheds, the bay, the coast, and the ocean." In this program, the institute educates the public about ways to help protect the San Francisco Bay. This will encourage people to clean the bay. Another program they have is the bay restoration program. This program has people clean up the trash in the bay. In this program, people go around the bay and pick up as much trash as possible. This helps fight habitat destruction because it is directly taking the trash out of the water in the bay, which is destroying the habitats under the surface of the water. The bay institute has many different programs.

If everyone enacts Bal Tashchit, people can help reverse the effects of environmental destruction. The most important way of enacting Bal Tashchit is through helping solve habitat destruction because the Earth is our home and animals live here as well. We should not take

away the homes of animals because we want more homes; The Bay Institute works on helping fix this issue by cleaning up the bay, and by educating people about why they should take care of the earth, which is why they should get an elevated donation. Environmental degradation is detrimental because it affects humans, animals, and the ecosystem. Habitat loss causes animals to lose their homes, and forces species to move and live in places they aren't used to, which sometimes results with death. There is an organization that helps with this issue, and it is called The Bay Institute. This organization educates people about why we should keep the bay clean, along with keeping the bay clean. We should support this organization because it is our responsibility as humans to help repair environmental degradation because we are the only species on earth than can. The Bay Institute can help prevent environmental degradation ad help reverse the effects that have happened.

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