

# **BAL TASHCHIT**

בל תשחית



REPAIR THE SEA  
Tikkun HaYam



# בל תשחית

Bal Tashchit (“Do Not Destroy”) is a fundamental ethical principle in Judaism. It is based on the Mitzvah in Deuteronomy 20:19–20 which says it is forbidden to cut down fruit trees. The Talmud expanded the concept of Bal Tashchit to include all forms of senseless damage or waste.

There is a famous midrash (Kohelet Rabbah 7:13) in which God shows Adam and Eve the Garden of Eden and says:

“Look at my works! See how beautiful they are — how excellent! For your sake have I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.”

It has become a central aspect of the ethical character of the Jewish people. Today, the destruction of the ocean and waterways of the world through pollution, single-use plastic products, and simple carelessness represent a blatant violation of the ethical principle of Bal Tashchit.

# Marine Debris

Our throwaway culture prioritizes the moment over the long term and ease above the environment. The temporary plastic products we use do not break down and can last on our planet for hundreds of years. We have yet to find a sustainable way to deal with our waste, and over time our ocean has become our dumpster. On top of the estimated 150 million metric tons of debris that already choke our oceans every year, humans add another 8 million metric tons of plastics to the sea annually.

Marine animals can often mistake trash as prey or accidentally ingest microplastic. Research has found that 100% of sea turtle species, 59% of sea birds, and 25% of seafood market fish have ingested plastic. A recent beached whale had 88 pounds of plastic in its stomach. The chemicals from the trash can bioaccumulate through the food chain, resulting in high quantities of toxins in marine mammals, sharks, and even humans. However, the perils of trash don't stop there. Derelict fishing gear such as nets and lines can entangle and smother organisms and ecosystems. And ghost nets continue to catch fish and other animals as they drift along in the sea. Thoughtful decisions about the products we use and a demand for a change in consumer culture can help alleviate the pain of plastic.



# Nutrient Pollution

Nitrogen and phosphorus are essential elements for plant growth and are necessary ocean nutrients in limited quantities. However, fertilizer and chemical runoff on land can artificially increase these nutrients in the marine ecosystem. Excess elements can cause algae overgrowth, turning into an algal bloom. Some algal blooms release toxins that are harmful to humans or marine life. An amplified red tide bloom in Florida recently killed over 150 dolphins, close to 600 sea turtles, and thousands of fish. Excess nutrients can also result in barren marine deserts. Large amounts of decomposing algae deplete oxygen in localized areas, causing the residential marine species to die or evacuate, creating marine dead zones.





# **What You Can Do**

Be Conscious of the Waste You Create.

Carry Your Water Bottle, Cutlery Set, Reusable Shopping Bag, and Coffee Mug.

Join Reverse Tashlich.

Educate Your Community.

Propose a Local Straw or Bag Ban.

Use Fertilizers and Pesticides Without Chemicals.

Plant Local and Native Wildlife.

Advocate for Strong Water Quality Standards.





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