

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators presents

# An Interactive PARSHA EXPERIENCE



**Parsha:** Shoftim

**Title:** Trees Have Rights Too

**Contributor:** Hannah Perlis, Pardes Day School Educators Program '11-'13

## The Parsha at First Glance

### Spotlight on the Parsha:

In this week's *parsha*, *Shoftim*, the Torah mentions certain laws about war. One law is that when a city is at war with another city, its trees should not be destroyed, or cut down, if you can eat from them.



The parsha also teaches us about the prohibition of *bal tashchit* - respecting all that has been created and not wasting it. The *Shulhan Aruch* (a main code of Jewish Law) explains that it is forbidden to destroy or harm anything that could be useful to people.

### Zooming In:

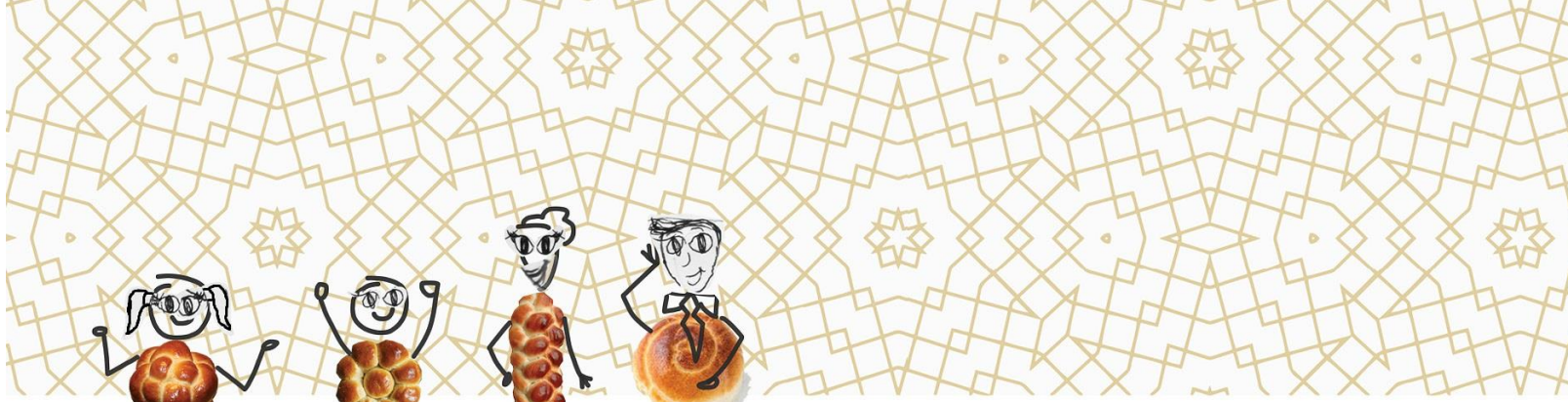
Rashi comments on *Devarim 20:19*:

<p>19 When you besiege a city for a long time, in making war against it to take it, do not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them; for you can eat of them, but you shall not cut them down; for is the tree of the field man, that it should be besieged by you?</p>	<p>יט כִּי-תִצּוֹר אֶל-עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ, לֹא-תִשְׁחִית אֶת-עֵצָהּ לְנִדַּח עָלֶיהָ גִּרְוֹן--כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאַתּוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת:  כִּי הָאָדָם יֵאָכֵל הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹא מִפְּנֵיךָ בַּמְצוֹר.</p>
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Rashi writes on the final part of the verse ('for is the tree of the field man'): *Is the tree of the field a part of the same (moral) world as a human being? No. The tree of the field is not the target of the war; the people of the town are. No one has the right to destroy the trees because of an argument between human beings - therefore the trees must not be destroyed because of an argument between human beings.*

### Questions for Consideration:

1. Bal tashchit means that things that could be useful to people should not be destroyed. How are trees useful to people?
2. How do Rashi's thoughts connect to the idea of bal tashchit?
3. Do you agree that trees should not be destroyed because of an argument between humans? Why or why not?
4. The *pasuk* states that trees that give food should not be destroyed, but what about the other trees that do not give food? Should they be destroyed? Is it worth protecting a tree if it doesn't provide food for people?



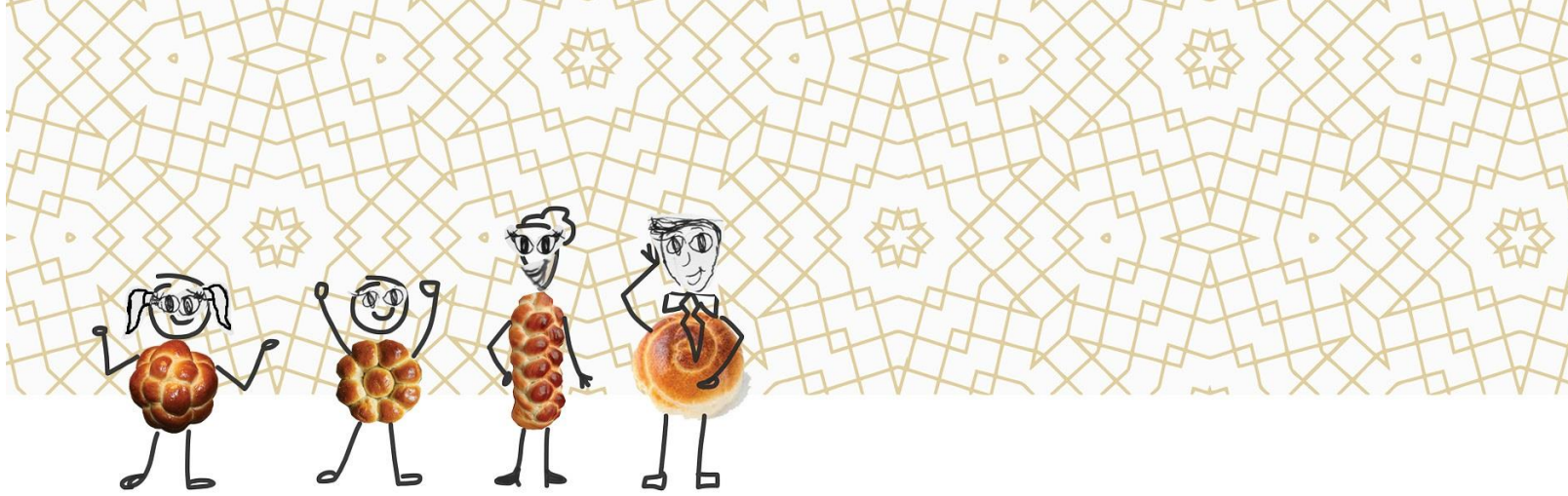
5. Are there ways you can apply this to your life today? What if you had a disagreement with your friend at the park and then decided to take the branches off of a nearby tree because you were so upset. Is that fair to the tree? What do you think Rashi would say?
6. What questions do you have for Rashi about his comments on protecting the tree?

## The Parsha Through Another Lens

### Pick a Quote, Any Quote:

Below are 5 quotes from Rabbinic sources, commentaries, and other Judaic resources.

1	Even if the land is full of all good things, still you must plant...even if you are old, you must plant. Just as you found trees planted by others, you must plant them for your children. (Midrash Tanchuma, Kodashim 8)
2	When a tree that gives fruit is cut down, its cry goes from one end of the world to the other, but no sound is heard. (Pirke de-R. Eliezer 34)
3	When God created the first human beings, He led them around the Garden of Eden and said, "See how beautiful the world is! I give it into your care. Do not spoil it. For if you destroy the world, there will be no one after you to restore it." (Midrash Kohelet Rabbah I)
4	If not for the trees, human life could not exist. (Midrash Sifre)
5	If someone kills a tree before its time, it is as though they have taken a soul. (Rabbi Nachman)



Questions:

1. Which of the quotes above explains bal tashchit the best?
2. Which of the quotes would you use to convince or persuade someone to take care of the trees and not waste things that you use?
3. Which quote do you want to learn more about, or have questions about?
4. Design your own motto/slogan/phrase that can help others understand the importance of bal tashchit.

**Shabbat Shalom!**