



*Jewish
environmentalism...*

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

*A New Page of Talmud –
Shoftim 5782*



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." - **Kohelet Rabbah 7:20**¹ When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the axe against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? - **Devarim 20:19**²

...you shall not destroy its trees...

לֹא-תִשְׁחִית אֶת-עֵצֵהּ לְגֵדִיךָ
Devarim 11:29

Rabbi Eliezer said: I heard that one who tears his garments for the passing of a close relative, more than is necessary has transgressed the commandment against destructiveness” - **Babylonian Talmud, Bava Kama 91b**³ And not only trees, but whoever breaks vessels, tears clothing, wrecks that which is built up, stops fountains, or wastes food in a destructive manner, transgresses the commandment of Bal Tashchit. Likewise, it is forbidden to kill an animal needlessly or to offer exposed water (presumed to be polluted or poisoned) to livestock. - **Rambam Laws of Kings 6:8**⁴ The root of this mitzvah is known, namely: in order to instruct our souls to love the good and the purposeful,

and to cleave to it. and through this, the good will cleave to us, and we will distance from all negative things, and from all destructive matter. **Sefer HaChinuch, Commandment 529**⁵ [The Torah compares humans to trees] because, like humans, trees have the power to grow. And as humans have children, so trees bear fruit. And when a human is hurt, cries of pain are heard throughout the world, so when a tree is chopped down, its cries are heard

throughout the world. – **Rabbi Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi, Tze’enuah u’Re’enuah**⁶

For the human is like the tree in a field, like the

human, the tree grows too; like the tree, the human is chopped down, and I don't know where I've been and where I'll be, like the tree in a field!

For the human is like the tree in a field, like the tree he strives upwards; like the human, it burns in fire, and I don't know where I've been and where I'll be, like the tree in a field! – **Natan Zach, A Tree of the Field**⁷

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