



## Social Action and Responsibility - Unit Worksheet 5

### Part I: Judaism and the Environment

#### *Bereshit 2:15*

קָח ה' אֱלֹקִים, אֶת-הָאָדָם; וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֶן-עֵדֶן, לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ.

And tGod took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.

#### *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, 1 on Kohelet 7:13*

בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אדם הראשון, נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן, ואמר לו: ראה מעשי כמה נעים ומשובחין הן, וכל מה שבראתי, בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך.

When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: "Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake 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.

1. What are the two jobs human beings are being asked to do?

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2. Give two examples of how people can fulfil God's request.

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3. Give two examples of how people can disregard God's request.

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4. A Chassidic rabbi, Rebbe Nachmen from Brestlav, wrote, "If you believe you can ruin, you must also believe you can repair." How does the Midrash turn the text from *Bereshit* into an obligation?

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## Part II: Prohibition of *Bal Tashchit* (wastefulness)

### *Devarim* 20:19-20

כי-תצור אל-עיר זמרים רבים להלחם עליה לתפשה, לא-תשחית את-עצה לנדח עליו גרזן-- כי  
ממנו תאכל, ואתו לא תכרות: כי האדם עץ השדה, לבא מפניך במצור. רק עץ אשר-תדע, כי-  
לא-עץ מאכל הוא-- אתו תשחית, וכרת; ובנית מצור, על-העיר אשר-הוא עשה עמך מלחמה--  
עד רדתה

“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? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siege works against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.”

1. What is the difference made in the text about the trees that can and cannot be destroyed?

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2. Why is the environment even a concern during wartime? Shouldn't winning the war be the number one priority?

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## Part III: Prohibition of *Tzar Baal Chayim* (distress to animals)

### *Devarim* 22:6-7

כי יקרא מן-צפור לפניך בדרך בקל-עץ או על-הארץ, אפרחים או ביצים, והאם רבצת על-  
האפרחים, או על- הביצים-- לא-תקח האם, על- הבנים. שלח תשלח את- האם, ואת- הבנים  
תשח-לך, למען יטב לך, והארכת ימים

If along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.

1. Why in *Devarim* 22 do we show concern for the mother bird?

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Ramban, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, (Nachmanides) (1194-1270), was a great Torah scholar and doctor in Europe.

**Ramban's commentary on Devarim 22:6-7**

גם זו מצווה מבוארת מן אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד (ויקרא כב כח). כי הטעם בשניהם לבלתי היות לנו לב אכזרי ולא נרחם, או שלא יתיר הכתוב לעשות השחטה לעקור המין אע"פ שהתיר שחיטה במין ההוא, והנה ההורג האם והבנים ביום אחד או לוקח אותם בהיות להם דרור לעוף כאלו יכרית המין ההוא

*This also is an explanatory commandment of the prohibition you shall not kill it [the mother] and its young both in one day (Leviticus 22:28). The reason for both [commandments] is that we should not have a cruel heart and not be compassionate, or it may be that Scripture does not permit us to destroy a species altogether, although it permits slaughter [for food] within that group. Now the person who kills the mother and the young in one day or takes them when they are free to fly, [it is regarded] as though they have destroyed that species.*

2. According to the Ramban, why is it wrong for both the mother and the young to be killed at the same moment even if the food would go to a hungry family?

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**Devarim 11:12-15**

וְהָיָה, אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ שִׁמְעוּ אֵל-מִצְוֹתַי, אֲשֶׁר אֶלְכִי מִצִּיּוֹן אֲתָכֶם, הַיּוֹם-- לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וְלִעֲבֹדוֹ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם, וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם. וְנָתַתִּי מָטָר-אֲרָצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ, יוֹרֵה וּמְלִקוֹשׁ; וְאַסְפֹּת דָגְדָג, וְתִירְשֶׁה וְיִצְהַרְדֶּה. וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשִׂדֶּה, לְבַהֲמֹתֶיךָ; וְאֶכְלֹתָ, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ.

And it will be if hearken to My commandments that I command you today, to love God, your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I shall provide rain for your Land in its proper time, the early and the late rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil. I shall provide grass in your fields for thy cattle and you will eat and you will be satisfied.

3. Why is the blessing for food for your cattle before human satisfaction from food?

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