

**THE WORLD**  
**OUR ROLE; OUR RESPONSIBILITY;**  
**OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**  
**A Jewish Perspective**

**Ba'al Tash'hit**

טו וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ

1

“And God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.”  
(Genesis 2:25)

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2

In the time that God created the first man he (God) took him (man) and passed him before all the trees of the Garden of Eden. He said to him, See my doings, how nice and praiseworthy they are. All that I created, for you I created them. Pay attention that you do not ruin and destroy my world. If you ruin (it) there will be no body to fix it after you.

(Kohelet Rabbah 7:28)

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3

כִּי־תִצּוֹר אֶל־עֵיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא־תִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצָהּ  
לְנֹדַח עָלֶיהָ גֵרְזֵן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֵתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם עַץ הַשָּׂדֶה

לְבֹא מִפְּנֵיךָ בַּמְצוֹר: רַק עַץ אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְעַה כִּי לֹא־עַץ מֵאֲכָל הוּא

אֵתוֹ תִשְׁחִית וְכָרְתָּ וּבְנִיתָ מְצוֹר עַל־הָעֵיר אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה עַד רִדְתָּהּ:

When in your war against a city and 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 humans to withdraw before you under siege? Only trees which 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 (Deuteronomy 20:19-20, New Jewish Publication Society translation).

4

It is not virtuous to use anything in a manner different from that which had been created...[including] a tree, which was aimed in its creation to produce fruit as food for human beings to sustain them, it is forbidden to do anything to them, which would harm human beings. (Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi of Kalenburg d. 1865 – Sefer HaKatuv v’HaKabalah [Nurenburg, 1924], on Deuteronomy 20:19)

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5

וְלֹא הָאֵילָנוֹת בַּלְבַּד, אֲלֵא כָל הַמְשֻׁבֵּר כָּלִים, וְקוֹרַע בְּגָדִים,  
וְהוֹרֵס בְּנֵינֹת וְסֹתָם מֵעֵין, וּמֵאֵבֵד מֵאֲכָלוֹת דֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁחִיתָהּ,  
עוֹבֵר בְּלֹא תִשְׁחִית.

“Not only fruit trees are prohibited to be uprooted, but whoever breaks vessels; or rips clothes; or destroys a building; or blocks a stream; or wastes food; transgresses *bal Tashchit*.”

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We also find a maximalist view by the tosafot responding to the Talmudic claim that a person who cuts down a good tree will not see blessing in their life. They expand the Talmud’s edict by stating that also somebody who cuts down a non-fruit producing tree will suffer the same fate. Pesachim 50b

## Ba'al Tzara Chiam

1

כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא־חַי לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ כִּי־רַק  
עֵשֶׂב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל:

“Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat, as with the green grasses, I give you all these.” (Genesis 9:3)

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2

צדקתך כהררי־אל משפטך תהום רבה אדם ובהמה תושיע  
יהוה:

“Your beneficence is like the high mountain; your justice like the great deep; man and beast you deliver, O Lord.” (Psalms 37:7)

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3

מצמיח חציר לבהמה ועשב לעבדת האדם להוציא לחם  
מן־הארץ

“You make grass grow for the cattle, and herbage for man’s labor that he may get food out of the earth.”  
(Psalms 104:14)

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4

נותן לבהמה לחמה לבני ערב אשר יקראו:

“Who gives the beast their food, to the ravens brood what they cry for.” (Psalms 147:9)

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5

ותכל להשקתו ותאמר גם לגמליך אשאב עד אס־כלו  
לשתת:

“When she had let him drink his fill, she said, ‘I will also draw for your camels, until they finish drinking.’”  
(Genesis 24:19)

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6

ויאמר אליו מלאך יהוה על־מה הכית את־אתנדך זה שלוש רגלים

“The angel of the Lord said to him, ‘Why have you beaten your ass these three times?’” (Numbers 22:32)

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7

כי יקרא קן־צפור לפניך בדרך בכל־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 תקח־לך למען ייטב לך והארכת ימים:

If along a 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 together with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.  
(Deuteronomy 22:6-7)

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8

לא־תחסם שור בדישו:

“You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing.” (Deuteronomy 25:4)

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9

ושור או־שה אתו ואת־בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד:

“An ox or a sheep, it and its young shall not be slaughtered on the same day.” (Leviticus 22:28)

10

כִּי־תִרְאֶה חֲמֹר שֵׁנֹאךָ רֹבֵץ תַּחַת מִשְׁאוֹ וְחִדַּלְתָּ מֵעֹזֵב  
לוֹ עֹזֵב תִּעְזֹב עִמּוֹ

“When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him.” (Exodus 23:5)

11

יֹדֵעַ צְדִיק נְפֶשׁ בְּהֵמָתוֹ

Proverbs 12:10: “A righteous man knows the needs of his beast.”

## Pekouach Nefesh (Saving a life)

1

Once should distance oneself from things that may lead to danger, for a danger to life is more serious than a [religious] prohibition - and one should be more worried about a possible danger to life than a possible [transgression] of a prohibition. Therefore, the sages prohibited one to walk in a place of danger, such as close to a leaning/shaky wall [it may fall] or alone at night. They also prohibited drinking water from streams at night or placing one's mouth on a flowing pipe of water to drink...For these things may lead to danger...

All of these things are intended to avoid danger, and one who is concerned with his health will avoid them. And it is prohibited to rely on a saving miracle, or to endanger oneself in a like way. (Shulkhan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 116:5 [Rema])

2

It is a positive commandment to be very careful and guard oneself from any life-threatening obstacle as it is said, "...take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously." (Deut. 4:9) (Shulkhan Aruch, Hoshen Mishpat 427:8)

3

Anyone who transgresses these matters [health concerns], saying: "I will endanger myself, what business is that of anyone else," or "I'm not concerned with such things." Prepare for him lashes...(Shulkhan Aruch, Hoshen Mishpat 427:10)