Rebekah Saltzman

Tu BiShvat
Keeping it Clean!

Tu BiShvat – the New Year for Trees – is the perfect time to celebrate and be reminded that part of our purpose here is to respect and protect the earth. G-d lends us the earth – and all our possessions – so we can use them correctly and care for them. Our clothing, furniture, cars, homes, the things we buy, are all just a loan.

Since all of these things are just a loan, we are expected to return them the way we found them. One way we do this is by not wasting the precious resources G-d gave us. *Bal tashchit*, the prohibition of wasting, seems to specifically apply to fruit-bearing trees during times of war. But *Sefer HaChinuch* says we shouldn't waste even something as small as a mustard seed. The Rambam says whoever breaks vessels, tears garments, destroys a building, blocks a well or spring of water, or destructively wastes food, transgress the commandment of *bal tashchit.*

Many of us are not satisfied with what we have on loan. We want more. In pursuit of more stuff, we not only damage the earth we are supposed to be caring for, we damage ourselves.

How so? When we buy, buy, buy, with no intention or purpose, we have a house full of stuff. So much, we can't find what we need when we need it. So we go out and buy the same items again, and our house becomes even more cluttered and disorganized. It becomes a problem not just of disorganization and spending but also a violation of bal tashchit – what a waste of precious resources!

What people don't realize is that often having less means having more.

When we have fewer things, we end up spending less time taking care of those things. We spend less time cleaning our home, less time looking for objects we need. We are able to spend more time with the people we love, doing activities we love.

By decluttering, we benefit ourselves and the earth. Here are some ways you can help the earth by organizing and decluttering your home:

☑ **Donate things you aren't using!** Help others who might need those items, and reduce pollution and manufacture of new items.

☑ **Recycle or upcycle.** When you reuse things that have come to the end of their lives, you help reduce pollution caused by waste and help preserve natural resources. For example, recycling old paper to be made into new paper or cutting up a torn shirt to be used as rags instead of paper towels.

☑ **What you can't donate or recycle, throw out.** You'll create space in your home for the things you need, which enables you to find what you need when you need it. You'll minimize the time you spend searching for the things you are looking for, and you won't spare yourself from buying an item you already have because you thought you'd lost it.

☑ **Shop efficiently.** Bring a list with you when you go shopping, and only buy things you need.

When you do these things, you are expressing thanks to the G-d you honor and respect for what He has given you. What better way to celebrate the New Year for Trees than to tell them, 'I agree to protect you by using what I have to its fullest and pass on what I no longer need to someone who does need it.'

As a personal organizer, I help people let go of their old possessions, thereby curating their best collection of belongings and creating a cleaner, more organized house. If you need help decluttering and organizing, join me for my 36-day pre-Pesach decluttering challenge to make cleaning for Pesach easier and less stressful.

During COVID, we've been spending a lot more time in our homes. Let's declutter so we can enjoy them to the fullest!

Rebekah Saltzman holds a degree in Fashion Design from Parson School of Design, and has been helping people declutter, organize their homes and reduce their waste through her personal organization company Balagan Begone. The website is www.BalaganBeGone.com and can be followed on the Facebook group Organizing in Israel and on Instagram @balaganbegone. Her weekly podcast, Journey to Organization, discusses decluttering and waste reduction. To join the 36-day challenge, go to http://bit.ly/BBG36.