

**Intro:** (Class Discussion)

Today we are going to learn about living in a clean environment and protecting the health of our cities.

What do you think is important to have in a city that you would like to live in? [Engage the students to make a list on a blackboard.] Would you enjoy living in a city with:

- clean water?
- clean air?
- lots of trees?
- Flowers?
- grass?
- Parks?

What kinds of things would you NOT want in a place to live? [Engage the students in making a second list. They can include things that they don't like in their current city/neighborhood.] Would you like living in a place with:

- garbage on the streets?
- dirty air?
- unclean water?
- dirty air?

**Lesson:**

- Today there are many laws that the government has made in order to protect the environment and allow us to live in nice cities with clean air and plenty of greenery. Long before the government had made these laws the Torah had already discussed this issue.
- **The Necessary Components of a Proper City**
- The Talmud says that a Torah scholar should not live in a place without certain things. Aside from the things we've talked about, what do you think the Talmud thinks are important things for a city with a Torah scholar? [engage the students in making another list – can also reference the first list and note that things on the second list would probably be things that shouldn't be in a city with a Torah scholar.]

**Talmud (Sanhedrin 17 B)**

- public baths
- sewage disposal systems,
- a court of justice,
- a doctor, and
- an elementary school.
- certain types of fruit (added by Rabbi Akiva because of the health benefits these fruits provide)

### **Talmud Yerushalmi (Kiddushin 4:12):**

- physician,
- bath house or
- court.
- access to vegetables (added by Rabbi Yose ben Rabbi Bun)

Rabbi Hezekia and Rav Kohen in the name of Rav further extend this message. They write, “A person will indeed have to give an accounting for everything that was seen but not eaten.” These statement shows that the Rabbis thought it was very important to have a varied diet and enjoy the world that G-d created.

### Air Quality

One thing that is very important for a clean city is to have clean air. Have you ever tried to hold your breath underwater? If you have, you know people can't live for more than a few minutes without air. Air that is polluted with chemicals from cars or factories makes it harder for us to breathe, and can even make us sick. Today we have laws that help keep our air clean to breathe. But the rabbis of the Talmud also made laws to make sure their city air was clean.

- The mishnah in Baba Batra (2:9) writes that cemeteries, carcasses and tannery must be at least 50 cubits from the towns. The mishnah also states that a tannery can only be set up on the east side of town because east wind is not strong enough to carry the fumes to the town.
  - What's a tannery? A place where they would treat leather with chemicals to make shoes and other clothing. The fumes from the chemicals smelled very bad, so the rabbis kept them far from the city and in a direction where the wind wouldn't blow the fumes into the town.
- Maimonides also showed his concern for air quality in The Preservation of Youth. He says that the air of the cities is thick in comparison to the light air of the desert, due to the tall buildings, narrow streets, pollution, waste, cattle, and polluted foods.
  - Rambam suggested that people choose to live in the suburbs or at least cities “with an open horizon” in tall houses with wide yards to allow for enough sun and wind.

### Polution as a Moral Dilemma

- Story: A hassid saw a man moving stones from his field to a publicly owned place. The hassid asked, “Why are you moving stones from a place that does not belong to you into a place that does belong to you?” The man scoffed at the hassid.
- Some time later, this man had to sell his field and he was forced to live in the publicly owned streets. One day, he tripped over the stones he had moved into the publicly owned space. He said, “Rightfully did that hassid say to me, why

are you moving stones from a place that does not belong to you into a place that does belong to you.”

[You can play this out by having the children bring stones in from home, and by marking public space and private space with masking tape on the floor. In the beginning, the students see that they have access to both the public space and the private space, but consider the private space their own. However, once the private space, which is only temporarily owned, is sold, the public space is all they have access to, and the garbage is left in the space that they have.]

- Rabbi Aryeh Carmel, in his book entitled *Judaism and the Quality of the Environment*, asserts that pollution is a “moral problem.” Someone who throws garbage on the streets or pollutes the air is saying, through his actions, that he does not care about how this actions will affect other people or the world around him..

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### **Conclusion:**

Guarding one’s health is a very important mitzvah, and the environment we live in can make a big difference to our health. What can we do to be sure that our cities are healthy places to live?

Some actions we can take are::

Not littering

Recycling

Buying recycled products

Not picking flowers

Using natural cleaning products

Making our parents drive us less – walk or ride bikes

### **Activity**

#### **Grades 1- 4**

Draw a picture of a healthy city. Include the many different things you’d like to have in your city. [Teachers may want to have magazines or stickers available for children to paste onto the artwork.]

#### **Grades 5 and above**

Write a creative story about a bad city that makes people sick and unhappy. What is wrong with the city? What will the people in the city do to make it better?

You may also illustrate your story.