



CAN I (LITERALLY) WEAR MY VALUES ON MY SLEEVE?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of the **Conscious Consumerism** through the value of **Self-Expression**.

At-a-Glance:

This resource provides participants with an opportunity to deeply consider the environmental impacts of their clothing choices. It introduces the ecological implications of fast fashion and encourages participants to grapple with how their desires for self-expression may at times be in conflict with their other value systems. The Jewish value of *bal tashchit*, avoiding unnecessary waste, provides a spiritual foundation for exploring conscious consumerism. Learners will engage in an activity that identifies the values driving their personal clothing choices. Individual reflection and group discussion offer opportunities for considering how to align multiple values through the clothing that we wear.



Time Estimate:
55-65 minutes



Best Uses:

- For group discussion
- Indoor or outdoor
- For older teens, young adults, and adults



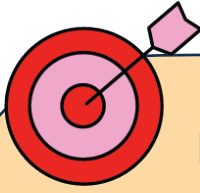
Materials Needed:

- Digital device to show (optional) video
- Printed copies of [Clothing Tales template](#)
- Pens and markers for drawing
- Print out or digital device to look at [Patagonia poster](#)
- Print out or digital device to look at [Buyarchy of Needs poster](#)



This resource was created as part of M²'s Values in Action Environment Fellowship, generously supported by Micah Philanthropies. For a full list of Fellows in the inaugural Fellowship cohort, [click here](#).

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Through our clothing, we present ourselves to the world. What we wear expresses both who we are and how we wish to be seen.

Today, we have more clothing options available to us than ever before. With the rise of “fast fashion” in the last few decades, which involves the rapid design, production, marketing, and distribution of clothing, consumers now have access to tremendous product variety at staggeringly low prices.



Read the passage below and/or show this 6-minute video on the environmental impact of fast fashion by the Economist.

Between 2000 and 2014, global clothing production doubled, demonstrating the spectacular growth of the fashion industry. However, while consumers bought 60% more clothing in 2014 than they did in 2000, they only keep the clothes for half as long (McKinsey and Company, 2016).

While this accessible abundance enables us to acquire the latest trends more easily, all this choice comes with a significant environmental price tag. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the fast fashion industry, marketed towards young consumers in particular, is the second-biggest consumer of water and is responsible for **about 10% of global carbon emissions – more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. Over 85% of all textiles go to the landfill each year, and the equivalent of one garbage truck full of clothes is burned or dumped in landfill every second (UNEP, 2018 and UNECE, 2018).**



Facilitator prompts the group:

- Do you think having greater access to clothing choices enables you to better express your personal identity?
- Would reducing your participation in fast-fashion limit your ability to express your personality through style?

Consider for yourself, (but not to answer together as a group), how much or little should ecological considerations guide our clothing choices?

8 min





ACTIVITY

Facilitator prompts the group to engage in the following exercise:

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: CLOTHING TALES (10 minutes)

1. Using the template provided [here](#), participants are instructed to draw their current outfit.

(These will not be shared with anyone unless participants want to.)



2. On the left-hand side of the page (under the header “The Story of Me”), in the empty space surrounding the picture, ask participants to write about how their outfit is a reflection of them as individuals.

Possible questions to consider, include:

- Why did you choose this outfit?
- How does it make you feel?
- How conscious/unconscious were your clothing choices today?
- What does it communicate about you to others?
- How is it an expression of your identity?

3. On the right-hand side of the page (under the header, “The Story of My Outfit”), in the empty space surrounding the picture, ask participants to write about how their clothing came to exist and be in their possession.

- *This will likely take some imagination – ask:*

- Imagine how your clothes came into being, or
- Think through the many steps it took to get the clothes from its place of origin to your closet.
- Encourage them to look at the tags for information.

- *Possible questions to consider, include:*

- Where was your article of clothing produced?
- What is it made of?
- What (do you imagine) are the steps that were taken for that piece of clothing to get from where it was produced to your possession?
- What will you do with it once you no longer want to wear it?

25 min



**PARTNER DEBRIEF** (5-10 minutes)

In pairs, ask participants to reflect on the ways in which the two sides of their drawing are in alignment and the ways in which there may be disconnects.

Possible questions to consider, include:

- Are your clothing choices an accurate reflection of who you are?
- Are your clothing choices a reflection of your values? How so? How not?

GROUP DISCUSSION (10-15 minutes)

Share with the group the ad that Patagonia ran in 2011 in the New York Times on Black Friday, that read, “Don’t Buy This Jacket.” The ad can be accessed [here](#).

Read this paragraph taken from their [website](#) about Patagonia’s decision to run their Don’t Buy This Jacket Campaign:

To lighten our environmental footprint, everyone needs to consume less. Businesses need to make fewer things but of higher quality. Customers need to think twice before they buy. Why? Everything we make takes something from the planet we can’t give back. Each piece of Patagonia clothing, whether or not it’s organic or uses recycled materials, emits several times its weight in greenhouse gases, generates at least another half garment’s worth of scrap, and draws down copious amounts of freshwater now growing scarce everywhere on the planet.

Encourage group discussion by asking the following questions:

- Patagonia’s ad encourages people to only buy what they “need.” How much clothing do you need?
- Are there needs to consider beyond physically covering your body?
- In a world where “fast fashion” is the norm, how can we be conscious consumers?
- Is it important that our clothing be a reflection of our values?



ANCHOR IN JEWISH WISDOM

Ground the group discussion in Jewish values by sharing the following teachings and discussion questions:

Bal tashchit is the Hebrew term for “do not destroy” and prohibits unnecessarily destroying or disposing of useful things. Although the Torah specifically mentions the senseless destruction of fruit trees (*Dvarim/Deuteronomy 20:19-20*), the Rabbis understood the prohibition to include other types of senseless waste, including clothing:

Whoever breaks vessels, or tears garments, or destroys a building, or clogs a well, or does away with food in a destructive manner violates the negative mitzvah of bal tashchit.

— Rambam, *Hilkhos Melakhim 6:10*

Facilitator prompts the group:

- If avoiding needless waste is a Jewish value, how can we reduce the amount of clothing sent to landfill (and the wasted water and fossil fuels imbedded in the production of our clothing)?

Continue reading:

One of the most effective ways of avoiding waste is to reduce the amount of clothing acquired to begin with. Similarly to the Patagonia ad which invites us to reconsider what we “need,” the rabbis of the Talmud encourage us to find contentment with what we have:

Ben Zoma says:

Who is rich?

One who is content with one's portion...

— *Babylonian Talmud, Pirkei Avot 4:1*

Facilitator prompts the group:

- Do you agree with Ben Zoma's definition of richness? In what ways might his understanding be counter-cultural?

12 min



***Continue reading:***

Both of these sources above prompt us to think about waste, needs and satisfaction when it comes to our possessions (and can be extended to our clothing purchasing habits), encouraging us, perhaps, to “buy less.”

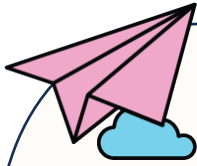
But is there *another side* to thinking about our clothing choices? How might they represent our own self-expression and identities? Things we represent besides for ourselves?

The torah in Parashat Tetzaveh describes the sacred garments which the *Kohanim*, and *Kohen Gadol* – Priests and High Priest – wore for “glory and splendor” when they served in the *Mishkan*/the Tabernacle.

These garments were made with fine fabrics, gold and jewels, and were visually quite beautiful. In ways, they may have been a bit “excessive” and sit in tension with some of the values we raised above. Why do you think they were still considered “sacred garments”?

***Facilitator prompts the group:***

- What do you think is meant by clothing to be worn “for glory and splendor”? Who are they ultimately being worn for? What do they represent?
- In what ways can clothing create an atmosphere for others, or particular feelings in the person wearing them?
- Have you experienced this in your own life? Where?



PROMPT ACTION

Read the following:

Climate activist, Sarah Lazarovic, created a “buyarchy of needs” to help guide our decision-making when we are faced with the question of “needing” stuff.



Show the following poster to participants. [Click here to access it.](#)

Facilitator prompts the group:

- How can you apply this model to your clothing choices? Can this framework support you in participating in more conscious consumerism?

Consider taking one of the following actions. As you review the list, write down which one you will take.

- Commit to reducing the number of clothing articles you purchase
- When purchasing clothing, prioritize previously loved or vintage clothing
- When purchasing new clothing, support companies that use organic materials, conserve water, and produce quality products that will last a long time
- Organize a clothing swap
- Look into local options for renting/sharing clothing.

Facilitator encourages sharing of one action participants to committed to taking.

10 min





CLOSE WITH INTENTION

In the exploration we just experienced, we took an issue that is far-reaching in our world today – conscious consumerism and environmental waste – and explored it through the value of self-expression. Through that lens we are able to assess the ecological implications of fast fashion, and how it fits into the clothing choices we make. We had the chance to reflect on the balance of values we hold, and how we get dressed each day fits into it.

Facilitator prompts the group:

- I came into this session _____, and I am now _____.

3 min

