

What to Do to Avoid the 5-Cent Bag Fee and Clean Up Our City

OPINION

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Look, we get it. Boro Park families don't want to pay five cents for plastic or paper bags when they go shopping.

Here's the good news: You don't have to pay a single nickel. And you can help clean up our community, reduce solid waste, and avoid needless destruction (*bal tashchis*) at the same time.

All you have to do is bring re-usable shopping bags.

Re-usable bags are easy to carry, strong, clean, and safe. They fold up easily, so you can bring 20 or more with you for your family's weekly shopping – all folded up inside one small bag, and they store in a small space in your home.

Our families already do many things every day that are far more difficult than remembering to bring bags when we go shopping. We bring briefcases or purses to work, religious items to shul,

keys and MetroCards and so much more. Many families already do their shopping with a cart or a car, so you can even keep the bags there.

Now, why is this worth doing?

By itself, each plastic bag might not seem like a big deal. But they add up. Every year, New Yorkers throw away more than 9 billion plastic bags (yes, *billion* with a "b"). That's roughly 19,000 bags per minute, and it adds up to 91,000 tons of solid waste in our landfills annually, requiring more than 7,000 truck trips through our city. Bags get caught in our trees, clog up storm drains, and pollute our streets and sidewalks and parks. We all know we have a litter problem in Boro Park, and a solid waste problem in NYC.

Our tradition frowns upon *bal tashchis*, which includes a prohibition on wastefully burning oil. Let's remember that plastic bags are made from petroleum. When we need to use the resources of the planet, we are of course permitted to do so. But when we don't

need to – when it is as easy as bringing reusable bags – then we should not engage in needless destruction.

Even opponents of the bag charge admit that 9 billion plastic bags are a problem, and we should do something about it. They just don't have any workable solutions.

All around the country and around the world, when places adopt a bag-fee law, most people start bringing reusable bags – and plastic bag waste drops by 60%-90%. From Los Angeles to Washington, DC; from Minneapolis to Austin, TX; more than 100 cities already have a law like this. Many countries, too, including England, Germany, and South Africa. Israel just adopted a bag fee of 10 *agorot*.

In these places, the vast majority of people – across lines of religion, race, age, and family size – have started bringing their own bags.

Stores will still be able to distribute produce and meat bags, so you don't need to worry about leakage or contamination.

The plastics industry has paid for research alleging that reusable bags are unhealthy, but *Consumer Reports* has shown that this is misleading nonsense. And if you've been using plastic bags for household garbage, you can still buy them online or at Costco for about one penny each.

Many grocery stores in the neighborhood – like Landau's Supermarket – are already giving away reusable bags or selling them at a dis-

count. The city will help too. We will be giving away over 100,000 reusable bags in neighborhoods across the city to make sure that all families can get the reusable bags they need to avoid paying the fee.

The Bring Your Own Bag Law is not about collecting money. In fact, the goal is not to have anyone pay the fee at all. Instead, the law is about helping us all make a small, easy change in our behavior that will add up to a big impact.

It's about cutting back on unnecessary destruction, so together we can give a cleaner neighborhood and a healthier environment to our children and grandchildren.

Isn't that worth switching to reusable bags?

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