



ECO-JUDAISM, part 1



Jewish Education News

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And God blessed them and God said to them,
 “Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and master it,
 and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the flyer of the heaven,
 and every live creature that creeps on the earth.” (*Genesis* 1:28)

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים
 פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ
 וּרְדוּ בַדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
 וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת עַל־הָאָרֶץ:
 בְּרֵאשִׁית אֵיכָּח

The Human Place in Nature

by Ellen Bernstein

In 1967, historian Lynn White argued, in a now famous essay in *Science Magazine*, that the Bible gave humanity a mandate to exploit nature when it empowered the *adam*/human to “master the earth,” and “have dominion over” it.¹ Many environmentalists and theologians are still haggling over White’s thesis even after hundreds of articles and books have tackled the topic over the last 30 years.²

In my environmental studies courses at U.C. Berkeley in the early 70s, we read White’s article and were taught that the theology of the Bible laid the ideological roots for the current environmental crisis. I naively accepted this idea, having no real knowledge of the Bible and no positive experience of religion. It was comforting to find a scapegoat to blame for society’s problems, and religion has always been an easy target.

White’s interpretation of Genesis had enormous ramifications on a whole generation of environmentalists and their students. I still encounter some who challenge my work, insisting that Judaism couldn’t possibly have ecological integrity because “the Bible encourages people to control nature.” They shun organized religion, claiming that it is the source of the environmental problem.

It is conceivable that people who have little experience reading the Bible could examine this verse and decide that the language of “dominion” and “mastery over nature” is anti-ecological. But a verse is not a collection of words, just as nature is not a collection of plants and animals. Extracting a word or verse out of its context is like removing a tree from its habitat -- taking it from the soil, the weather, and all the creatures with which it lives in total interdependence. It would be impossible to really know the tree outside of its relationships. It’s no different with the Bible. When you read the Bible, you have to consider the derivation of the words under consideration, the meaning of the

neighboring words and verses, the message of the Bible as a whole, the context in which it was written, and how others have understood the verse throughout its 3000 year history.³

The concept of “dominion” in this context is a blessing/*bracha*, a divine act of love. While God blessed the birds and fishes with fertility, God blessed humanity with both fertility *and* authority over nature. In more abstract terms, the fish receive a blessing in a horizontal dimension, while the *adam* is blessed in both horizontal and vertical dimensions. Like the animals, the *adam* is called to multiply and spread over the earth, but, unlike the animals, he stands upright as God’s deputy, overseeing all the animals and the plants.⁴

Caring for Creation is an awesome responsibility. The Psalmist captures the sense of undeserved honor that humanity holds:

What are human beings that You are mindful of them
Mortals that You care for them?
You have made them a little lower than God,
And crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands,
You have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen and also the beasts of the field the birds of the air
and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea.⁵

As a blessing, responsibility for Creation is a gift. According to anthropologist Lewis Hyde, the recipients of a gift become custodians of the gift. The Creation is a sacred trust and dominion is the most profound privilege.

It is necessary to remember the context of blessing as we examine the so-called “accused” words, **כבש** “master,” and **רדה**, “have dominion over.” It is also important to remember that Hebrew is a more symbolic, multilayered, and vague language than English — any single word root can have multiple meanings, and often a word and its opposite will share the same word root. According to Bible scholar Norbert Samuelson, both **כבש**/master and **רדה**/have dominion over appear in these particular grammatical forms here and nowhere else in the Bible, so translating them is not a cut and dried affair. The root of the Hebrew word for mastery, **כבש**, is related to the Aramaic “to tread down” or “make a path.” In the book of Zechariah, the root **כבש** is interchangeable with the root **אכל**, the word for “eat.” Although **כבש** is often translated as “subdue” or “master,” it appears to have agricultural implications.

The root of the Hebrew word for “have dominion over,” **רדה**, generally refers to the “rule over subjects.” In a play on the word **רדה**, Rashi, the foremost medieval rabbinic commentator, explains that if we consciously embody God’s image and rule with wisdom and compassion, we will rise above the animals and preside over, **רדה**, them, insuring a life of harmony on earth. However if we are oblivious to our power and deny our responsibility to Creation, we will **ירד**, sink below the level of the animals and bring

ruin to ourselves and the world.⁶ If we twist the blessing to further our own ends, the blessing becomes a curse. The choice is ours.

As I was writing my book, *The Splendor of Creation: A Biblical Ecology*,⁷ I had long discussions with environmentalists and feminists who urged me to substitute a less “offensive” word for the word “dominion,” the traditional translation of **רָדָה**. They argued that “dominion” carries the negative connotations of control and domination. I considered what they said, and pondered the nuances of other words like “govern” or “preside over,” (one feminist suggested “have provenance over”). I decided that while these words are less offensive, they are also less inspired; they do not carry the sense of dignity and nobility captured by “dominion”; they do not capture the sense of taking responsibility for something much larger than oneself.

Like the Hebrew **רָדָה**, “dominion” implies two sides: graciousness *and* domination. Dominion, like money, is not in itself bad; it all depends on how we exercise it. As Rashi said, we can recognize our responsibility to nature and rise to the occasion to create an extraordinary world, or we can deny our responsibility and sink to our basest instincts (dominating nature) and destroy the world. Such is the human condition. It is time that we understand our conflicting tendencies and deal with them, rather than deny their existence.⁸

Humanity’s role is to tend the garden, not to possess it; to “guard it and keep it,”⁹ not to exploit it; to pass it on as a sacred trust, as it was given. Even though we are given the authority to have dominion over the earth and its creatures, we are never allowed to own it, just as we can’t own the waters or the air. “The land cannot be sold in perpetuity.”¹⁰ The land is the commons and it belongs to everyone equally and jointly. In the biblical system, private property does not even exist, because God owns the land and everything in it. (When the State of Israel was established, the Jewish National Fund took responsibility for the management of the land — with an original intention to ensure its perpetuity.)

The blessing of mastery over the earth calls us to exercise compassion and wisdom in our relationship with nature so that the Creation will keep on creating for future generations. We use nature every day in every thing we do; nature provides our food, shelter, clothing, energy, electricity, coal, gas. “Mastering” nature involves determining how much land and which animals should be designated for human use and the development of civilization, and what should remain untouched.

According to Saadia Gaon in the 11th century, “mastery” of nature meant harnessing the energy of water and wind and fire; cultivating the soil for food; using plants for medicines; fashioning utensils for eating and writing; and developing tools for agricultural work, carpentry and weaving. It meant the beginning of art, science, agriculture, metallurgy, architecture, music, technology, animal husbandry, land use planning, and urban development.¹¹

That the power is in humanity's hands is clearly a risk for all of Creation. Indeed the rabbis question why God created humanity, with the capacity to do evil, in the first place. Some of them figured that humanity would only destroy itself and the world. But our ability to choose between good and bad is what makes us human. Free choice is what distinguishes us from animals, who follow their instinct, and angels, who have no will of their own and act entirely on God's decrees. It is up to us to determine if we will make of ourselves a blessing or a curse. To rule nature with wisdom and compassion is our greatest challenge, our growth edge. It demands that we understand ourselves and guard against our own excesses and extremes; it demands a constant level of heightened awareness.

One of the pleasures of grappling with a biblical text is that one can always find new meanings in it. Over the years as I've turned this verse over and over, I've discovered a psycho-spiritual nuance. The complementary pair of blessings, "fertility" and "mastery," can be understood as blessings for "love" and "work." Fertility implies love, creativity and being; mastery implies work, strength, and doing.

For most of us, love and work are the two dimensions that define our lives; for Freud, they set the criteria for a healthy life. The complementary pair, love and work, take other forms such as being and doing, sex and power. God blesses us with the ability to experience both. Yet our contemporary worldview attributes more value to our dominating side, to work, than to our fertile side, to love. It's important to temper our dominating tendencies with our fertile, creative ones, and to remember that mastery over the earth is a sacred act, just like love. They both invite the Divine in us.

Endnotes:

1. White, Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in *Science* 155, (March 10, 1967)
2. Wendell Berry, environmental writer and farmer, appalled by this anti-environmental reading of Genesis demanded, "How, for example, would one arrange to 'replenish the earth' if 'subdue' means, as alleged, 'conquer' or 'defeat' or 'destroy'?" Berry contends: "The ecological teaching of the Bible is simply inescapable: God made the world because He wanted it made. He thinks the world is good and He loves it. It is His world; He has never relinquished title to it. . . If God loves the world, then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it or justified in destroying it?" Berry, Wendell. *What are People For?* San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990, p.99
3. The historical context is this: In all the biblical commentaries over the last 2000 years, the rabbis rarely even mentioned dominion, undoubtedly because Jews rarely "owned" their own land for most of history, and consequently were not in a position to dominate nature. What little the rabbis did say about dominion—most rabbinic commentary focuses on the "be fruitful" half of the verse—was framed in the context of governance of nature, never control. They compared humanity's dominion of nature on the sixth day to God's governance of the luminaries on the fourth day. Humanity's charge is to preserve the order and integrity of Creation, maintaining all the diverse kinds of organisms. The prototype of dominion was Adam's stewardship of the Garden of Eden (*Genesis* 11:15) to watch over the garden.
4. Zornberg, Aviva. *The Beginning of Desire*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995.
5. *Psalms* 8:6
6. Rashi, *Commentary on Genesis* 1:26.
7. Bernstein, Ellen. *The Splendor of Creation: A Biblical Ecology*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005.
8. Provocative verses in the Bible have generated thousands of years of rabbinic debate. But other than the comment by Rashi, the rabbis are, by and large, silent on the question of "dominion" and "mastery of the earth." Since throughout history, Jews were rarely allowed to own land, the rabbis undoubtedly found the idea of mastering the earth and the creatures irrelevant to their circumstances. They were

more concerned that people would not be able to master their passions and their pride than that people would (improperly) master the earth and the animals. One must learn to balance oneself before taking charge of anything else.

Rather than giving humanity a mandate to control or exploit the earth, the primary object lesson of the Bible is that of humility. We need a sense of humility to balance our sense of pride. Through stories and laws, the futility of hubris is taught over and over again. The *Midrash* asks: "Why does God create all of the creatures before humanity? So human beings should not grow too proud. You can say to them, 'Even the gnat came before you in the Creation!'" (*Tosefta Sanhedrin* 8:4))

Indeed the whole book of Ecclesiastes is a commentary on the pointlessness of vanity.

What befalls the generations of man befalls the beast. . .
 as the one dies, so the other dies.
 Yes, they all have one breath
 Man has no preeminence above the beasts
 for all is vanity
 All go to one place
 All are dust and return to dust
 Who knows the spirit of man, whether it rises up
 and the spirit of beast whether it descends below to the earth?
 (*Ecclesiastes* 4:19-21)

And God's longest monologue in the entire Bible is a desperate cry of despair at the arrogance of humans.

Can he be taken by his eyes?
 Can his nose be pierced by hooks?
 Can you draw out Leviathan by a fishhook?
 Can you put a ring through his nose
 Or pierce his jaws with a barb?
 Will he plead with you at length?
 Will he speak soft words to you?
 Will he make an agreement with you
 To be taken as your lifelong slave?
 Will you play with him like a bird and tie him down for your girls?
 Shall traders traffic in him?
 Will he be divvied up among merchants? (*Job* 40:24-30)

9. *Genesis* 2:15.

10. *Leviticus* 25:23.

11. Rav Saadia Gaon, *Commentary on Genesis 1:26*; the Christian theologian Claus Westermann highlights the unfolding development of a distinctively human civilization replete with technological discovery and artistic refinement. Westermann, Claus. *Creation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1974, p. 25.

Ellen Bernstein founded Shomrei Adamah, the first national Jewish environmental organization, in 1988. She is author of numerous articles and books that address the confluence of Jewish and ecological ideas and values, including Let the Earth Teach You Torah, The Splendor of Creation, and Ecology & the Jewish Spirit. For more information and articles, visit www.ellenbernstein.org. ellen@ellenbernstein.org

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Between the Generations: Becoming Elijah

by Arthur Waskow

Some 2500 years ago, the prophet called Malachi – "My Messenger" -- called forth a vision of the future, at once ominous and hopeful, that has been seen in Jewish tradition as the last outcry of the classical Prophets:

"Here! -- I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of that great and awesome day of YHWH, so that he will turn the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to the parents, lest I come and strike the earth with utter destruction."¹

That outcry comes ringing down the millennia to us, who live in the generation when, indeed, the age-old web of life on earth is in deep danger.

How does Malachi portray this danger?

"That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and all the evil-doers shall be straw, and the day that is coming -- said the infinite Breath of Life -- shall burn them to ashes."²

Of all the dangers facing us, the greatest seems to be that of global climate crisis -- the overheating, scorching, burning, of the earth.

And what is Malachi's remedy?

"For you who revere My name, a sun of justice shall rise, with healing in its rays."³

One might almost say that the remedy for overheating of the earth is our turning to solar power and the other sustainable sources of renewable energy that stem, like wind, from the gentle rays of justice from the sun.

Even more important than the technological changes that we need to make are the spiritual and emotional and political changes they require: Malachi cries out to us to imagine ways in which the hearts of parents and children can turn toward each other, so as to prevent dire destruction of our earth and much of human society.

When can we take up the mission of Elijah, and how?

There is a singular moment in the spiral of life when the older and younger generations meet each other face to face. A moment when people meet across the generations, with full and open hearts. A moment when people are open to learning, and open to making commitments about how they want to walk their life-paths from that moment on.

At such a moment, both generations have the opportunity to consider the world that the older generation will bequeath to the younger, and what responsibilities and challenges the younger generation will inherit from the older. To turn their hearts toward each other.

This moment is the time when Jews become *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* (and, to a lesser degree, are confirmed).

How can we make that moment one of facing a profound challenge that the older generation has wrought and the younger generation will inherit: the global climate crisis?

We must bring learning, ritual, and commitment to the preparation and enactment of this moment.

So The Shalom Center, through its Green *Menorah* Covenant Campaign, has developed a curriculum that is appropriate for *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* preparation, as well as a ritual for the service itself that brings the generations face to face, heart to heart.

The ritual moment begins after the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* candidate has read from the *Torah* and *Haftarah* and spoken a *dvar Torah*. At that point, the rabbi, *chazan*, or other congregational leader asks everyone under 13 to walk up to the front of the congregation and to turn and face those who are 13 or older.

Then the leader reads in English and Hebrew the passage in *Malachi* about Elijah, and continues with words like these:

"Today, the world is threatened with utter destruction through the climate crisis of global scorching. That crisis has come upon us through our addiction to the over-use of fossil fuels, pouring so many heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere as to destabilize the climate of our planet.

"Today, older and younger generations must join to protect the future of the web of life on our planet and the future of human civilization from utter destruction.

"Parents and the children must listen deeply to each other, educate each other, pray with each other, act alongside each other – turn their hearts and minds and bodies and souls to each other – lest the earth be utterly destroyed."

Then the leader asks,

"If you are willing to commit yourself to this covenant between the generations, please open your heart to learn what single act you can now commit yourself to do. Be as concrete, as specific, as possible. We will take a moment of silence to let this commitment to doing a single act emerge."

After a pause, the leader says:

"Please turn to the person next to you and say out loud what action you have made a commitment to do."

And the leader continues by inviting everyone who wishes to join in a pledge to take on Elijah's task.

But this ceremony, powerful though it is, must be rooted in knowledge and understanding. So The Shalom Center commissioned Noam Dolgin, a veteran of teaching eco-Judaism to teens, to create a curriculum for young people and their families.

Oy Vey, I'm Shvitzing!!!



He wrote *Oy Vey, I'm Shvitzing!!! -- A Four-Week Educational Program on Planet Earth's Global Climate Crisis and Jewish Thought for Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation Students*.⁴ Its goals and a brief outline run as follows:

- Background on Jewish environmental ethics and values of responsibility
- Background on climate systems, exploration of spiritual underpinning of systems
- Background on climate crisis, what's happening, why, and spiritual implications
- Personal and communal methods of conservation and alternative forms of energy
- Advocacy, mobilizing youth to use their voices toward changing public policy.

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The point of this ceremony and curriculum is to involve in the effort to prevent climate disaster the young people and their families, and, beyond them, the wider congregation that is often present for these powerful life-marker celebrations.

Not only for the young people, but also for their parents and grandparents, this moment helps them take another step forward in their life-spiral of responsibility. At this moment, it is appropriate for all who are present to strengthen their commitment to do the *mitzvah* of saving the earth itself from destruction, giving birth to a more just and sustainable future.

The action commitment might be strengthened by the young people and their families making an appropriate contribution to organizations that are acting on the climate crisis, and by making appropriate decisions about details of the celebration afterward: using reusable and recyclable utensils and organically and locally grown food, urging guests to car-pool and setting up information networks to help them do so, suggesting gifts that reflect concern for the earth.

In this way, we can all take on the task of Elijah, turning the hearts of the generations to each other and to the well-being of our planet, basking rather than burning in the sun of justice whose rays can bear healing to us all.

Endnotes:

1. *Malachi* 3:23-24
2. *Malachi* 3:19
3. *Malachi* 3:20
4. For full copies of the ceremony and curriculum, write Office@shalomctr.org or The Shalom Center, 6711 Lincoln Drive, Philadelphia PA 19119

Rabbi Arthur Waskow has been one of the creators and leaders of Jewish renewal since writing the original Freedom Seder in 1969. In 1983, he founded and has since been director of The Shalom Center (www.shalomctr.org). In 2007, Newsweek named him one of America's fifty most influential rabbis. He pioneered in the shaping of Eco-Judaism, both through his books (Down-to-Earth Judaism; editor, Torah of the Earth (2 vols); co-editor, Trees, Earth, & Torah: A Tu B'Shvat Anthology) and The Shalom Center's religiously rooted social action (e.g., the 1996 Tu B'Shvat Seder to protect the redwood forest, the 1998 Hoshana Rabbah celebration to protect the Hudson River, and the present Green Menorah Covenant campaign). He taught at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College from 1982-1989 and has taught as a Visiting Professor at the Hebrew Union College -Jewish Institute of Religion and in the departments of religion at Swarthmore, Vassar, Temple University, and Drew University. He is a member of the panel of

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regular writers on religion for "On Faith," the Washington Post-Newsweek interactive blog.

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Photo credit: Rabbi Korngold Reading Torah Outdoors

Guardians of the Earth: To Till and to Tend

by Jamie Korngold

Excerpted from *God in the Wilderness: Rediscovering the Spirituality of the Great Outdoors with the Adventure Rabbi*, by Jamie Korngold, Doubleday Religion 2008, used with permission.

How many things You have made, O Lord; You have made them all with wisdom' the earth is full of Your creations....May the glory of the Lord endure forever.

Psalm 104:24 and 104:31



Rabbi Jamie Korngold reading from the *Torah* on a hike and *Shabbat* Service in Boulder, Colorado. Photo credit: Peggy Dyer.

I once lived in a small tent, on a gravel bar, on the outskirts of a rainy Alaskan fishing town called Cordova. The town was so small that there were two roads, a handful of stop signs, and no traffic lights.

The main road started at the docks, where fisherman hauled supplies back and forth between town and their boats. From there the road headed up Main Street, past the post-office, grocery store, general store and café, and then headed out of town, past my gravel bar and finally a mile or so out to the canneries, where I worked. There the road curved back into the sea, where incessant waves washed onto the gravel.

Each morning at 4:30 a.m., my alarm jarred me from a deep sleep. The rain, which had lulled me to sleep at night, usually still played a tapping rhythm on the tent fly in the morning. I unzipped my sleeping bag quickly, like tearing off a band-aid so it won't hurt, and scrambled out into the tent vestibule where I kept my grimy work clothing. I liked to pretend this separation kept my tent somewhat clean.

I pulled on long underwear, wool pants, a shirt, and a fleece jacket, rain gear, boots, and finally my homemade knit hat, and stepped out into another Alaskan morning. I walked half a mile along the coast to the salmon processing plant, where I worked 18 hours a day gutting fish on the "slime-line." The factory was loud, despite my double set of earplugs; cold, despite my wool layers and raingear; and smelly – oh, did it stink! The work was repetitive and tiresome – but the money was good.

Toward the middle of August, when the rains began in earnest, our makeshift campground began to flood. My neighbors and I put our tents up on wooden pallets, first one high, and then two high. One morning I awoke to strange thrashing sounds. I looked outside and saw that the gravel bar had practically become a lake, and the salmon were trying to swim across it. But the water was so low, that the salmon couldn't actually swim, so they just sort of thrashed up against the gravel, indignantly pushing their way through the rocks, and many were suffocating in the low water.

A local explained that the river used to flow fast and free through what was now our campground. However, when the area had been mined for gravel, a few years ago, the river had been redirected a quarter mile to the east, and the salmon, which had spawned in that river for centuries, had not gotten the memo that the river had been moved. When it is time for salmon to lay eggs, they swim up river, back home – and even if the river that used to be home is no longer there, they still try to "go home," so to speak.

When I lived in Alaska, it was easy to see first-hand the inter-connectedness of human beings and nature. Every day I saw the impact of our choices on the land and sea around us, and I became acutely aware of the power and resilience of nature, but also of its vulnerability.

Now that I live in the lower 48, however, it is much more difficult to get the connection between driving my SUV and the heat we've been sweating in all summer. Paying \$60 to fill my gas tank, or cranking on the air conditioning, hurts my wallet, but it's just not the same as having confused salmon swim through your living room.

Sometimes, being environmentally responsible – recycling and biking instead of driving, etc. – feels as futile as the experience of trying to save money by just ordering a sandwich and iced tea for dinner, and ending up splitting the check with ten people who all ordered steak dinners and an expensive bottle of wine. What good can just one person do? Why should I bother installing high efficiency light bulbs when every driveway on the block has an SUV parked in it?

As always, I come back to my moral compass, religion. As Carl Pope, the Executive Director of the Sierra Club, said on a recent conference call with Jewish environmental leaders, "Morality doesn't help you stop hitting your own thumb with a hammer. But it does stop you from hurting people far away, or in the future." Our treatment of the planet is not just a scientific or political issue, it is moral issue. So what does religion teach us is our role in regard to nature? And what does the Bible tell us is the right thing to do?

One of the first things God does in the Bible, directly after placing Adam in the Garden of Eden, is to lay out Adam's job description: "*And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to till it and tend it.*"¹

Although Judaism offers a lot of amazing thousand-year-old laws that still apply to the environment today, the crux of the Bible's ecological arguments is this verse itself, "to till it and tend it." The Earth is not ours; we are simply caretakers of it. Our job is "to till and to tend" God's creation, the Earth.

Unfortunately, a lot of fuss has been made about a verse that comes a bit earlier in the Bible. In the first creation story, God creates man in His image and then commands him, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth, and *subdue it*; and *have dominion over* the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth."²

For years some religious people and corporations have argued that this passage gives us the right to fill the Earth, subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing on the planet. Those who hold this view explain that within this verse, God gives us the earth, and all that it holds, as a toolbox of resources, to use as we see fit. The "subdue and have dominion" verse has been used as a mandate for everything from strip-mining, to clear-cutting, to habitat destruction.

But unfortunately for those who use this verse to prove their point of view, just one chapter later we find a verse that counters the first one. The tricky thing about Bible study is that you can never read any verse in isolation, because each verse is explained by other verses throughout the Bible. The art of Bible study therefore involves hopping back and forth between texts to find the passages that explain each other, as in the "subdue and have dominion" verse, which is clarified by the "to till and to tend" verse.

I'm not saying that the "subdue and have dominion" verse is wrong. There is no denying that we have dominion over the earth. No other species in history has held the power to destroy life on the planet. In fact, we can choose from a variety of ways to destroy the earth, or at least change it so that life as we know it will no longer exist.

We can choose between quick death by pushing a few buttons that launch nuclear missiles, or slow death by poisoning our air and contaminating our water sources. And of course climate change provides another frightful option. Yes, we have subdued the

earth and we do have dominion over it. The urgent question is, what is our dominion supposed to look like? This is what is unclear in the excerpt of Biblical text.

Fortunately, Genesis 2:15 answers the question about dominion and clarifies any ambiguity. It tells us that we are supposed to be protectors; we are supposed to “till and tend” God’s garden and take care of God’s planet. There is also a breath-taking passage in the Jewish scriptural text, *Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, written around 800 C.E., which says, “When God created the first human beings, God led them around the garden of Eden and said: ‘Look at my works! See how beautiful they are – how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.’”

I am amazed that these prescient words were written so many years ago, and that even then there was concern that we might spoil and destroy the earth. This additional text makes it clear that although God made the earth for us, God did not intend for us to use it recklessly. It is God’s earth, not ours. “Take good care of it,” God commands. What a clear call to action! Fortunately, today, many religious leaders have come to understand this message and many churches and synagogues are now leaders in the environmental movement.

For me, an equally strong call to action, and perhaps an even stronger argument for taking care of the earth, comes from something more immediate than the text. Some of my colleagues wonder what could be stronger than the words of the Bible, but for me it is the feeling I have when I am outdoors, riding my bike past a green pasture filled with blue chicory flowers as far as my eye can see, or sitting on the red rock high above town and watching a hawk ride the thermals round and round.

In my book, *God in the Wilderness*, I write about my outdoor journeys, as well as the experiences of participants on Adventure Rabbi trips. In the book I talk about what a potent place nature is for many of us, a place of indescribable connection, ripe with spiritual awakenings. If you are like me and experience your most powerful spiritual moments outdoors, the mandate is clear. We must take care of the planet, for as we destroy the earth (either through action or lack thereof) we destroy our opportunity for spirit, and we destroy ourselves.

Endnotes:

1. *Genesis* 2:15.
2. *Genesis* 1:28.

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Eco-Jewish Education – How to Make It Effective

by Gabe Goldman

The year 1992 saw the beginning of Jewish environmental and eco-Jewish education with the publication of Dan Fink's and Ellen Bernstein's *Let the Earth Teach You Torah*.¹ Since then, the teaching of Jewish ecological traditions has spread throughout school curricula. Schools also have initiated school greening projects, multi-day camping and canoe trips, and weekend retreats at natural retreat settings. Global warming and *bal tashchit* have become as much a part of our students' vocabulary as *Torah* and *tefilah*. And indications are that more and more schools will be following this trend. Now that mainstream America has "gone green," it is almost expected for Jewish educators to include Jewish environmental studies in their curricula. Precisely for this reason, it is crucial at this point to step back and examine how best to make Jewish ecological and nature education an effective part of Jewish education.

Analysis of the Range of Jewish Ecological Studies

When asked why ecological studies are part of their school curriculum, teachers and school directors give four common responses:

- a) We have a teacher or school director who is passionate about environmentalism and initiated a course.
- b) Ecology is part of Jewish tradition.
- c) Environmental problems are a significant social issue.
- d) Environmentalism is a topic relevant to our students.

Passionate Environmentalist on Staff:

Prior to 2006, schools were motivated to add ecological studies to their curricula primarily by environmentally conscious teachers or school directors. Most often, these courses were added in grades 6 – 10 and focused on understanding the state of the environment.

Part of Jewish Tradition:

Over the past three years, schools have been motivated to add ecological studies because they view these studies as an inherent part of Jewish tradition. As many of the articles in this journal demonstrate, our tradition addresses use of natural resources, treatment of animals, care of land, "greening" of cities, and issues of air and water pollution. These curricula focus on specific Jewish ecological traditions (e.g., *bal tashchit*) and their sources in Jewish text.

Significant Social Issue:

Just as Jewish education over the decades has included curricula about Civil Rights, Vietnam, and Darfur, so, too, it now includes curricula that address an issue that affects all of life on our planet. These “socially conscious” curricula are a “voice” for social injustices – be they against people or against nature.

Relevant Topic to Students:

Over the years, relevant topics have ranged from gay lifestyle issues to professional Jewish sports figures to rap music. Educators have long understood that students are more willing, and better able, to learn about that which interests them. Courses employing this rationale frequently address such issues as “eco-Kashrut,” vegetarianism, and animal testing.

While each of these variations on the theme of eco-Judaism has its pedagogical strengths, each also has its weaknesses. For example, in schools that have on their staff a passionate environmentalist who initiates a Jewish environmental course or program, the instructor’s own enthusiasm often goes a long way in making the course/program successful. A downside, however, is that if/when this instructor leaves the school (and all of us know the woes of faculty turnover rate in Jewish education), the course or program usually fails or becomes defunct.

A benefit of the “relevancy” model, of course, is that the more a subject matters to students, the more likely it is to appeal to them. Ironically, however, because of the current vogue of environmentalism, a downside to this variation of eco-Judaism is that students find their studies repetitive. As one student put it, “All my teachers are making environmentalism a theme of their class — English, art, even gym!” Students often voice the complaint, for example, that they have been “taught exactly the same information about *bal tashchit* every year since sixth grade.”

And beyond the particular limitations of any one of the above-outlined approaches to Jewish environmental studies, we face always the fundamental imperative of engaging our students and fostering in them a love of and commitment to learning. The mere act of teaching does not, as we know, ensure that an equivalent amount of learning is taking place. At least as important as what we teach is how we teach.

For this reason, I recently challenged my graduate students in the Experiential Education program at the Fingerhut School of Education (American Jewish University) to conduct a study of the elements of experiential education and their effect upon student engagement and learning. Started in 2005, the Experiential Education program offers its academic studies through hands-on experiences and real-life challenges. For example, students learn about the connection between Judaism and nature while tent camping for four days. Part of this learning takes place over text around a campfire. Part of the learning comes from direct experiences such as hiking, foraging for wild edibles or even when collecting firewood. Now in its third year of operation, the Experiential Education program is attracting students from across North America.

The Four Elements of Experiential Education

The two-year study (2005-2007) included Jewish day and religious schools (grades pre-K through high school), Jewish summer camps, outdoor education programs, museum programs, and congregation/family retreat weekends. Observations ranged in duration from a few hours to several weeks. Research techniques included timed observations of student engagement; tracking of student- vs. teacher-initiated questions; observation of teacher and student interactions; notation of the degree to which students had the opportunity to interact with each other; and analysis of the extent to which each class or program accomplished its goals. The study also included follow-up interviews with a select number of students, teachers, and school directors.

What my students and I discovered is that teachers employing one or more of the four elements of effective education (see below) — whether these teachers were conducting classes indoors or providing outdoor programs — were far more successful in engaging students in active learning than their counterparts (those using conventional teaching techniques). The more elements of experiential education that were employed, the greater the number of students engaged and the greater the degree of their engagement (e.g., students asked more on-target questions, demonstrated fewer discipline problems, and were disappointed when class ended). In fact, we did not observe any serious discipline disruptions (i.e., requiring teacher intervention) in classes/programs employing all four elements of experiential education.

The four elements of experiential education that we identified involve students' relationship to their learning experience, specifically to:

- Each other.
- Their teacher.
- Their curriculum.
- Their physical setting.

Relationship to Each Other

The best classes we observed were those in which the students felt that they were part of a community. Likewise, participants in youth groups and in groups that traveled to Israel, as well as campers in all types of Jewish summer camps, reported that the degree to which they valued their experience was in direct proportion to the degree to which they felt a positive relationship with the other members of their group. In examining the dynamics of these positive group experiences, we realized that successful groups were actually what we call school or class communities.

However, there are very few “natural” classroom communities. Just being in a classroom with others does not make that population of students a community. Rather, the schools and programs we observed with the best examples of community were those that intentionally created opportunities for students to experience each other

outside of the classroom settings; opportunities to share their individual skills and interests; and, most importantly, opportunities to teach and to learn from each other.

Teacher–Student Relationship

We also discovered that the most successful classes and programs were the ones in which students and teachers expressed a particular kind of relationship to each other. The most effective teachers, formal or informal, were the ones who demonstrated the highest degree of respect for their students. These teachers never ridiculed their students, used sarcasm or expressed cynicism toward their students. Teachers demonstrated their respect in positive ways ranging from addressing students as “Mr.” and “Ms.” to thanking them for conducting themselves well rather than just taking such conduct for granted.

In turn, the students in these classes expressed feelings of trust for their teachers. In fact, it became clear to us that the more challenging or “dangerous” (whether physically, intellectually or emotionally) an experience was perceived by students to be, the greater the level of trust they needed to have in their teachers. For example, unless they truly trust their teachers, students asked to keep journals do not share what is most important — their own insights into who they are.

Student Relationship to Curriculum

A Jewish high school history teacher’s comments during a post-class interview summarizes the lack of relationship most students have to their curriculum: “We decide what our students will learn, how they will learn it, why they’re learning it, how much time they need to learn it, and how they are going to demonstrate what they learned. And then we wonder why they can’t relate to their studies.” The best classes we observed were ones in which students previously had been invited to be part of a curriculum “negotiation” process. As described by teachers, this process begins to take place at the start of school and, in some cases, prior to the start of classes through e-mail correspondence, with teachers discussing with students what the range of their studies could be and inviting students to share their particular interests and passions.

It is not uncommon for students to express few interests at the beginning of the process, but their involvement invariably increases within a short time. In these co-decision-making classes and programs, participants help determine what parts of their studies will occupy more or less time, help construct test formats and grading systems, and help decide which resources to use. We found that the more choice offered to students, in formal and informal settings, the more likely they were to engage in the learning experience.

Student Relationship to Physical Setting

One of the most fascinating findings of the study was the degree to which the physical setting affects students’ learning. The most acute examples of this were found in early childhood classes and in outdoor education programs. Early childhood educators typically alter their classrooms — they include pictures, plants, animals, decorative walls, reading areas, and so forth. As grade level increases, however, the degree to

which classrooms are altered to bring about desired experiences decreases. By fifth grade, fewer than 5% of the classes we observed had more than a single poster on their walls.

Outdoor Jewish educators attributed much of their success to the multi-sensory experience of the outdoors. Nevertheless, we did observe camp and outdoor Jewish education programs that were ineffective in engaging participants. The two most common reasons for this were:

- a) Failure of educators to establish in participants the necessary level of trust.
- b) Failure of educators to make the natural setting a part of the experience (i.e., the outdoor setting was used as a mere “backdrop” to the educational experience and this most often resulted in students being distracted by nature’s wonders).

What Works?

Following are some approaches to Jewish ecological/environmental education that incorporate the four elements of experiential education discussed above.

Jewish experiential and nature education (JENE) programs

Since first appearing in 1994, these programs have spread across all arenas of formal and informal Jewish education. JENE programs provide ways for students to learn Jewish values through interactive experiences with nature. These experiences may take place outdoors or inside. JENE programs frequently focus on the role of nature in Jewish life (in prayers, Biblical stories, holiday celebrations, etc.) and on natural “lessons” to be learned from the environment. These programs include everything from indoor gardening to picking apples for *Rosh Hashanah* or taking *Shabbat* nature walks and are effective with students of all ages and from all types of Jewish backgrounds.

Jewish ecological courses that frame environmental problems as social problems and add a significant service learning or community service element

Older teens and college students experiencing the combination of academic study with hands-on learning describe these courses as the “best they have ever had.”

Community service projects include working in community gardens, cleaning trash from public parks and waterways, planting trees in urban areas, and so forth. When the community service is followed by discussion about the experience, students succeed in learning more than just the subject they are studying. They learn about themselves and their classmates in ways that are otherwise impossible.

Garden programs

These are proving highly successful in all types of Jewish educational settings, from day schools to summer camps. Gardening is being used as a medium for teaching about ancient Jewish agricultural laws, about the seven special types of plants (*shivat haminim*), about feeding those in need, about the partnership between people and God, about faith, about the value of organic produce, about *bal tashchit* through composting, and about the synergistic power of people working as a community toward a common

purpose. A recent evolution of Jewish garden programs is to contribute the garden produce to a local agency responsible for helping people meet their food needs.

Mix and Match

An example of an educational program that combines all three of the above-described approaches to experiential eco-Jewish education is currently being developed by The Service Learning Department of the American Jewish University, in partnership with Azusa Pacific University (a Protestant university in the Los Angeles area). Called "Helping Hands Gardens" (HHG), the program will train university students in basic organic gardening skills and then provide these students the opportunity to guide the development and care of gardens to be located at Hillels, Campus Ministries, community synagogues and churches, public and private schools, nursing homes, hospitals, and even in family backyards.

Summary and Conclusions

Whether teaching about Jewish history, Jewish holidays, or eco-Judaism, we have a far better chance of engaging students in active learning that leads to changes in their attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and skill levels if we attend to developing our students' relationships to each other, to their teachers, to their curriculum, and to their learning environment. Common sense tells us that student engagement is an *a priori* condition for any educational experiences to be meaningful. And it is only by making our students' educational experiences meaningful that we can hope to achieve our ultimate goal of enabling them to discover for themselves the value of Judaism in their lives.

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Endnotes:

1. Bernstein, Ellen and Dan Fink. *Let the Earth Teach You Torah*. Philadelphia, PA: Shomrei Adamah, 1992.

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Sustaining the quest for Sustainability: The role of Spiritual Teaching and Practice in Jewish Environmental Education

By Jonathan P. Slater

We seem to have reached a “tipping point.” Nearly forty years after the first Earth Day, the work of the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and the National Resources Defense Council (among others) is finally paying off. Two years after the blockbuster appearance of Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Truth,” it appears as if the long winter of denial in Washington may be coming to an end. The run-up in the cost of oil has created market forces to further develop and deploy alternative energy sources. It seems as if everything we do or use is now subject to evaluation in terms of its impact on the environment, its contribution to reversing climate change. We could do this... .

Yet, the *New York Times* reported on a phenomenon that seems to be tracking this environmental success: “‘green noise’ — static caused by urgent, sometimes vexing or even contradictory information played at too high a volume for too long.”¹ Good hearted, well-intentioned people, committed to doing their part to minimize their impact on the environment, report a sense of “information overload on the environment — from friends, advice columns, news media, even government-issued reports. Much of the advice is conflicting.”²

A consequence, as reported in the *Times*, has been a paradoxical diminution of engagement in environment-friendly practices, even among those who report that they are committed to those issues. “A study by the Shelton Group, an advertising agency and market research company based in Knoxville, TN, that focuses on environmental products, showed that consumers surveyed in 2007 were between 22 and 55 percent less likely to buy a wide range of green products than in 2006.”³

The Importance of the Commandments

It is important to continue to invest in education and to promote adoption of environmentally sound practices. One approach is to show how Jewish law or practice support or mandate environmentally sustainable practices. For some people, this knowledge will be inspiring and may change their behavior. For others, it will confirm what they already have committed to doing, and so will add Jewish language to their green commitment. This approach reflects a key principle of classical Judaism. Human beings are fundamentally good, and innately wish to do the best for all beings, to be kind and compassionate and just. Yet they are also subject to the pushes and pulls of

their bodies' needs, easily distracted by base desires, and deflected from the good by fear and greed. To help people do what they truly wish, to be as good as they can be, the *Torah* offers instructions: the commandments. Following the commandments supports our better intentions and helps to constrain and redirect our more base instincts.

The *Torah* also grounds the commandments in the covenant between God and Israel. When we fulfill the commandments, we also align ourselves with the divine will. We recognize that God's intention was for our good, as well, and see in the commandments an expression of God's love. It is this that led the sages to teach "Greater merit accrues to one who is commanded and fulfills the command, than one who fulfills it yet is not commanded."⁴

This may be a helpful model when thinking about how to encourage people to act in environmentally sustainable ways. Knowing that there are rules, and that the rules are not only important but also are for our good, may generate commitment to significant behavioral change. But the commitment is still based on an external rule. There is a risk that over time, other factors – changed circumstances, conflict with other desires or concerns, failure to feel the benefit personally – may undermine the power of the "commandment." This will be true, perhaps even more so, when the behavior has been adopted simply as a good thing to do, and not as a rule. Lacking even the force of external authority, other factors may supersede this behavior, the rule will be broken or ignored, and we will not have succeeded in bringing about sustained sustainable action.

Shifting Consciousness

The possibility that even knowing the rules and valuing them may not successfully change people's behavior over the long term echoes the statistics cited above and the phenomenon of "green noise." This suggests that we must also learn what is required to maintain attention and to support the long-term, incremental changes in lifestyle that will truly make life on earth sustainable. We need to not only change peoples' behavior, we also need to shift consciousness. And we need to help people make good choices in the face of confusion, fatigue and discomfort. This is truly where Jewish spiritual teachings and spiritual practices can play a significant role.

R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk recognized this problem with regard to the traditional commandments, both in terms of the one who is commanded and acts, and the one who does so naturally:

So that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge"
(*Numbers* 15:39). The phrase "do not follow your heart" applies to the one who behaves appropriately, yet whose upright behavior is not the product of effort or intention. Rather, it is the product of his nature and habit. Indeed, to this sort of behavior we can apply the phrase: "I will follow my own willful heart" (*Deuteronomy* 29:18).

All action, everything we do for the good, must ultimately emerge from effort and intentional exertion. To this we can apply the verse: “Know that for all such things God will call you to account” (*Ecclesiastes* 11:9). In this instance, “know” refers to that which we discern to be true in our own minds and that we acquire as a practice through effort and intentional exertion, even experiencing discomfort as we do so. We “know” when we inquire into our behavior, to know what to do.⁵

Action that emerges out of habit, or even out of one’s own good nature, is not connected directly or immediately to intention. Even if we initially choose to do something good – to recycle, to bike to work, to seasonally adjust the thermostat – over time, that good behavior becomes unexamined habit. We come to take it for granted that having undertaken this behavior, we automatically continue to do the good and right thing forever. Yet we cannot trust habit to examine itself. So, for instance, once we are no longer paying attention, we do not notice when we have stopped riding our bike. We have allowed our image of ourselves as “bike-riders” to obscure the fact that we have stopped. Moreover, we continue to see ourselves as bike-riders because we value all of the good reasons we stopped (e.g., “after all, my schedule has changed”; “I can’t carry everything on the bike”; “the weather has been bad”). Our good intention becomes habit, our attention wanes, and we do not see when we are no longer aligned with our original intention.

The Kotzker teaches us that we need to understand religious practice as that which is meant to keep us attentive and engaged in our decision-making all of the time. It cannot be simply a set of rules or commandments that become habitual – even when beneficial. As soon as we stop connecting our hearts and minds to our behavior, we cease to connect to the reason for our behavior. As soon as we take our probity for granted, we risk slipping away from the intention that first moved us to do the right thing.

But what about the problem with which we began – “green noise”? Even if we are paying careful attention to what we do and why we do it, how can we keep from becoming dispirited when it is so difficult to know what to do? How can we prevent ourselves from losing, or disconnecting from, our desire to live sustainably when there is always something new, something more, something different to do or to know?

The Baal Shem Tov offers us an answer:

[As you set out to serve God,] do not be overly punctilious in all you do. [To do so] is but a contrivance of the *yetzer* [*hara*] to make you apprehensive that you may not have fulfilled your obligation, in order to make you feel depressed. Depression, in turn, is an immense obstacle to the service of the Creator, blessed be He.

Even if you did commit a sin [Heaven forbid], do not be overly depressed lest this stop your worship. Do feel saddened by the sin; but then rejoice in the Creator, blessed be He, because you fully repented and resolved never to repeat your folly.

Even if you are certain that you did not fulfill some obligation, because of a variety of obstacles, do not feel depressed. Bear in mind that the Creator, blessed be He, “searches the hearts and minds” (*Psalms* 7:10). He knows that you wish to do the best but were unable to do so. Thus strengthen yourself to rejoice in the Creator, blessed be He.

It is written, “There is a time to act for God, they voided Your Torah” (*Psalms* 119:126). This implies that the performance of a *mitzvah* may sometimes entail an intimation of sin. In that case, do not pay attention to the *yetzer hara* who seeks to prevent you from performing the *mitzvah*. Respond to the *yetzer [hara]*: “My sole intent with that *mitzvah* is but to bring gratification to the Creator, blessed be He.” With the help of God, the *yetzer hara* will then depart from you. Nevertheless, you must carefully determine in your mind whether or not to perform that *mitzvah*!⁶

The *Times* article cited above reports the results of “focus groups to investigate the psychological barriers to taking action for the sake of the environment. The activist groups ‘believe that, surely, if I just gave them one more reason why they should do it, then they would. But the fact is, people are not motivated by more facts. That can just reinforce their feeling of helplessness’.”⁷ That helplessness, the frustration and confusion, sound very much like the “depression” caused by the wily *yetzer hara*, our confused minds. We strive to do the best we can, to do the least harm while living a functional, reasonable lifestyle. Yet sometimes we make mistakes: we waste, we throw things away, we are inefficient. Our response to this “sin” could be depression, helplessness, fatigue, and dissolution.

The Baal Shem Tov, however, tells us that this response is incorrect; it is not what we – or God, or our truest desire – really want. Our original intention was honest, and even now, as we witness our failure, that intention remains whole and essentially unblemished. Were we to give up on our effort to live in alignment with sustainability, we would betray ourselves. The sadness, despair and lassitude that would come of giving up will be much greater, and more self-defeating, than the momentary frustration and sadness in this moment.

Living in Line with our Intentions

God wants us to try, over and over again, to live in line with our true intentions. Indeed, it could be argued that the surfacing of our sadness when we become aware of having made a mistake, or acknowledge a “sin,” is actually a prompt from our higher selves, from God’s love, to pay attention. Now, even the moment of our “sin” or mistake or confusion, is the moment in which we can renew our intention. We can feel fully how deeply we desire a world in which all beings can live healthy lives, with sufficient food and water, clean air and education. We know that our sadness in this moment is not really about our own “failure,” but is a reflection of our care and concern for this planet. It is when we pause in the moment of awareness to recognize that we have not failed,

but have been awakened again to our true intention, that we are able to recommit to that intention. We are energized by our mistake to live consistently with our values. We engage in that work that the Kotzker would have us do, so that we are not acting out of habit, blindly and thoughtlessly. This is when we become mindful, and connect intention to action for the sake of all beings.

If the education that we offer to our fellow Jews (and others) is truly to create and sustain the efforts necessary for an environmentally sustainable world, it must attend to matters of the heart. We must mine our tradition for those texts and teachings and practices that will help us all to become mindful in our lives, able to wake up over and over to the truth of the moment, and free to connect our deepest intention to our capacity to act. In this way, the Judaism we teach will not only help us to know the commandments, but how to live them with whole, and holy, hearts.

Endnotes:

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Experiential, Environmental Education: A Natural Connection

by Barbara Lerman-Golomb

There's a new kind Jew out there. Maybe you know him. Maybe you are her. They're *davening* on mountaintops, they're growing their own food on organic farms. They're hiking and biking and backpacking and getting in touch with the land. They're sharing in lifecycle events where they feel closest to God: outdoors. They're greening their synagogues and homes, gardening, composting and recycling and changing to energy-efficient light bulbs, using non-toxic cleaners, not wasting, and not taking plastic or paper when asked. They're choosing renewable energy sources, installing solar panels, installing solar *ner tamids* (eternal lights), driving less, and becoming vegetarians or eating lower on the food chain. Some are writing their Congresspeople and lobbying in Washington to advocate for the protection of endangered species and national forests, cleaner beaches and healthier oceans, to increase fuel efficiency and to move towards a more sustainable energy policy. Many are preaching that global warming is a "Jewish issue" because it's a social justice issue that will disproportionately harm those most vulnerable in our society.

These members of the Jewish community are doing all this as a way to rekindle and reconnect to their Judaism. For lack of a better name, we'll call them eco-Jews. They follow an *eco-kashrut*. They've often been categorized as hippie-fringe, radical, or apocalyptic. They've been around for a while, fighting the good fight. Their numbers are small, but they're growing. And even though there are more and more of them, they're still on the outside.

Making the Connection Accessible

The idea of connecting to the natural environment and environmental stewardship is still not accessible across the board to the general Jewish community. Traditional synagogue life, Hebrew schools, and day schools have not fully embraced the messengers or their message. They see it as "environmental education" and therefore an *addition* to traditional teachings, instead of understanding how it flows from our liturgy and integrates naturally into Jewish learning, into our daily life. It's instead relegated to *Tu B'shevat*, what's become the Jewish Earth Day, and, if we're lucky, *Sukkot*.

Jewish learning is on one side and the environment is on another. Experiential environmental education includes awareness, interconnectedness, and responsibility, and is usually taught to our children only upon request, once or twice a year, by guest educators who come to the classroom to do specialized programming. What we need is

a rethinking and reshaping of how these teachings can enhance the Jewish educational system, beginning with the current curricula in rabbinical schools and Jewish teacher training programs.

Now some may argue that there is no room in an already packed syllabus to add environmental texts, but the point is, it's not adding, it's integrating. Learning and living the basic tenets of Judaism through an environmental lens should be woven into the fabric of Jewish education, and no longer be tagged on to the traditional curriculum. This integration will provide a better understanding of God, and create a sense of awe and wonder, and confidence in what it means to be Jewish.

A Wake-up Call

The subject of wonder and awe is nothing new to Jews with a daily practice of prayer and to the eco-Jews. Traditionally, the Jewish people have expressed their sense of wonder by reciting blessings of appreciation at moments of interaction with Creation. But without actually experiencing nature, how are we to fully explore the meaning of our liturgy? So the first step is to get students outside. "The world is full of wonders, special radiance, and marvelous secrets, but all it takes is a small hand held over the eye to hide it all" (attributed to the Baal Shem Tov). Too many of us are walking around with blindfolds, unaware, uninspired, that is to say, aweless, jaded by our natural environment. Once we stopped seeing miracles, we stopped sensing God's presence in all things. Or as Rabbi David Wolpe wrote in his book, *Why Be Jewish?*, "So perfectly blended in to the fabric of the world is God's presence that we are apt to miss it."¹ Without this awareness or belief in the wonder and awe of order out of chaos, without the appreciation of everyday miracles, without being humbled by the sacred blueprint of Creation that is our natural world, we are rendered incapable of possessing the tools to protect it.

What we need is a little *Sh'ma*, a wake-up call. The *Sh'ma* prayer calls upon us to listen, yet how many of us are truly paying attention? The *Sh'ma* is a reminder that Creation is not a thing of the past, but an on-going process within our lives, and that God daily renews the work of Creation.

So why is the environment such a hard sell? Are we so tangled up in the World Wide Web that we've lost our way in the web of life? Or, have we come so far from the natural world that we've forgotten where we fit into the chain? The irony is, of course, that in a world with so much connection, we're more out of touch than ever. But look what nature has to compete with. What if more of us were to tune out our iPhones and iPods and truly tune in to the I-God? What if we were more concerned with how our *blackberries* and *apples* are grown and the impact of the distance they traveled from the farm to our table rather than their range of reception? For instance, were they grown locally? What were the conditions like for the workers? Were they grown without harmful pesticides? What if we actually stopped to take the time to contemplate something as simple as an apple? We couldn't help but be awed by its attributes and discover that it isn't simple at all, but is instead an example of the diversity of the complex ecological systems in our

natural environment, and is instrumental in expressing the very presence of God. As taught by Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, a student of the Baal Shem Tov and one of the pioneers of the Hasidic movement, you can find God's presence everywhere, in each created thing. "God is in the details," an axiom attributed to twentieth century architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is fitting as God is often referred to as the great architect of the universe.

The manifestation of one God is in the interconnectedness of all things and the basic principle that everything in nature has a purpose and that there is no waste. What we can take from this is that we should emulate nature by not destroying or wasting natural resources such as food, water, energy. *Bal Tashchit*, the wartime prohibition against cutting down or destroying your enemy's trees,² specifically forbids the cutting down of fruit-bearing trees. The Law forbids wanton destruction. According to a 13th century text,³ the righteous would be distressed if even a mustard seed is wasted. Talmudic rulings on *bal tashchit* also prohibit killing animals for convenience,⁴ wasting fuel,⁵ and require the proper disposal of hazardous waste.⁶ These sound like a call for clean energy technology, conservation, reducing meat consumption, and more stringent pollution regulations to protect the air, land, and water. In the aggregate, they reflect a sense of stewardship.

Our disconnect has paved the way for the violation of these basic tenets and many believe we are already seeing the consequences in the form of global climate change. Some of us are subtly affected by the fallout, while more vulnerable populations — indigenous peoples, the poor, the elderly, children — are suffering disproportionately in terms of the loss of their homes and livelihoods, threats to their food sources and to human health. Jewish tradition mandates an obligation to save and preserve life, *pikuach nefesh*. This is a precautionary principle telling us that we not only need to take global responsibility, but we also need to be cognizant of how our everyday lifestyle choices take a toll on the earth's inhabitants.

The Consequences of the Disconnect

So where did this disconnect to nature begin? We were once an agrarian people. We still mark the cycles of the season through our holidays and celebrations, yet along the way the Jewish people also began to see the advantages of the obligation to be literate. To be a good Jewish parent, you needed to educate your children and to do that you had to trade in the farming life for more urban digs. So is it possible that we've been so busy educating ourselves that we've missed the real meaning behind what we're teaching?

The results of this disconnect for today's American Jews whose great-grandparents were immigrant urbanites is that being outdoors does not come naturally. In fact, this first generation of "indoor children" has come to fear nature irrationally. But this is a learned condition and literally is not natural. From the time we're young we express an inherent desire to experience a tactile connection to nature. We fashion sand castles, dig in the soil, delight in the color and fragrance of flowers, mold clay, and build with

sticks. But too often children are discouraged from this. Too many parents don't want their children to touch dirt, rocks, and insects, creating a generation of dirt phobics, bee haters, and spider killers. Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*⁷ makes it clear that with dramatic increases in childhood obesity, attention difficulties, impaired social skills, and lack of self-esteem, the need to get children outdoors to reconnect to nature is greater than ever. The spiritual, emotional, and psychological benefits of exposure to the wonders of nature are reducing stress, better physical health, enhanced learning abilities, creativity, and environmental consciousness. It's been proven that effects of Attention Deficit Disorder are reduced when children with this disorder have regular and frequent access to the outdoors; children perform better in school, and are more cooperative, happier and healthier.

Concern for this issue has even generated a national movement of "leave no child inside," resulting in a focus of Capitol Hill hearings, state legislative action, grassroots initiatives, a U.S. Forest Service effort to get more children into the woods, and a national "green hour" in each day. The connection kids develop to the natural environment now not only benefits their health and well-being, and gives them a personal sense of responsibility as caretakers, but it also will provide a reciprocal benefit for our natural resources as our children will become the stewards of our environment for the next generation—*l'dor vador*.

In general, being outdoors around nature has a positive effect on the human soul and spirit. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov and the Hasidic rebbe most closely attuned to nature, prescribed to his followers daily prayer in fields. "Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone; may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass and all growing things, and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer..."⁸

A child who understands the cycles of life and that there is order in the universe will take comfort in continuity. With the understanding that we are part of something bigger than us, we are humbled. As partners in Creation, we gain a sense of purpose to our lives. As Jews, we are concerned about the future of our religion, about retention and Jewish identity. Reconnecting to nature can help preserve Judaism.

Bringing Relevance

So, as it turns out, that growing minority of eco-Jews is on to something. But the problem still remains that the many who are not in this category take comfort in knowing that someone else is managing the problem. Someone else is driving a more fuel-efficient car or changing to a compact fluorescent light bulb. There is a danger in this compartmentalization. Just as we can no longer afford to relegate environmental activities to a few "eco" holidays or compartmentalize environmental teachings and keep them separate from the curriculum, we can not afford to compartmentalize environmentalists as "them" and everyone else as "us." Cartoonist Walt Kelly first used

the quote, "We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Us" on a poster for Earth Day in 1970. Humans can no longer afford to be at war with nature.

Of course we are all familiar with the notion that to be better caretakers of the Earth, we need to adhere to the three R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle. Similarly, to be better caretakers of Judaism, a new three R mantra needs to be adopted: reconnect, relevance, and renewal. Reconnecting with our sacred environment and being filled with wonder and awe for all of Creation will bring relevance to our Judaism, and living this connection will be a source of renewal for the Jewish people.

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Creative Ways to Teach Sustainability and Environmentalism

By Dov Peretz Elkins and Yoni Stadlin

Newsflash: The year is 2008 and a large asteroid is hurtling straight towards planet Earth.

Question: What does Jewish tradition suggest we do about the impending asteroid-impact disaster?

First of all, is the word “asteroid” even mentioned in our ancient books? I think not. But our tradition goes to great lengths to let us know that preservation of human life is paramount. The *Torah*, in *Leviticus* 19:16, commands us, “Do not stand idly by the blood of your brother,” and mandates that, if necessary, we break almost any law to save a human life. The *Torah* does not explicitly discuss asteroids, energy-efficient light bulbs or hybrid cars, but it does give us a set of values that are meant to undergird our decision-making.

So there is, in fact, no actual large asteroid threatening our planet. Rather, it is we humans who are on a collision course with earth. Global climate change, caused by our massive output of greenhouse gases into the air, has been named as the culprit for the multitude of natural disasters that seem to be piling up beyond measure. Some would say that the asteroid has already hit.

Fortunately, there appear to be several solutions, albeit challenging and expensive ones. Our Jewish tradition is overflowing with imperatives to stand up and act for these solutions — if not for our planet, then for ourselves.

As Gabe Goldman, Jewish eco-educator extraordinaire, says, “I’m not an environmentalist; I’m a Jew, and my Judaism informs my actions. If we do a good job teaching our learners Judaism, they will become environmentalists by default.” Learners will encounter, for example, the Jewish imperative of not cutting down the fruit trees of our enemy while they are under siege (*Deuteronomy* 20:19-20). Then, upon learning about clear-cut forestry practices and the alarming rate at which our planet’s rainforests are disappearing, the learner may say, “If the imperative is such during a time of war, how much more ardent must the imperative of protecting trees be in a time of peace?”¹

Upon hearing that Judaism naturally fosters environmentalism, a critic might cite the well-known passage in *Genesis* 2:15, which commands Adam to “rule and have dominion” over “all living things” on the earth. This sentence, taken alone, would

appear quite problematic to the hypothesis we are posing. The very next verse, however (*Genesis* 2:16), puts a clear restriction on Adam's dominion by explicitly commanding Adam to be a vegetarian. It reads, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat...." If we put these two lines together, we see that we humans do have a special role in this world. We do have special power and privilege, but, like good mayors or presidents, we may not abuse or exploit this power. Rather, we are to be stewards of this gift and leave it in good shape for generations to come!

Creative teachers often use "hot topics" to engage pupils. If we can relate Jewish texts to the war in Iraq, the presidential election, substance abuse, worldwide terrorism, and environmentalism, we have a "hook" on which to hang our lesson. This can be very effective, and it is done frequently in classrooms, sermons, workshops, and lectures.

We suggest an alternative approach, perhaps more authentic and direct. The "hook" comes later in the lesson, but is no less compelling.

The truth is that our planet is faced with a danger no less serious than an asteroid threatening to crash into Manhattan, Paris or Beijing. And, furthermore, it is not a potential danger: It is a *real, current* danger. Our air and water are becoming dangerously polluted; there is a crisis in the shift of the global climate; the ozone layer that protects us from the burning sun is being punctured; we are over-spending the earth's resources to the point of making it less and less possible that our children or grandchildren will have a safe planet on which to live.

Why are we not responding to the *real, current* danger, as we would if a potential one occurred, such as an asteroid spinning mercilessly toward us? Yet, we are not!

Why do we describe the present calamity as *real* and *current*? Scientists tell us that many of the current crises in the world are human-made — such as the increase of floods (e.g., Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath); tornadoes; loss of valuable species as rain forests are cut down and used for grazing land; the growing problem of world hunger due to our insufficient measures to inhibit it; and the simultaneous epidemic of overweight children. The economic gap between the wealthy and the underprivileged is growing in countries both rich and poor across the globe; there are health epidemics that are going unsolved (deadly viruses, AIDS, cancer, etc.); the knowledge of healthy eating is spreading far too slowly to prevent premature morbidity; greenhouse gas emissions are moving us closer to dangerously increasing global warming. And on it goes. Recent environmental disasters at Love Canal, Chernobyl, and Prince William Sound in Alaska (the Exxon Valdez oil spill), and during the Gulf War, all point to human irresponsibility.

The use of dangerous pesticides, toxic chemicals, and the dangers of acid rain, soil erosion, deforestation, and other modern "plagues" intensify our awareness that an ecological "asteroid" of mammoth and disastrous proportions is already upon us.

Implications for Creative Teaching

If we accept the premise that an “asteroid” of unhealthy, materialistic, anti-ecological, climate-endangering human habits is causing hunger, reduction of sustainable energy, and dangerous climate change, then a creative alternative to the “faddish,” “hook-related” pedagogical approaches now in use must be created.

What we propose is that instead of using the “hooks” of faddish media issues (which is one valid approach, but only one), a more direct, authentic method can be utilized. What is it?

Our suggestion is to teach traditional Jewish values that have powerful implications for sustainability and global environmental health. What does this mean?

Instead of building a lesson around the hot-button hook of “environmentalism” and working Judaism into it, the lesson can instead be built directly around *Jewish* values such as *Bal Tashkhit* (do not destroy), *Tzaar Baalei Hayim* (prevention of cruelty to animals), *Tzelem Elohim* (the image of God), *Shabbat* and *Shmitah* (the Sabbatical year for the land in Israel), *Pikuah Nefesh* (saving a life), *P’ru Ur’vu* (be fruitful and multiply), *Tzedek u-Mishpat* (righteousness and justice), *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world), *Malkhut Shadai* (the kingdom of God), *Brakhah* (blessing), *Kedushah* (holiness), *Venishmartem M’od le-Nafshotaykhem* (take good heed unto yourselves), *Yovel* (the Jubilee year), *Pe’ah* (gleaning), etc.

In short, by using traditional and authentic Jewish “value concepts,” as taught by Prof. Max Kadushin in *Worship and Ethics*² and by other educators, the creative instructor can plunge directly into contemporary issues such as sustainability and environmentalism, which will lead the lesson into implications that relate to the problems of energy abuse, world hunger, racial injustice, ignoring the welfare of living things (humans, animals, and vegetation), our communal ecosystems, and the other issues we want to cover in this realm.

Sustainability

While “environmentalism” is the catchword these days in the movement of activist individuals and institutions, the broader concern with which we must engage is “sustainability.” In past centuries, complex human societies have perished, sometimes as a result of their own growth-associated impacts on ecological support systems. Modern industrial society — which continues to grow in scale and complexity and which exhibits much wasteful, destructive behavior — might also fail unless our generation begins to place sustainability higher on our priority list. “Sustainable agriculture,” for example, would develop agricultural systems to last indefinitely; “sustainable development” is a development of economic systems geared to last indefinitely.

Yehuda Levi, who is a scientist, rabbi, and former Rector of the Jerusalem College of Technology, writes:

Early considerations of sustainability pinpointed unchecked population growth as the greatest threat to the world's sustained survival. The rate of growth of world populations, they argued, could not be matched by increases in food production.

More recent research has found that a factor of considerably greater importance is the average individual consumption, which is increasing at a much faster rate than that of population growth. In the course of thirty years, the world's population doubled, while energy consumption per capita increased eightfold in this period. We may add to this the fact that in North America and Western Europe, ten percent of the world's population consumes fifty percent of its energy.

The danger to the world posed by excessive consumption is serious. Not only does it deplete the world's energy store, it also is the chief cause of the warming of the atmosphere, through excessive burning of fossil fuels. In other words, the excessively high standard of living in some parts of the world is a major source of today's ecological crisis.

This over-consumption is also manifest in our use of raw materials. It can even be found in our dietary habits. Note that the production of one kilogram of beef consumes sixteen kilograms of grain.

...All this shows that the root of the problem originates in a selfish world view which inflates personal consumption beyond the essential. Regarding this problem, the *Torah* instructs us to "be *kadosh*," in other words, to refrain from self-indulgence and luxuries.

...Every time we walk to the grocery down the street instead of driving, every time we turn off the boiler when we had enough hot water for our shower, we are being "*kadosh*" and, simultaneously, making a contribution toward sustainability.

A child raised in this spirit will have "the quality of the environment" at his heart and may have more impact on the ecology than legislation imposed on a dissident public.³

Inculcation of the traditional doctrines of authentic Jewish values, as listed above, can help engage the student in a life path that will move toward a more sustainable society, a healthier planet, a more realistic social order, and a more wholesome, educated, and mature individual.

An Example

Brakhah:

In teaching *siddur* and *tefillah*, the teacher can begin with the general underlying principle of "Why pray?" and "Why the *siddur*?" The paradigm of Jewish prayer is most often the "*brakhah*," which is a part of almost every important section of Jewish worship.

As the discussion unfolds, the teacher can offer the views of ancient, medieval and modern writers; philosophers; and poets, such as, for example, the Psalmist, Maimonides, and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

For the student to have a well-grounded feeling for the need to preserve and sustain our planet, it is vital that he or she be exposed to the traditional view of our universe as created by God as a gift to us, responsible stewards, as portrayed in the Creation narrative in the early chapters of *B'reishit*. There (*Genesis* 2:15) we are clearly told "*le-ovdah u-le-shomrah*," to use it and also to preserve it. The stirring poem of creation in these chapters leads us to move toward the glorious poetry of the psalmists whose feeling of awe and wonder pervade the Psalter ("The heavens declare the glory of God...." *Psalms* 19:1-6).

The *siddur* itself is filled with such eloquent paeans of praise of God's world. The paragraph after the *Barkhu* in the *Ma'ariv* prayer speaks of *Adonai* as "bringing on the evening twilight, with wisdom opening the gates of the heavens... arranging the stars in the sky; rolling away light from dark, and dark from light — God who brings on the evening twilight."

Maimonides gives persuasive proof of God's existence in his philosophical works by pointing to the wonders of God's creation. In his words, "In order to serve God, one needs access to the enjoyment of the beauties of nature, such as the contemplation of flower-decorated meadows, majestic mountains, and flowing rivers. For all these are essential to the spiritual development of even the holiest people."⁴

And Rabbi Heschel writes most powerfully of radical amazement, awe and wonder. In his words:

Indifference to the sublime wonder of living is the root of sin. Wonder or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious man's attitude toward history and nature. One attitude is alien to his spirit: taking things for granted, regarding events as a natural course of things. To find an approximate cause of a phenomenon is no answer to his ultimate wonder. He knows that there are laws that regulate the course of natural processes; he is aware of the regularity and pattern of things. However, such knowledge fails to mitigate his sense of perpetual surprise at the fact that there are facts at all. Looking at the world he would say, "This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes" (*Psalms* 118:23).⁵

From this vantage point, that the creation of our world is a supremely holy gift of our Creator, the teacher can move into other concepts such as *Bal Tashkhit*, *Pikuah Nefesh*, *Tzaar Baaley Hayim*, and others noted above. If we have awe and reverence for God's gift of our universe, then it follows that other important values must be adhered to and more aggressively pursued as an authentic Jewish lifestyle. That we are stewards and not owners is a fundamental notion that emerges from everything Judaism teaches.

What we have done, by teaching in this way, is to plunge into Jewish ideas, texts, and values, directly through Jewish tradition and texts, instead of hooking on to the latest fads of contemporary society. We back into them, as it were, and cover the contemporary material as an outgrowth of teaching traditional Jewish values.

Either approach is valid. What we are offering in this essay is one more arrow in the quiver of the creative educator to help promote ideas that are both Jewish and relevant to current issues. The assumption is that one need not always rely on the learner's need for popular culture and faddish ideas, as attractive as they may sometimes be. We do not negate this approach, because for many it is still a useful and effective pedagogic tool. But there is something soothing and reassuring about simply teaching Jewish values, and, by doing so, help to change our students, and, thus, the world in which they live.

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Classical Rabbinic Steps toward A Theology of Environmental *Torah*

by Jonah Chanan Steinberg

This article also will appear in Studies in Jewish Civilization 20: "The Mountains Shall Drip Wine": Jews and the Environment." Edited by Leonard J. Greenspoon, and et al. Omaha: Creighton University Press (forthcoming: 2009). Distributed by University of Nebraska Press.

How can we aspire to exaltation while also aiming to grow beautifully as creatures of this earth? Those may not sound like contradictory aims to our present day, holistic ears, but our ancestors often thought in terms of antagonism when they juxtaposed the loftiest possibilities of humanity on the one hand and our earthly nature on the other. Even now, the question does remain: How can we celebrate our wondrous capacity to soar beyond seeming natural constraints – to explore, to create, to imagine, to transcend, even to master – while at the same time cultivating a momentous and deep awareness of our being still enmeshed with all the life around us and with the earth from which we come?

In this study, I want to turn to the audacious and creative classical rabbinic tradition, which inspires and animates me in so many ways, to seek wisdom for survival and even flourishing in our own times from the trail-blazing paradigms of this inheritance. I want to suggest that the valuable guidance that the classical rabbinic tradition does provide is most apparent when we see the early rabbinic path against the historical backdrop of certain alternatives that preceded it.

The apocalyptic writers of the late Second Temple period saw humanity's technological prowess with deep mistrust. In their view the sciences and inventions of humankind were to be understood as the upshot of our encounter with wicked or fallen angels who revealed cosmic secrets and powerful arts to the children of the earth. In this ancient view, humankind's interaction with technology was regarded as inevitably pernicious and corrupting, an undermining of the natural order. The appropriate response of the righteous, in such a theodicy, was to withdraw from the general mischief and to await taking part in a cataclysmic and vindicating end of days, in league with the heavenly forces of light, in triumph against the over-proud forces of corruption.

By contrast, the *Mishnah* of the early rabbis attests to a tradition that believed it possible for humankind to handle its creative powers carefully in this world and to build materially toward a redemptive future. If that sounds somehow like a less glorious prospect for humanity than the heavenly speculations of apocalyptic thought, I also want to suggest that early Rabbinic teachings and tradition did not give up on the idea of our attaining

something like divine glory. The difference is that, among the early rabbis, we hear voices teaching that the route toward our becoming divine, so to speak, lies in our carefully realizing and practicing the constructive *Torah* of this world.

Let us start, for a moment, on the shores of the Dead Sea – perhaps an aptly cautionary place for us to start when thinking of ecology. The sect that removed itself from Jerusalem to that locale, in the wake of the Hasmonean victory of 165 BCE,¹ seems to have brought with it the First Book of Enoch (1Enoch) – at least, fragments of that work have been found in the textual trove at Khirbet Qumran.² When we think of Enoch – as this mysterious biblical ancestor figured in the apocalyptic literature that flourished before the rise of the early rabbis – we think of his storied ascent into the heavens, a guided tour illustrating the supernatural cosmology and angelology of our ancestors in Late Antiquity. It can be surprising to remind ourselves how the book begins. The following lines (quoted from the version of 1Enoch preserved in Ethiopic by the early North African church and paralleled by fragments found at Qumran³) are considered by scholarship as “early pre-Christian”⁴ – and they bring us squarely, by way of cosmological speculation, to our theme of ecology:

Examine all the activities which take place in the sky, and how they do not alter their ways, and examine the luminaries of heaven, how each one of them rises and sets; each one is systematic according to its respective season; and they do not divert from their appointed order.

And look at the earth, and turn in your mind toward the action which is taking place in her, from the beginning to the end: how all the work of God being manifested does not change. And behold the summer and the winter, how the whole earth is filled with water and clouds and dew, and God causes rain to rest upon the earth.

Examine and observe everything – and the trees, how all their leaves appear when they wither and fall, except for certain trees whose leaves do not fall but the old foliage remains for some two or three years until the new foliage has come.

And again, examine the days of the summer, how the heat of the sun is upon the earth and dominates her. And, as for you, you crave shade and shelter on account of the heat of the sun; and the earth burns with scorching heat, and you are not able to walk upon the earth or on the rock on account of the heat.

Observe how the verdant trees are covered with leaves as they bear fruit. Pay attention concerning all things, and know in what manner God fashioned them. All of them belong to the One Who Lives Forever. God’s work proceeds and progresses from year to year, and all God’s work prospers and obeys him, and does not change, but everything functions in

the way which God has ordered it. And look at the seas; they do not part but fulfill their duties.

But as for you: you have not been patient and you have not done the commandments of the Lord but you have transgressed and also have spoken slanderously, grave and harsh words with impure mouths... Oh you hard-hearted, may you not find peace! Therefore you shall curse your days, and the years of your life shall perish in eternal execration and there will not be any mercy unto you. In those days you shall make your names an eternal execration unto all the righteous... But to the elect there shall be light, joy and peace, and they shall inherit to the earth.⁵

These verses begin with the beautiful idyll of a harmonious and ordered natural world. We, who know the seasons to be fragile, may sense tenuousness in the opening images; but to our ancestors these workings of the heavens and the earth seemed immutable and certain, unless interrupted by some terrible divine decree.

There does seem to be a note of foreboding in the lines about the scorching summer heat, though anyone who has ever tried to walk barefoot on the beach in Eilat in the summer-time, for example, can instantly relate. The searing sun that literally drives one off the ground does call to mind prophetic visions of the Day of the Lord, but for the time being the summer heat in these first passages of 1 Enoch has its regulated place in the cycles of seasons and trees and leaves and all of the natural world.

From this picture, humankind alone sticks out like a sore thumb – “But as for you... oh you hard-hearted!” – and implicit in those lines is an existential question, so to speak, that underlies 1 Enoch. Why, amid such beautiful, harmonious divine order does humanity seem so awkward and so at odds? Why does our species seem constantly to be fighting the natural order, or to be pitifully set against it? Why does the effortless gracefulness of our world seem to elude us?

For this question 1 Enoch has an answer. The book’s world-story, to which the ecological idyll at the start of 1 Enoch is a prelude, is a narrative so pervasive in the Judaism of Late Antiquity that Seth Schwartz, in his recent historical work, has termed it simply “the myth.”⁶ In the myth, innocent humanity is corrupted, early on, by a band of fallen angels⁷ who teach humankind the secret arts of science and technology. Here is how that sounds in 1 Enoch:⁸

In those days, when the children of men had multiplied, it happened that there were born unto them handsome and beautiful daughters...

For our forefathers, evil always had to be woman’s fault somehow.⁹

And the angels, the children of heaven, saw them and desired them, and they said one to another, “Come, let us choose women for ourselves from among the daughters of man and beget us children.” And Semyaz, being

their leader, said unto them, "I fear that perhaps you will not consent that this deed should be done, and I alone will become responsible for this great sin." But they all responded to him, "Let us all swear an oath, and bind everyone among us by a curse, not to abandon this suggestion but to do the deed."

I picture them like a 1950s gang of teenagers, slicking back their hair on a Saturday night, rolling cigarette packets in their T-shirt sleeves, tugging on the lapels of their leather jackets, double-daring one another.

Then they all swore together and bound one another by the curse. And they were altogether two hundred; and they descended into Ardos, which is the summit of Hermon. And they called the mount Armon, for they swore and bound one another by a curse...¹⁰

And they took wives unto themselves, and every one chose one woman for himself, and they began to go unto them. And they taught their women magical medicine, incantations, the cutting of roots, and taught them about plants...

And Azaz'el taught the people the art of making swords and knives, and shields, and breastplates; and he showed to their chosen ones bracelets, decorations, shadowing of the eye with antimony, ornamentation, the beautifying of the eyelids, all kinds of precious stones, and all coloring tinctures and mixtures.

If Azaz'el were selling magazine subscriptions, he would be peddling both *Guns and Ammo* and *Vogue*.

And there were many wicked ones, and they committed adultery and erred, and all their conduct became corrupt.

One thinks of other magazine subscriptions.

Amasras taught incantation and the cutting of roots; and Armaros the resolving of incantations...

Such was *The Lancet* in those times.

and Baraqiy'al taught astrology, and Kokarer'el the knowledge of the signs, and Tam'el taught the seeing of the stars, and Asder'el' taught the course of the moon as well as the deception of man.

Think *Sky and Telescope*, with an astrology column, and *Poor Richard's Almanack*. The myth is an account of good and evil; and to understand it, I believe we must think of our ancestors' encounter with Hellenistic culture, with its science and sophistication and

its power in battle. We must imagine our Israelite forebears looking at Alexander and his successors, and later at the Romans – with stadia and gymnasia, with legions of massed soldiers, and charts to navigate the seas, and medical sciences, and women (and boys) made up like wondrous creatures that had never been before – and we must imagine our ancestors saying, ‘If we are the divine nation, and the chosen people, why do these *others* have such awesome power and finery? Where did they learn such things? What heavenly powers instructed these challengers of our ancestral ways?’¹¹

For our purposes, what is most important is that the myth reflects a deeply pessimistic outlook on humankind’s adventure with the creative arts and sciences. It is an ancient Luddite’s cautionary tale about overreaching sophistication.

Against the tide of corrupt progress that it portrays, the myth seems to have recommended a path of self-affirming withdrawal for those who wished to call themselves faithful. Enoch was a hero to sects with such an ethos because the story of his journey into the divine realm, in literal opposition to the downward course of the fallen angels, confirmed that the highest secrets of the heavens were reserved for the elect of Israel,¹² as distinct from all the world. Enoch’s visions affirmed that the over-proud pretensions of the wicked were sure to be overthrown in a searing cataclysm that would establish the true order of heaven on the earth.¹³

It is against that ideological backdrop and in view of the tragedy that befell it in 70 AD, with the devastation of Jerusalem, and again in 135, when the eschatological hopes embodied in the Son of a Star (*Bar Kochba*) were dashed, that we should see the *Mishnah*’s caution and reticence about heavenly secrets:

One does not expound on the work of creation with two others; and not on the “chariot” with one, unless that one is wise and understands of his own mind.

Anyone who speculates on four things, it were better had that person not come into the world: that which is above, that which is below, that which is before, and that which will be after; and anyone who does not take a care for the glory of his maker, it were better had such a one not come into the world.¹⁴

That is, anyone who does not give divine glory a modicum of privacy strays toward the hazard. “We played with that fire, with those stories and hopes of heavenly intervention and rescue,” the *Mishnah* seems to say, “and we got badly burned.”¹⁵

If the *Mishnah* restricts study of “that which is above, that which is below, that which was before, and that which comes after,” where does it leave us? The *Mishnah* directs us squarely to the here-and-now, or we might say it leaves us the “four cubits of *halakha*” – the way one walks in this present world. Utopian as the world created by the *Mishnah*’s chapters may be,¹⁶ its prescriptions – phrased as present-tense declarative

statements (“One does not do such and such”; “One does thus and so”) – imaginably create a functional world, with human beings very much in the landscape:

One may not dig a cistern next to one’s fellow’s cistern, and not a trench, nor a vault, nor a water-channel, nor a laundry-pool, unless one distances it three hand-breadths from one’s fellow’s wall, and plasters it with lime. One must distance refuse of olives, and manure, or salt, lime, or stones, three hand-breadths from one’s fellow’s wall and covers them with lime. One must keep seeds and plough, and urine, at distance of three hand-breadths from one’s fellow’s wall. And a mill must be kept at a distance of three hand-breadths, measured from the lower millstone, which is four hand-breadths from the upper. And an oven must be kept at a distance of three, measured from the belly, which is four from the rim.

One must not place an oven within a house unless there is a space of four cubits above it. If one set it in an upper chamber, there must be a foundation under it of at least three hand-breadths – and, in the case of a double-walled stove, one hand-breadth. And yet, if it caused damage, one must pay for what it damaged. R. Shimon says: They prescribed these measures specifically so that if damage is caused one should be exempt from having to pay compensation.

A person should not open a baker’s shop, nor a dyer’s shop under a neighbor’s storehouse, nor a cattle-stall. In reality, they have permitted [such below] a wine-storehouse, except for a cattle-stall. As to a shop within a [shared] courtyard – another may protest and say, I cannot sleep on account of the noise of those who come and go. However, as to one who makes utensils at home and sells them in the market – another may not protest and say, I cannot sleep because of the sound of the hammer, or the sound of the hand-mill, or the sound of the children [who come to be tutored].¹⁷

I suggest that what this mishanaic building code and zoning law teaches, as an outlook, is the view that humanity can learn to handle technology and commerce constructively and judiciously.¹⁸ I see an inherent optimism in the *Mishnah’s* legislation. It is possible for human beings to engage responsibly with technology and agriculture and construction and industry, if only we do it carefully, in accordance with a wise teaching – or we might say, with a *Torah*.

Characteristically, for the *Mishnah*, the laws we have just heard are not furnished with scriptural prooftexts. One might posit a deuteronomic paradigm: the commandment to build a parapet around one’s roof,¹⁹ for example, or the general injunction to guard ourselves most carefully²⁰ as it is widely interpreted in rabbinic literature,²¹ but directly corresponding *midrashim* linking those verses and these laws have not come to us. The *Mishnah* presents these regulations, just as it presents itself in general, as *Torah*, on the authority of the rabbis of the ages.

I want to note here the trail-blazing audacity of the mishnaic tradition in insisting that *Torah* must extend to every concern. Instead of counseling that we retreat from exercising our technological abilities, the *Mishnah* suggests that *Torah* should teach us how to build a better world. As the heirs to this tradition, we should perhaps resist the impulse merely to retreat from modern industry to agrarian enclaves, there to await apocalypse and the doom of the wicked, and instead encourage, as a matter of *Torah*, the urgently needed development of environmentally responsible technology.²²

I want to place the early rabbinic impulse to bring *Torah* to every realm of human action – the conviction there must be a *Torah* for every aspect of life – in a spiritual or theological setting. I have said that the *Mishnah* with its “*ein dorshin*” (“One does not exposit...”) seeks to restrain the impulse toward angelological speculation, protology (the study of origins and first things), cosmology, and eschatology; but even the *Mishnah* does not close those doors entirely. For all its censure, the *Mishnah* does not deny that there may be something to be said of God’s inner secrets and of *Ma’aseh Bereshit*, (the working of creation). By the early 5th Century and the compilation of *Genesis Rabbah*, the themes that the *Mishnah* restricts to hushed conversations were again rising to the surface, but now in rabbinic terms.

“The Holy Blessed One looked into the Torah and created the world.”²³ Whoever placed this midrashic idea first, as the opening exegesis of *Bereshit Rabbah*, was – in the true way of rabbis – doing many things at once.

In the first place, this *midrash* breathes new rabbinic life into the ancient tradition of Wisdom, specifically as she appears personified in the eighth Chapter of Proverbs, in the great soliloquy of primordial Wisdom, the first created thing, almost a partner, keeping company with God throughout the creation of the world. For the classical Rabbis, Wisdom, as personified in the Proverbs, is *Torah*. Our midrashist²⁴ of *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1 says, “When a king of flesh and blood builds a palace, he has an architect, and the architect has designs, so as to know how to make the chambers and the passageways. So, too, the Holy Blessed One looked into the *Torah* and made the world.”

Another observation: What better description of the rabbinic enterprise could there be than “looking into the *Torah* and creating a world?” Both interpretively and materially this was what our rabbinic forbears had to do. The opening *midrash* of *Bereshit Rabbah* sets up the rabbinic endeavor as an *imitatio dei*. Interpretation and world-making become one in rabbinic thought; and creating a world – if we are to imitate the divine example – becomes a matter of seeking out the right *Torah* to guide our actions.²⁵

Another observation: If *Torah* is conceived in the grand terms of cosmic Wisdom, then in that concept we may have the ideological basis, or at least a justification, for what the rabbis of the *Mishnah* did in extending *Torah* to cisterns and to stoves, to courtyards and cowsheds. If *Torah* is the primordial Wisdom expressed in the unfolding of the cosmos, then *Torah* must extend to every place, and there can be no place in which

Torah cannot be discovered. So there must be a *Torah* of pits and wells and water-pools and ditches and ovens and plaster and excrement. There has to be a *Torah* of shops and neighborhoods and storehouses and mills – a *Torah* of lecterns and microphones and electric light-bulbs, and carbon emissions and internal combustion engines and dams and power-plants and aviation and space travel. May one place a nuclear reactor aboard a satellite to be launched on a rocket that has a dubious performance record?²⁶ There is a mishnaic question for our days. The question then becomes: where are our rabbis, our *Tanaim* who will insist daringly that the Wisdom of creation must extend to such questions? From whom should we seek *Torah*? The prophet Malachi, in his days, was sure he knew from whom. “The *priest’s* lips shall guard knowledge and the people shall seek *Torah* from his mouth, for he is a *mal’ach* (a messenger or angel) of the Lord of Hosts.”²⁷ We may ask: if the rabbis inherited the mantle of priestly legislation, did they, with their focus on the four cubits of earthly *halakha*, give up the mantle of quasi-angelic aspirations and the urge toward transcendence?

That is the question I addressed in my 2003 doctoral dissertation, and its title, *Angelic Israel: Self-Identification with Angels in Rabbinic Aggadah and its Antecedents*, indicates my answer. This is not the place to set out the many *midrashim* in which the early rabbis did indeed associate the first human beings, the patriarchs, the prophets, the priests, themselves, and the righteous of Israel at large, with the angels.

So let us think of our familiar liturgy, which we inherit from the formative rabbinic tradition. We still begin each day, in the *Yotzer* dawn-blessing, by telling the story of the heavenly luminaries who faithfully do God’s bidding, and by associating our worship and our work with theirs. I mean to say that, taken as a whole, the early rabbinic tradition leaves us with both the four cubits of quotidian *halakha* and also the grand aspiration of assuming a place in the circle of glorious beings shining in God’s own glory.²⁸

If I say that the rabbinic legacy, on the whole, teaches a law-based optimism with respect to humanity and our play with the fire of creation here on earth, then you will surely counter by pointing to the famous argument between the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel on the question of whether it might have been better for the world if humankind had not come into being at all.²⁹ You will certainly remind me that when the sages voted on the matter they affirmed *Beit Shammai’s* negative verdict about humankind. Yes, true – but, after all, that damning view of us is placed in the mouths of *Beit Shammai*, the perennial opponents and straw-men, and the rabbinic consensus comes with the all-important caveat, *Now that we have been created, let us carefully consider our actions*. Put to a vote, it may indeed seem inevitable that humankind will prove itself to have been a bad idea; but the audacity of the early rabbis was to suggest – in the face of all human mischief – that we may yet justify our existence through careful action and thereby become glorious creatures after all.

Endnotes:

1. This sect seems to have consisted originally of a band of disenfranchised Temple-priests and their followers, probably displaced by the rise of the Hasmonean priestly faction. In its texts this group often describes itself as *ha-kohanim, benei Tzadok ve-anshei b'ritam*, "the priests, sons of Zadok, and the people of their covenant." In my view of the sect, here and throughout, I am particularly indebted to the guidance of Lawrence Schiffman and Rachel Elior.
2. These include 1Q23-24, 26; 4Q201-207, 212; 7Q4, 8, 11-13, 530-533.
3. The Ethiopic text quoted here in translation is paralleled by 4Q204, Col. I, lines 17-30.
4. This is E. Isaac's representation of scholarly consensus in his introduction to 1Enoch in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 7.
5. 1Enoch 2:1-5:7, following E. Isaac's translation with some revisions, paralleled in part in the Qumran scrolls, as notated above.
6. In describing "the myth," Schwartz aims to encapsulate "the central myth of apocalypticism as an ideological system and its ethos as a world-view." Schwartz sees "the myth" as a second central ideological axis of Judaism, along with the narrative of covenant, in the period before the rise of the rabbis. *Imperialism and Jewish Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 74-87.
7. In this regard the myth is an elaboration of the enigmatic narrative of the *Nefilim* (*Genesis* 6:1-4).
8. The following quotations are from 1Enoch 6-8, following E. Isaac's translation with some revisions.
9. I observe this critically, with my feminist spectacles well in place.
10. The text here continues: "And their names are as follows: Semyaz, the leader of Arakeb, Rame'el, Tam'el, Ramu'el Dan'el, Ezeq'el, Baraqyal, As'el, Armaros, Batar'el, Anan'el, Zaqe'el, Sasomaspw'el, Kestar'el, Tur'el, Yamayol, and Arazyal. These are their chiefs of tens, and of all the others with them." This passage seems to be paralleled in 4Q204, Col. II, 24-29.
11. It is possible that the writers of 1Enoch and its idyllic natural prelude had some historical sense of the damage done to the ecosystems of their region in much earlier ages by soil salination, by deforestation, overgrazing, and by the dyeing industry, for example; and we might interpret their demonizing view of human technology, in part, as reflecting a sense or knowledge of such ecological degradation at the hands of indigenous peoples. However, the encounter with Hellenism occurs to me as the most plausible explanation for the extremely dramatic elaboration and the prevalence of the apocalyptic myth in the period before the early rabbis. For a discussion of injuries to the ecosystems of the ancient Middle East wrought by the earliest agriculture and industry, and for some reflections on the echoes of such environmental impact in the theologies of the ancient world, see Daniel Hillel's *The Natural History of the Bible: An Environmental Exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Columbia, 2006). It is especially notable that the great city-culture of ancient Mesopotamia declined as a result of severe soil salination brought on by human intervention in the natural cycles of flood irrigation (see "Mesopotamia: the Fragile Civilization," 46ff in Hillel's book).
12. If the sectarians at Qumran were angel-obsessed, it was not because they were hoping to escape the earth for the heavens, but rather because the angelic ministers in the realm above were, in the sectarian view, something like place-holders for the roles that the sect believed its own Israelite priesthood would assume when the new cosmic order was established. The sect seems to have seen itself as a beachhead of the heavenly world upon the earth, a foothold from which the sectarians believed they would soon strike forth, in league with the heavenly hosts, in a final war that would dissolve the boundaries between the heavens and the earth and establish God's own throne in Jerusalem for all time. In the context of that belief-system, we can see the sect's elaborate rituals and practices of purity as something of an angelic masquerade, a rehearsal for the projected role of their own society in the eschaton that they believed was incipient.
13. In reading the *War Scroll* of Qumran and picturing its images, what is most striking is how very much the ranks and spears and banners and siege-towers and engines of war on the side of the Sons of Light resemble a Roman legion. I think we must remember that the armies of Rome were to our ancestors something like what the atom bomb is to us today – the ultimate specter of devastating force in human hands. It is as though the sectarian community at the Dead Sea looked at that power and said, 'Do not fear, ours is coming, God will send it; and then we will show these *Kittim* what true greatness is in battle.' See 1QM Col. IV 1-17 and Col. XV 1-3, for example.
14. *M Eduyot* 2:1
15. Of course, the *Mishnah* also arises in the time of Christianity's formation, and we can understand the *Mishnah's* treating certain areas of exegesis as controlled substances, so to speak, as a response to

- a threat of renewed sectarianism and eschatology fuelled by Christological speculation and by aspirations to supernal knowledge and identity.
16. Beyond the sheer idealism of the *Mishnah* with regard to the hegemony of the rabbis, it is worth noting that the world described by the *Mishnah* is one that includes a Jerusalem Temple and a functioning priesthood. It is in that connection that the *Mishnah* does make a rare gesture toward the world of the *Merkavah*. When the High Priest piles the incense on his fire-pan in the Holy of Holies (in *M Yoma* 5:1) and “the whole house filled up with smoke,” the *Mishnah* is elliptically associating that moment with Isaiah, chapter 6 (v. 4: “...and the house filled up with smoke”). Isaiah’s was a vision of the heavenly throne room of God as seen through the speculum of the Temple (to borrow a term from Elliot Wolfson); the *Mishnah* is content to have sight-obscuring smoke be the extent of its allusion to that vision.
 17. *M Bava Batra* 2:1-3.
 18. It is worth noting the storied appreciation (or at least ambivalence) in the society of the early sages, with regard to Roman technology. Famously, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is said to have had to flee to hiding in a cave because of his dissenting retort when his colleagues praised the civic innovations of the Romans (*B Shabbat* 33b). The rabbinic perspective on the Roman baths, as a pleasant innovation somewhat at odds with ancestral Torah, is also worth noting for its relative temperance (e.g. *M Avodah Zarah* 3:4, *B Avodah Zarah* 44b) by contrast to the fiery attitude of the apocalyptic writers.
 19. *Deuteronomy* 22:8.
 20. *Deuteronomy* 4:15.
 21. *B Brachot* 32b seems to be the earliest attestation to an interpretation of this verse as having to do with physical safety.
 22. I would like to thank Elyssa Auster, rabbinical student at Hebrew College, for a valuable admonition and conversation about the hazards of technophobia, which led me to invoke the constructive ethos of the *Mishnah* along these lines, by contrast to the pessimism and the impulse to withdrawal on the part of the apocalyptic writers.
 23. *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1
 24. Although it is set apart, by the words *davar acher* (“another matter”), from the introductory lines of *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1, attributed to Rabbi Hoshaya Rabbah – which would generally signal a differing opinion – I view this interpretation, in which *Torah* is instrumental in God’s artisanship, as being part of a coherent and cumulative homily running through the whole of *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1, in which several aspects of the *Torah*’s nature, status, and role are considered in turn on the way to this conception.
 25. I am grateful to Nigel Savage of *Hazon* for asking how the outlook presented here might motivate Jews who do not conceive of their Jewish actions and commitments in terms of *halakha* (rabbinic law). My answer to this important question is twofold. In the first place, and ideally, I believe that the word *halakha* ought to be reclaimed by non-orthodox Jews as the best possible term for the seeking and actualizing of righteous ways that is the central endeavor of Judaism. *Halakha*, in this sense, as a searching, evolving quest, is to be distinguished from “the *Halakha*” (with a definite article), which is a dubious and polemical construct. In the second place, the classical rabbinic commitment to developing a *Torah* for all areas of life can speak to present-day Jews by way of paradigm, cultural heritage, and inspiration, helping Jews who feel their commitment to social and environmental justice as rooted in Judaism to affirm how this is so.
 26. In 1983, reentry and burn-up of the Soviet satellite COSMOS-1402 caused plutonium fallout in the atmosphere. 1997 saw widespread protests over NASA’s launch of the Cassini-Huygens Saturn-probe, with a power system based on 32.8kg of plutonium, on a Titan IV-B rocket and with a planned trajectory that would ‘slingshot’ the probe around the Earth on its route to Saturn. NASA’s internal report projected a 1 in 1400 chance of plutonium release during the first 3½ minutes of flight, and a 1 in 476 chance of plutonium release later in the rocket’s climb. The Apollo 13 mission, which failed to land on the Moon in 1970, used its lunar module as a ‘lifeboat’ for the journey back to earth, and thus a plutonium fuel package, meant to be discarded on the Moon but built to withstand atmospheric re-entry in an emergency, in fact did plunge through our atmosphere and was estimated by NASA to have come to rest, theoretically intact, on the sea bottom in the Tonga trench off New Zealand, where it presumably still lies. NASA estimates that the contents will remain radioactive for approximately 2,000 years and has expressed a wish that the device be recovered, which may prove technically

impossible in our times. By listing these facts, outside my fields of expertise, I do not mean to declare that I know them to be unacceptable, only that a Mishnah of our day, so to speak, might outline a Torah applicable to them. Meanwhile, the mischievous fallen angels of 1Enoch may well rejoice.

27. *Malachi* 2:7

28. Theosis through works of the law – a notable contrast to early Christian doctrine, and the title of a forthcoming study by this author.

29. B *Eirubin* 13b.

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Jewish Wisdom for Our World

by Evonne Marzouk

While the modern environmental movement has done much to raise awareness of environmental challenges and to find technological solutions, the movement has done little to change the culture of Western society. Western society tends to focus on a glorification of the physical, on quick “soundbites” versus wisdom, on instant gratification over patience, and on consumption rather than restraint. This focus has, in part, caused today’s environmental challenges. The Jewish tradition, on the other hand, presents a time-tested philosophy that *can* help us address today’s problems – if we can listen to it.

Our environment is severely threatened today. We face the breakdown of major systems on our planet, systems that all human beings rely on for basic elements such as food, clean air, and clean water. More than half of the world’s major rivers are seriously depleted and polluted. Nearly 1.8 million people die worldwide each year due to urban pollution. Thirteen thousand species are listed as threatened or endangered with extinction or as species of concern under the Endangered Species Act, more than 100 times what we understand to be normal rates of species extinction. Large predatory fish in our oceans have been reduced to a mere 10% (by mass) of pre-industrial levels. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a recent study of worldwide ecosystems, concluded that we are destroying our natural resources at a rate that will leave a seriously depleted world for our own children.

The problem is even more severe in Israel, where more people die from air pollution in metropolitan areas in Israel than from traffic deaths in all of Israel in a given year. Water scarcity has caused nearly all of the rivers in the land of Israel to become polluted or depleted, though efforts since 1993 are working to restore the major rivers in Israel.

The Physical and the Spiritual

Judaism has a deep tradition for protecting what is now known as the environment. Reading our sources with an eye for environmental sensitivity, we find a wealth of connections and teachings that encourage us to protect our resources, care for our health, prevent unnecessary damage to our neighbors, show concern and respect for other creatures, and avoid unnecessary waste. These teachings can help us find solutions to some of the grave environmental threats that we face today. At the same time, bringing Jews together on an issue of common concern such as the environment can provide important opportunities for Jewish unity.

The *Torah's* teachings on our environmental responsibility begin in Genesis, when we are given two separate explanations for our role on the earth:

“Be fruitful and multiply, fill the Earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the Earth.”¹

“And the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden, to cultivate it and to protect it.”²

In *The Lonely Man of Faith*,³ Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik discusses two different conceptions of man based on these verses. The first instruction calls to the physical person, who works the earth and uses it for his physical needs. This person relates to the earth and uses it in a physical way, to get what he needs to survive. This function might be called “subduing the earth,” and Rav Soloveitchik sees this as a holy endeavor, part of our human responsibility and part of what makes humanity great.

The second instruction calls to the spiritual side of man: the person who wants to know, understand, and connect to God. This person looks at the universe and wonders. This person is given the instruction to cultivate the land and to protect it. This person wants to connect to the land that we've been given. In the second story, which includes this instruction, Adam also goes around and names the animals. He establishes a relationship with the earth.

Rav Soloveitchik considers both aspects – the subduing and the protecting – as essential parts of a human being. Looking at this from an environmental perspective, we can see that *Hashem* created the land for us to use. But we also have a responsibility to temper our instincts to build and subdue. There must be a balanced relationship with the earth. We are permitted to use the earth -- but we must use it wisely. This balanced view is the *Torah* perspective on the environment, and we can see this balance running through our tradition whenever we are interacting with the world.

Responsibilities

One example of our traditional wisdom regarding protecting resources comes in an unlikely place: in a discussion of laws that relate to protection of privacy in the *Talmud*.⁴ These ancient laws read like modern day laws preventing pollution. For example, the *Talmud* required that certain industries be kept at a distance from the town so that those living in the town would not be afflicted by the bad smells. Maimonides follows this example and prevents individuals from building certain technologies, such as threshing floors, on their property unless they are done at a distance where the particles of earth or dust will not reach his neighbor. He says that it must be done at a distance that the wind will not carry the particles to his neighbor. He considered this in the same category as doing damage with arrows. The *Shulchan Aruch* also describes a law requiring us to protect our neighbor's drinking-water sources.

We can see from these references that one of the major categories of what is now called “environmentalism” was included in our sources, and simply understood as part of our responsibilities to our neighbors. But to what extent do our “environmental” actions today ensure the health and comfort of our neighbors? When we drive our cars and idle them in school parking lots, do we think of the impact on our neighbors’ children who may have asthma? When we wash our cars, fertilize our lawns, or pour chemicals down the drain, do we think of the impact on our neighbors’ water sources? Perhaps we should revisit these sources in the context of our modern environmental challenges.

Even more important than our responsibility to protect our neighbors is our responsibility to protect our own health and that of our families. The *Torah’s* teaching, “But you shall greatly beware for your souls”⁵ requires us to be especially careful in protecting our health. We all should take a moment to reflect on how well we are taking care of our bodies in light of this major obligation. We must also remember that many actions that are today called “environmental” can have a significant impact on our health and especially on the health of our children. Some products that we use in our homes include carcinogens that could, God forbid, affect our families. Some pesticides being used on our lawns (or those of our children’s schools, or being used as pesticides on our food) can cause significant threats to our children.

Another category of Jews laws relates to our responsibility to other creatures. We have a *mitzvah*, *tzaar baalei chaim*, not to cause animals needless pain, based on two verses in the *Torah*⁶ that tell us we must help even our enemy unload his donkey. One common example of this *mitzvah* is the process of *shechita* – severing the jugular using a knife with no nicks, to avoid pain while recognizing that we need food to eat.

Further, a commandment in Deuteronomy is seen by the great commentator Nachmanides as including multiple responsibilities to other animals:

“If a bird’s nest happens to be before you on the way, in any tree, or on the ground, whether [it is filled with] young ones, or eggs, and the mother bird is sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, you should not take the mother bird with the young. But you should surely let the mother go, and [then] take the young, so it will be good for you and you will prolong your life.”⁷

Nachmanides explains that this *mitzvah* is related to the prohibition against slaughtering an animal and its kid in one day, and gives two reasons for these prohibitions: our responsibility to protect the feelings of the mother animal and that even though ritual slaughter of an animal may be permitted, “the *Torah* should not permit us to destroy and uproot a species... One who kills a mother [animal] and her children in one day or who takes them... it is as if he annihilates that species.”

These commandments demonstrate that although human beings have guardianship of the world, we are not to take lightly the needs of other creatures. We have a responsibility to keep the world, and this includes other species, as well. Other commandments, such as *bal tashchit* (do not destroy),⁸ encourage us to avoid waste of all kinds, an astonishing thought given the extraordinary waste in our current society.

The Work of *Canfei Nesharim*

One organization teaching the Torah's wisdom on the environment is *Canfei Nesharim*, an organization that is working to inspire the Jewish community to understand and act on the relationship between traditional Jewish sources and modern environmental issues. *Canfei Nesharim* ("the Wings of Eagles") is the only organization that focuses on environmental education specifically within the Orthodox Jewish community, while also providing programs and resources to the entire Jewish community. Since its inception in 2003, *Canfei Nesharim* has implemented environmentally-focused programs for Jewish holidays and the *Sabbath* in dozens of communities worldwide. In 2007, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), a body of nearly 1,000 Orthodox rabbis that serves as the rabbinical authority of the Orthodox Union, passed a resolution supporting Torah-based environmental learning and action, and recognizing the work of *Canfei Nesharim*.

All of *Canfei Nesharim*'s programs provide education about the relevance of *Torah* wisdom to the environment, and help Jews address modern environmental concerns from within the context of Jewish tradition. In 2008, *Canfei Nesharim* embarked on several new initiatives reaching out to the Jewish educational community by providing series of seminars in San Francisco for Jewish educators on Jewish environmental wisdom, based on a set of teachings about each weekly *Torah* portion. The pilot project consists of seven half-day seminars on Judaism and the environment for over 100 Jewish educators from across the denominational spectrum. Each three-to-four-hour seminar provides participants with resources for translating the material into sermons, learning activities, lesson plans, workshops, educational programs, and community action initiatives. *Canfei Nesharim* is seeking additional communities to replicate this highly successful program in 2009.

Canfei Nesharim is also currently developing a Strategy for Environmental Engagement in Orthodox Day Schools, beginning with a series of educator focus groups in summer 2008. At present, few environmental education resources are written from an Orthodox perspective; those that exist (some of which are in Hebrew) are not in common use in North America. Orthodox Jewish day school administrators and educators have indicated to us that they are interested in innovative and compelling new *Torah*-based ideas, and that they would welcome the opportunity to teach a modern high profile issue, such as the environment, from a *Torah* perspective. Working with educational partners, *Canfei Nesharim* is in the process of organizing three focus groups (in New York City; Washington, D.C.; and Boston) to discuss challenges and strategies for introducing environmental education into the Orthodox community. The focus groups will also serve to engage educators whose schools are prospective hosts for a 2009

pilot program. The strategy will identify the best ways to introduce education about environmental challenges, and the Jewish teachings that address them, to the Orthodox day school community.

In addition, *Canfei Nesharim* is beginning a program series for local synagogues to promote awareness and action based on Jewish wisdom about the environment. During the pilot phase of the project, the organization is designing and launching activities focused on *Torah* and the environment in five Orthodox synagogues (communities that have expressed interest include Los Angeles, CA; Englewood, NJ; New Rochelle, NY; Riverdale, NY; Washington, DC; and Potomac, MD). The program series is a four-part, year-long series of activities, focusing on themes including environmental responsibility, energy conservation, healthy homes, and connection to Israel, and including activities such as Sabbath and holiday programs, weekly *Torah* talks, seminars, and nature walks. Each program will be structured around traditional Jewish concepts and will provide scientific information on environmental issues to help participants connect the environment to their values and concerns. The long-range goal of the program is to bring about attitude shifts, behavioral changes, and activism on behalf of the environment.

Canfei Nesharim offers a wealth of resources about *Torah* and the environment via its searchable web-based resource library, its weekly *Torah* commentary on the environment, and its first publication, *A Compendium of Sources in Halacha and the Environment*, which includes articles by rabbis about the connections between *Torah* and protecting the environment.

One would not imagine that our sages could have imagined the environmental problems that we face today. And yet, the *Torah* includes teachings for every type of challenge that we face. We conclude with this remarkable insight from the *Midrash*:

At the time when God created Adam, He took him around the trees of the Garden of Eden, and He said to them, "Look at My works! How beautiful and praiseworthy they are. Everything that I have created, I created for you. Take care not to damage and destroy My world, for if you damage it, there is no one to repair it after you."

Take One Action at a Time

Maimonides teaches us to see each action we take as tipping the balance for good or bad, in our own lives – and for the whole world. Applied to the environment, we can see that we need to begin with our personal environment and change just one action. It will make a difference. And in time, it will lead to the next action: a *mitzvah* leads to another *mitzvah*.¹⁰

There are many initial actions that we can take that will improve our own lives and also protect the world:

- To save energy, we can turn of the lights when leaving the room, use cold water in the washing machine, change the thermostat a few degrees to reduce heating and air conditioning costs, and choose to walk when we can instead of driving.
- We can make the air in our homes cleaner by investing in eco-friendly cleaning products, reducing air fresheners and aerosols, and ensuring that our home has a Carbon Monoxide detector.
- To reduce chemicals in our home, we can begin to buy organic. (The most important 12 fruits and vegetables to buy organic are apples, bell peppers, celery, cherries, imported grapes, nectarines, peaches, pears, potatoes, red raspberries, spinach, and strawberries. For an exploration of this issue visit www.canfeinesharim.org and search “organic.”)
- To reduce waste, we can recycle, buy recycled paper with the highest “post-consumer waste” percentage available, stop buying bottled water and use tap water (with filter, if needed), and use real dishes and cloth napkins rather than disposable.

Any of these actions would help us begin on a path toward healthy and sustainable living. Choose one to start with, and when you have mastered that, it will be time to choose another.

More information about Canfei Nesharim’s resources and programs can be found at www.canfeinesharim.org. Canfei Nesharim has volunteers in 20 cities, including Washington, DC; New York, NY; Sharon, MA; Los Angeles, CA; Milwaukee, WI, and San Francisco, CA. To find a partner school or synagogue near you (or to create a new partnership with Canfei Nesharim), send an e-mail to info@canfeinesharim.org.

Endnotes:

1. Genesis 1:28.
2. Genesis 2:15.
3. Soloveitchik, Yosef Dov (Joseph B.). *The Lonely Man of Faith*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
4. *Bava Batra*.
5. Deuteronomy 4:15.
6. Exodus 23:5 and Deuteronomy 22:4.
7. Deuteronomy 22:6-7.
8. Deuteronomy. 20:19-20.
9. *Kohelet Rabba* 7:28.
10. *Pirke Avot* 4:2

Evonne Marzouk is the founder and director of Canfei Nesharim (www.canfeinesharim.org), an organization which provides Torah-based resources about the importance of protecting the environment. Evonne is also the leader of Maayan Olam, a Torah-environment committee dedicated to educating the Orthodox community in Silver Spring, MD, where she currently lives with her husband and son. evonne@canfeinesharim.org

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Shemita as a Foundation for Jewish Ecological Education

by Nati Passow

And six years you shall sow your land, and you shall gather in its produce.
And the seventh year you shall release it from work and abandon it, and
the poor among your people will eat.

Exodus 23:10-11

Eaters must understand that eating takes places inescapably in the world,
that it is inescapably an agricultural act, and that how we eat determines
to a considerable extent, how the world is used.¹

Wendell Berry

Over the recent years, there has been a steadily growing awareness of environmental issues in both the Jewish and secular communities. This has spurred an increased interest in Jewish environmental education as parents, teachers, and administrators recognize that one of the greatest tools in confronting our ecological challenges is through earth- and land-based experiential education.



Organizations such as the Teva Learning Center, Hazon, the Adamah Fellowship, and the Jewish Farm School are addressing these issues on a number of levels. First, through their work, they are bringing heightened awareness within the Jewish community to environmental concerns. Jews are beginning to understand that caring for the earth is a religious mandate. Second, through the educational experiences that they facilitate, they are also bringing many people closer to Judaism.

Judaism is a culture rooted in its connection to the land. Our *tefilot* are filled with prayers and blessings for the Land of Israel, for its produce, and for rain in its proper time. Our major holidays are agricultural festivals, celebrations of harvests and the seasons. And what is becoming clear is that, for some people, being exposed to the agricultural and ecological roots of our tradition opens up new avenues for relating to God, our rituals, and our heritage.

I believe food is at the core of our relationship to the earth and to God. When we reflect on the true nature of this three-way relationship, we gain a greater appreciation of the abundance that is available to us, as well as a deeper understanding of the responsibility we have both to work and to protect the land. How we grow and consume food has the potential to be tremendously damaging or beneficial for the earth, and for us. We can use petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides and allow these pollutants to run into our water and soil. Or we can choose regenerative farming practices that increase biodiversity and soil health. We can eat highly processed foods that are making us sicker and sicker each day, or we can eat more simply, locally and naturally, and enjoy the benefits of a healthy diet. On a more philosophical level, we can look at the land as something that is ours to exploit or we can recognize that we are part of a much larger web of life, and that within the web we are given the role of stewardship.



While for many people, young and old, our roots in living off the land seem distant and foreign, it is essential to understand that we come from a nation of farmers, and that, in fact, much of the rabbinic literature focuses on agricultural laws and practices. As the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, they began farming differently than the other nations at the time. There are strict prohibitions against planting different species together. Corners of the fields and gleanings were left for the poor and landless members of the community. The first fruits and a percentage of the harvest were donated to the Temple and to the poor. Among other reasons, these practices were in place to prevent the farmer from becoming too arrogant, from taking too much credit for the bounty. They serve as a reminder that, “even a king is subject to the soil.”²

Of all the agricultural laws found in the *Torah*, *shemita* is arguably the most important, and the one that can serve as a foundation for the future of Jewish ecological education. The *Shemita* Year, literally translated as the year of release, sets several restrictions on our agricultural, economic, and social interactions. It is a year in which all land is allowed to rest, all debt is forgiven. A year in which there is no private property and resources are shared by all members of the community, rich and poor. A year that recognizes the importance of reflection and separation from work and that honors the sacredness of food and its role in building community.

With growing interest and concern for environmental issues, we must be careful that our education around these topics reflects the nuances and complexities of the problems themselves. Simply changing our light bulbs or buying organic is not going to be sufficient. We must be willing to make more considerable lifestyle changes and that begins with how we educate younger people about our relationship to the earth. For

this reason, *shemita* can serve as a foundation for Jewish ecological education that is both transformative and effective.

Shemita: Three Main Ideas

There are three main ideas that careful analysis of *shemita* can convey. First, that we need to rethink our concepts of ownership and the inherent entitlement we assume to exploit natural resources for our benefit alone. Second, we need to cultivate a sense of empathy and compassion for the less fortunate and more vulnerable members of our society. And third, that our overall goal as a community should be to create systems that benefit the whole rather than encourage the accumulation of material wealth among a minority of individuals.

Shemita appears in three different locations in the *Torah* and in each of these places there is a different focus or intention given for the practice. In *Shemot*, the articulated goal for letting the land rest is so, “the poor among your people will eat.”³ During the *shemita* year, claim to all ownership of that which grows is released by the individual owner and the bounty is shared equally by all members of society. This practice reminds the grower that he or she is not the true landowner and that the wealth associated with land should be shared, to a certain degree, by all.

In *Vayikra*, the *shemita* year is a year of rest for the land and for God. “The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat, for you, your slave, and for your maidservant; and for your laborer and for your resident who dwell with you. And for your animal and for the beast that is in your land shall have all its crop be to eat.”⁴ The use of the word “*Lachem*,” “for you,” implies a collective experience. Unlike in *Shemot* where the main reason for the law was to feed the poor (*evyon*), here the motivation is to create an equal experience for all members of the community. Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer writes in *Sefer Habrit, Behar*, “It [the *shemittah* year] teaches us further that the rich should not lord it over the poor. Accordingly, the *Torah* ordained that all should be equal during the seventh year, both the rich and the needy having access to the gardens and fields to eat their fill.”

Refraining from farming for one year would, undoubtedly, cause some anxiety among the growers. In fact, the *Torah* addresses this by stating, “If you will say: What will we eat in the seventh year?...I will ordain my blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three year period.”⁵ This can be understood as a tool for fostering empathy and compassion among the land owners. For this period of time, they, too, would experience the same anxiety that the landless experience every day, wondering where their next meal may come from. And, through this practice, they would gain the ability to relate to those less fortunate than themselves, and prevent them from understanding their own wealth as a right rather than a privilege allotted to them by God.

In *Devarim*, the release (*shemita*) is monetary rather than land-based, as all debts are to be forgiven. Again, claims of ownership over material wealth are let go as the needs

of the poor are prioritized over the needs of the rich. This practice recognizes that a society with a large disparity of wealth is ultimately not sustainable. Our collective mission is to create a holy community, not a free market, and this is achieved, in part, through these economic regulations.

The Relevancy of Shemita Today

In addition to these three main ideas that are conveyed through the different mentions of *shemita* in the text, there are other benefits from the practice that are extremely relevant today. Agriculturally speaking, observing the *shemita* is something that does not merely happen in the seventh year. In a land-based society, refraining from farming in the seventh year would require careful planning during the previous six. Farmers would have had to grow a diversity of crops, including fruit and other perennials, in addition to the annual grains and vegetables. This would allow more food to grow on its own during *shemita* in order to supplement the surplus that had been stored and preserved from previous years. This creates a more sustainable and secure food system, as it is not solely dependent on annual crops that require massive inputs and labor. In our modern context, much of the environmental degradation associated with agriculture stems from the large-scale monocropping of a very limited number of staple crops such as corn and soy that require incredible amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides; chemicals that end up in our water, soil and air. And yet, as evident through the current global food crises, this system has done little create a more secure food system.



This year we observe the *shemita* and it has been a popular topic of conversation. Schools and synagogues have invited the Jewish Farm School to present on *shemita* and explain how this practice is observed today in Israel. While interest in *shemita* is undoubtedly positive, we must recognize it as a beginning. For six years we are to work our land, and in the seventh year we are to let it rest. There is a direct relationship between the six years and the seventh, in the same way the six days of the week are in permanent relationship to the seventh day, *Shabbat*. We cannot properly observe *shemita* if we are not spending six years preparing for it. And while the agricultural laws apply only within the borders of biblical Israel, there is so much potential to use the *shemita* year as a foundation for renewed Jewish ecological education around the world, for *shemita* requires of us a humility and

reverence for that which is greater than any one person.

Imagine what it might be like if, every *shemita* year, Jewish schools and institutions worldwide somehow looked tangibly different, if we were able to honor the spirit and values of the *shemita* year. The notion that the land is not ours and that the benefit we can derive from the land ought to be shared. That food is sacred and should not be bought and sold like other commodities. That the processes of growing, preparing, trading, and consuming food should nourish our bodies and our souls, ourselves and our communities, and restore health and beauty to the land. That we must cultivate a sense of empathy and compassion for the more vulnerable members of our society, and that we must create systems that allow our community as a whole to thrive, not just a select few.

How can we integrate these core values of *shemita* into our pedagogy? The answers are not easy. I am suggesting that as a community we need to rethink some of our most basic assumptions and current practices. There is a need for contraction (*tzimtzum*), for scaling back and refocusing on some of the basic life skills we have lost. As a start, we can do this by encouraging more interaction with the earth among our students. Plant a garden. Learn the trees on our school grounds. Teach the agricultural and ecological roots of our holidays. Think critically about where the food we serve is coming from. This is just a beginning. We must also address the injustices we see in the world, the ever-increasing disparity of wealth between an elite minority and the global majority. I'm not entirely sure how all of this manifests, but that is okay, because this *Rosh Hashanah* marks the beginning of the next *shemita* period, and the beginning of six years of preparing.

Shemita, a year in which we turn our focus away from personal benefit to public benefit, from material needs to communal needs, from worldly pursuits to spiritual pursuits. What does that look like? What do we all have to do to make it happen?

Endnotes:

1. Berry, Wendell. "The Pleasures of Eating" in *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990.
2. *Kohelet* 5:8.
3. *Exodus* 23:11.
4. *Leviticus* 25:6-7.
5. *Leviticus* 25:20-21.

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Environmentalism and Creation

by Nancy Sohn Swartz

When searching for the connection between environmentalism and Judaism, we can look to the words of *Torah* -- to the commandments and to the countless Talmudic interpretations of text. We can especially look back to the beginning of the text, to the very beginning.

*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth ... and the light and the darkness ... and the waters and the land ... and the trees and the plants ... and the fish in the waters ... and the birds in the sky ... and all the wild creatures upon the earth...
And God saw that this was good.
And God said, "Let Us make humans in Our Image, after Our likeness."*

To whom was God speaking?

According to the book *The Legends of the Jews*,¹ which combines hundreds of legends and parables from a lifetime of midrash research by author Louis Ginzberg, one of the outstanding Talmudists of the twentieth century, the use of the words "Us" and "Our" can be seen as God asking counsel of all around Him. This interpretation sees God as calling upon heaven and earth, then upon all other things He had created, and last upon the angels, in His resolve to create man.

Though I had never read that interpretation at the time I was inspired to write my own *midrash* about Creation,² I too interpret these words as God speaking to all He had created, to ask advice for how to make humans. Seen in this way, God can be "seen" as expressing a wish to create a being that would be in the image, in the likeness, in harmony with, all of Creation.

Interpreting the "Us" and the "Our" in this way, as God working with nature to make humankind, we can see ourselves as not only the "culmination" of creation, but also as the reflection of everything that came before us. And understood in this light, we can also see our interconnectedness with nature, and our responsibility to take care of the earth.

A Miniature World

According to *Kabbalah*, each one of us is an *Olam Katan* -- a miniature world. We have within ourselves and within our lives a "likeness" to the essence of all of Creation. We have within ourselves the world. Everything that is within the world is within us. And everything that is within us is in the world.

For example, the word for man (used in *Genesis* in the sense of “human being”) is Adam, derived from *adamah* (earth), to signify that a human is earth-born. In fact, the most common elements found in the human body are also some of the most common elements found on the earth -- oxygen, hydrogen, calcium, sodium, iron, carbon.

Water, which is one of the most abundant and essential substances on the surface of the earth, is also one of the most abundant and essential substances in our bodies. In fact, the ratio is almost identical. The oceans cover about 70% of the earth's surface. Water makes up almost 70 % of the human body, with an almost identical percentage of salt as in the oceans.

We have a connection -- a likeness -- to the “essence” of all of nature, a likeness not only to the earth and to the waters, but also to the animals that were formed from the dust of the earth, just as we were. We also have a “likeness” to the trees that grow in the earth.

In fact, we even have family trees. It is the term we use to connect ourselves from one generation to the next. As we teach our children and grandchildren, with care and nurturing, our family's past closely resembles the strong roots of a tree, firmly planted. And as the fruit tree bears its seeds within its fruit, so, too, do we have within us the seeds for future life.

In chapter 2 of *Genesis*, we read that God told *Adam* to name the animals. How did *Adam* decide what to name them? According to *Rashi*, *Adam* named the animals based on their “essence.” In order to do this, *Adam* would have to understand their “essence.” He would have had an intuitive feeling, a connection, to the animals. And since we are all “*Adam*,” we, too, are capable of having that connection with the animal kingdom.

In likeness to God's animals, we can move on the land with speed and grace, or swim in the waters, or hop or creep or crawl. And as our dreams and hopes move us to acts of bravery and courage, we can feel as though we soar on the wings of an eagle.

Using our Gifts

Of course we are more than the total of all of nature and earth and water combined. For God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." And so we are, above all else, made in the image and the likeness of God. Our character is potentially divine.

Humankind alone among all living creatures is gifted with moral freedom and will. We are capable of knowing and loving God. We are endowed with reason, and the capacity to love; we are blessed with Divine qualities of goodness and mercy, justice and compassion.

It is therefore up to each one of us to use these gifts with which we are blessed, and to choose wisely, as we pass this world to the next generation.

From the very beginning of time, before we were even created, there was a plan set in motion, that we would be connected to all living things; that we would be the ones to be partners with God to take care of our world. In the image of God, and in the image all of nature, we were created to take on this responsibility. The concept of environmentalism is not new. It goes back to the beginning; to the very beginning.

Endnotes:

1. Ginzberg, Louis. *Legends of the Jews*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1911, reprinted 1942.
2. Swartz, Nancy Sohn. *In Our Image: God's First Creatures*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1998.

Nancy Sohn Swartz is the author of In Our Image: God's First Creatures (Jewish Lights, 1998) and How Did the Animals Help God? (Skylight Paths, 2004).

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Low Hanging Fruit: Simple Congregational Projects To Raise Environmental Awareness

by Marla J. Feldman

Each year we begin the cycle of *Torah* readings with *Parashat Breishit*, containing two different versions of Creation. The first version outlines what God created in six days before resting on the seventh. The second version is the well-known story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Central to both stories is the reminder that humanity is part of a greater community of life and is given a special duty to care for Creation.

In the *Tosefta*, the rabbis asked why man and woman were not created until the sixth day. The response was that humankind was created last so we would learn humility. If we grow too proud it could be said, “Even the tiniest flea preceded you in creation.”¹ Not only were all the other creatures created before us, but they, too, have a role in the Divine plan: “Even those things that you may regard as completely superfluous to Creation, such as fleas, gnats, and flies, even they were included in Creation; and God’s purpose is carried out through everything, even through a snake, a scorpion, a gnat, or a frog.”²

The very first commandment established humanity’s responsibility for Creation: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”³ While one might argue that this commandment gave humans the right to use natural resources as we please, the rabbis teach otherwise. “Rabbi Hanina said: If humanity merits it, humanity will have dominion; but if they do not merit, they shall descend.”⁴ In other words, we only rule the earth as long as we deserve to do so. If we fail in our responsibilities, we will be supplanted. (For a more detailed explanation of Hebrew roots **רָדָה** and **רָדַד** please see Ellen Bernstein’s article in this same issue.)

In the second Creation story, God places Adam in the Garden of Eden in order “to till it and to tend it.”⁵ The rabbis saw in this account a mandate for humanity to care for the world around us, as clarified in this well-known *midrash*: “When God created Adam, God led him around the Garden of Eden and said: ‘Look at My works! See how beautiful they are! Take care not to spoil or destroy My world, for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you.’”⁶

Unfortunately, we often forget these basic lessons as we go about the business of living. We take for granted the air we breathe, the water flowing from our faucets, the food purchased at the local grocery. We drive our cars and SUVs with little thought to the impact of auto emissions on the global climate. We welcome the benefits of

economic development without considering seemingly secondary matters like endangered species, rainforests or wetlands.

Yet to neglect our role in maintaining the fragile balance of nature is to default on our very first commitment in our covenant with God. Religious leaders and educators have a vital role to play in reminding the Jewish community – indeed, all of humanity – of our sacred duty as stewards of God’s Creation. While some schools and congregations have engaged in extensive environmental programming, others are just beginning the conversation. For those just getting started, there are many simple ‘starter’ programs that may provide helpful entry points.

Beyond *Tu B’shevat*:

Year-round Environmental Projects for Congregations and Schoolsⁱ

With most of the Jewish holidays rooted in the ancient agricultural cycles, environmental awareness can become a focus of every holiday observance for congregations, schools and individuals. A “holistic” program will include education about foundational Jewish values and the environmental issues at stake, ritual and hands-on opportunities to engage individuals, and advocacy to seek effective long-term solutions.

Rosh Hashanah and *Yom Kippur*

“Rabbi Eleazar son of Rabbi Simeon observed, ‘Why does Scripture at times put the earth before heaven and at other times heaven before earth? To teach that the two are of equal value.’”⁷ Though our focus during the *Yamim Noraim* is other-worldly, this *midrash* teaches us to consider the earthly realm similarly holy. The moment that we celebrate the world’s “birthday” is a time for us to acknowledge and repent for the sins we commit against the earth. The High Holy Days are a good time to launch a year-long initiative culminating with a major Earth Day event in the spring or the end of the academic year.⁸

- During *Elul*, spend time in natural settings that inspire awe and remind us that we are a part of Creation. Since it is traditional to study in preparation for the High Holidays, choose texts that reflect on our obligations to Creation.
- Create a *tashlich* program and worship experience to teach about the importance of, and risks to, our water resources. Toss into the water items that are ecologically beneficial, host a communal clean-up effort at the banks of the water source used for *tashlich*, and take the opportunity to ask government leaders to support protections for water resources and endangered species. Invite local government officials to join you for *tashlich* and cast away their own environmental sins, making a commitment to work with you to repair environmental damage.
- Have students (or adults!) create their own “*Al Hey!*” listing of sins against Creation, followed by “resolutions” of changes they will make in the year ahead.
- Host a Break Fast that is organic, vegan, made from “Fair Trade” products or purchased from local farmers as a way of supporting best environmental practices.
- Conduct an environmental audit and/or calculate your home, school or congregation’s energy consumption and “carbon footprint.”⁹ Make a New Year

resolution to reduce by a certain percentage the amount of carbon generated. Turn the challenge into a friendly competition within the congregation or school to see who can reduce their energy usage the most.

Sukkot and Simhat Torah

For one week during the year we are commanded to make ourselves vulnerable, to be at the mercy of the natural elements. Regulations for *sukkot* dictate that they be sturdy enough to withstand the wind, yet vulnerable enough to blow over in a storm. The *schach* (covering) must be made of only organic material -- stalks or branches taken from living trees. During *Simhat Torah*, as we begin anew the readings of *Breishit*, we are reminded of our obligations as caretakers of God's Creation. And we begin to recite the blessing for rain, reflecting the agricultural cycle of the Land of Israel. Both *Sukkot* and *Simhat Torah* reinforce our connection to, and reliance upon, the natural world around us.

- The tradition of *Ushpizin* encourages us to welcome holy guests into our *sukkot*. Use this opportunity to honor those who provide produce and healthy food by inviting a local organic farmer to speak about growing healthy food. A farm worker might be asked to speak about the difficulties working around pesticides and the dangers of poor working conditions. Other *sukkah* guests might be invited to receive honors for their justice work in the community.
- Use as many recycled materials as possible in the building of your *sukkah*.¹⁰
- Organize an educational trip to a local organic farm where students can gather natural *s'chach* and *sukkah* decorations, harvest fruits and vegetables for meals in the *sukkah*, or "glean" produce to be donated to a local food bank.
- Launch a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program,¹¹ using your congregation or school as a drop-off site for local farmers. A CSA supports local, sustainable agriculture by allowing individuals to pre-purchase a share of a farmer's produce for an entire season.
- Begin a recycling program and/or create a compost site for your school or synagogue. Be sure to educate the members and/or students about recycling and composting and encourage them to do it at home as well.

Hanukkah

Celebrating the miracle of one day's worth of oil lasting eight days serves as a reminder of the importance of conserving our natural resources for the future. Oil today has become a metaphor for depletion of our natural resources and the need to rededicate ourselves to finding smarter alternatives.

- *Let There Be (Renewable) Light* - The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) has an excellent web resource on energy conservation and *Hanukkah*.¹² On-line materials include readings for candle-lighting; "8 Days and 8 Actions," a checklist for conserving energy; suggestions for "green gifts"; text resources; "*Hanukkah* Energy Scavenger Hunt"; and many other tools.
- Instead of giving presents, give *tzedakah* to an environmental organization, "adopt" an animal, plant a tree or buy an acre of rain forest in someone's honor.
- Buy gifts in reusable or recyclable packaging. Bring a canvas bag for shopping to avoid unnecessary plastic or paper bags. Send e-cards instead of paper.

- Just as the Maccabees rededicated the Temple by restoring the eternal flame, “rededicate” your synagogue by installing and dedicating a solar powered *Ner Tamid*. Similarly, rededicate your synagogue, school or home by replacing light bulbs with energy-efficient bulbs.¹³
- Encourage people to reduce oil consumption by honoring those who drive hybrid-cars with designated parking spaces (which can be dedicated during *Hanukkah*) or giving priority parking to those who carpool. Install and dedicate bike racks for those able to ride instead of drive.
- At the end of the school semester, have students make new “recycled notebooks” using their half-used one-sided sheets of paper.

Tu B’shevat

One of the most well known Talmudic sayings is that of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai who said: “If you are planting a tree and you see the Messiah coming...finish planting the tree and then go and greet the Messiah.”¹⁴ Taken literally, planting a tree is among the most sacred things we can do.

- Hold a *Tu B’shevat seder* for your religious school, youth group or adults in the congregation and/or host one for friends and family. Be sure to include educational information about environmental issues and advocacy tools to help participants contact elected officials about related policy matters.
- Adopt a park, stream, highway or other public area in your community for general clean-up, beautification, planting trees, building or renovating playgrounds, or providing activities.
- On the *Shabbat* closest to the holiday, host a Fair Trade or organic *Oneg Shabbat*. Alternatively, host a “tasting” during which participants can compare fair trade or organic products and learn to become environmentally-conscious consumers.

Purim

Although *Purim* does not share the agricultural foundation as do other Jewish holidays, nonetheless there are ways to incorporate environmental programming during the holiday:

- Send Fair Trade, organic or locally produced *mishloach manot* packages, making sure to include educational information about the products for recipients.
- During the annual *Purim* carnival, offer free car washes for hybrid cars.
- Make *groggers* out of interesting recycled materials or shake boxes of dry noodles that can be donated to area soup kitchens.

Pesach

The observance of *Pesach* provides opportunities to incorporate environmental awareness, as parsley symbolizes the renewal of spring and the egg reminds us of the cycles of nature.

- Donate usable *chameitz* to local soup kitchens; compost and recycle products that cannot be donated.
- Throughout the *seder* there are opportunities for creative worship. Have students create readings for an Environmental *Seder* such as an alternative Ten

Environmental Plagues, Four Questions for Policy Makers or a variation of “*Dayeinu*.” (For example: Had we polluted our air but not our rivers, *dayeinu*; had we caused the extinction of hundreds of species but not diminished the rain forests, *dayeinu*; etc.)

- Earth Day often falls around the same time as Passover, as does *Birkat HaChama* (The Blessing of the Sun) in 2009.¹⁵ If that is the case, it is a good time to launch special environmental efforts such as installing and dedicating a solar panel or solar generated *ner tamid*, holding an environmental walk and study session, planting a garden to grow fruits and vegetables to donate to local food banks and soup kitchens, and other efforts noted above.

Shavuot

Shavuot, also known as *Chag Hakatzir*, is a Festival of the Harvest. During the Counting of the *Omer* preceding *Shavuot*, we daily mark the period of the harvest season. In ancient days, the Israelites would set aside the *bikurim*, the first fruits of the harvest, for the Temple, celebrating the connection between humans, the earth, and God. In modern times it has become customary on *Shavuot* to decorate the synagogue and home with flowers and greenery.¹⁶ For many schools and congregations, *Shavuot* marks the end of the program year and the beginning of summer, serving as an ideal time to wrap up year-long environmental programs and/or remind people to be particularly conscious of their connection to the eco-system as they begin their summer vacations and outdoor activities.

- Sponsor a *Lag B’Omer* Environmental Bike Ride to raise awareness about environmental concerns and as a fundraiser for environmental organizations.
- Make environmental learning a focus of your *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, providing educational information, text study, and advocacy resources.
- Since it is traditional to eat dairy products on *Shavuot*, host a cooking session at your *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* to teach about *eco-kashrut*, using organic, locally grown or pesticide-free produce and dairy products.
- Make your Confirmation celebration environmentally friendly with re-usable or recycled tablecloths, napkins and serving-ware, recycled paper for invitations, and re-usable table decorations instead of throwing away balloons or flower arrangements.
- Eliminate pesticide, fertilizer, and weed killers in home and synagogue gardens.

In addition to Jewish holidays, secular celebrations like Independence Day, Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day offer occasions to raise environmental awareness. Personal celebrations, including *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah*, weddings and birthdays, similarly provide opportunities to model environmental stewardship.

The environmental challenges we face may seem overwhelming, but our combined efforts can make a difference. The list provided herein is simply a taste to help us get started. The most important thing is to START SOMEWHERE. Find something fun and doable, make a commitment that is manageable, and it inevitably will lead to something else. Pick the “low-hanging fruit” and eventually we will climb higher and higher until we reach the goal.

Endnotes:

1. *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 8:4.
2. *Breishit Rabbah* 10:7.
3. *Breishit* 1:28.
4. *Breishit Rabbah* 8:12.
5. *Genesis* 2:15.
6. *Kohelet Rabbah* 7:13.
7. *Breishit Rabbah* 1:15.
8. Many of the program ideas in this section were culled from the Commission on Social Action's Social Action Holiday Guides, available at www.rac.org/holidayguides. There also is a great deal of programmatic material available at www.coejl.org.
9. For a carbon calculator, go to www.safeclimate.net/calculator or other similar online tools.
10. The Northwest Jewish Environmental Project (Portland, OR) launched a campaign in 2003 to encourage its members to use recycled materials in the construction of their *sukkot*. For more information go to www.nwjep.org.
11. Hazon provides assistance to Jewish groups forming CSAs through its *Tuv Ha'Aretz* project. For more information go to www.hazon.org.
12. www.coejl.org/Hanukkah
13. For a dedication ceremony to use when switching bulbs, go to www.coejl.org/climatechange/cflhanukkah.pdf.
14. *Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 31b.
15. The "Blessing of the Sun" is a special Jewish prayer recited once every twenty-eight years, the period of the solar cycle. Jewish law stipulates that the prayer be said every 10,227 (28 times 365.25) days. The next date set is April 8, 2009.
16. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, 494.

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The Earth on Your Fork: An Ecology of *Kashrut*

by David Seidenberg

I.

How we eat is a huge piece of how we relate to the earth itself. *Kashrut*, along with all Jewish mores and customs about eating, not only reflects the ecology of ancient Israel, it also impacts our sense of place and purpose in the greater world. In this brief essay, I want to ask you to imagine that there is some deeper ecological meaning to *kashrut*, and to explore what that meaning might be. By the end of this essay, I hope to propose a convincing theory for which animals we eat, and don't eat, according to Jewish law.

II.

Our humanity emerges from our relationship with all life — not just with other human beings — and from our connection to the earth. This connection is one of the bases for all religion. One can experience this connection in the way we eat our food and how we respect the species and locales that our food comes from.

More broadly, one can experience the human connection to the earth in the inspiration we feel from other animals, and in our love (our *biophilia*, as E.O. Wilson calls it¹) for the diverse beauty of all living things. Each of these sensibilities becomes part of our rituals, part of our sense of identity, and even part of our relationship with the divine.

We also can find wonder and awe in the extraordinary human capacity to live in almost every ecosystem existing on this planet. We are called *adam* (human) because the first human was created from the *adamah* (earth or soil). As the *midrash* teaches, God made the first human out of soils from all over the earth so that we would feel at home anywhere there is earth, soil. One teaching inherent in this idea is that who we are arises from the earth itself. "Fill the earth and connect with her," one might say.

Human diversity arises from this capacity we have to live in any ecosystem. How we live is influenced by and influences the earth; what we become after we die is once again the earth. The uniqueness of the ecology and biological diversity in each place leads to a unique way of relating to the earth. Each place therefore demands the creation of unique human cultures and religions.

III.

Judaism, too, arose in a particular place with a particular ecosystem. While Jews live everywhere, our rituals are keyed to the seasons and rhythms of Israel.

Hence, for the Jews living in ancient Israel, the *lulav* (palm branch) was taken and the *sukkah* (temporary hut) was entered on the fall full moon, as a prelude to and preparation for praying for fertility and rain, as is reflected in the *Hoshanah* prayers we still say. Ultimately, all of this work (including *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, which purified us to make these prayers) was a very elaborate cycle of prayer and ritual for the well-being of both the ecosystem and the food crops that people depended on.

Kashrut is an essential part of how most Jews express being Jewish. Looking at *kashrut* from an ecological perspective, one can see that keeping kosher is not just a way of creating Jewish identity, but also of shaping a person to be more deeply connected to the lives we take for food and the animals we use.

This is not just true of Judaism. The ecosystem in which each culture evolved shapes not only its diet and cuisine, but also its fertility and rain rituals, its own pantheons or ways of worship. The reason why there are different religions is not primarily political or theological; it's that each society must find a way to teach its generations how to live in harmony with a particular place and a particular ecosystem. One of the ways this happens is through religion -- through its rituals, rules, and stories.

Conversely, religious practices are shaped by the ecosystem where they evolve. For example, even though Buddhism as a religion historically demanded vegetarianism, Tibetan Buddhism found a way to allow its adherents (even its priests) to eat meat, creating rituals and rules that would make meat-eating to fit into Buddhist religious practice. Ecologically, the Tibetans lived in a high-altitude ecosystem which did not allow sufficient protein-rich food production through farming alone, so in order to survive they had to eat some meat.

If every ritual has an ecological significance, then it remains up to us to discover what that significance is.

IV.

Before we talk more about ecology, however, it may help to explore a related dimension of *kashrut* and eating, taught to us by anthropology. We know from anthropologists that one of the primary ways that a culture expresses its values and its sense of the human place in the world is through eating. (Levi-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked* was one of the most important works that established this point.²) In fact, one of the primary ways of "civilizing" ourselves is to separate killing from eating.

By doing this, we make the relationship we have with our food different from the relationship other animals have with their prey. For a lion must kill and eat with one and the same mouth, while only a few species (i.e., primates with hands and mouths) can even theoretically make any kind of physical separation between killing and eating. Humans, in fact, are the only predators that can consistently separate killing (or capturing) and eating. This truth is embodied within Judaism by the Noachide law, considered binding on all human cultures, to not eat "a limb from a living animal" (*'ever min hachai*).

This civilizing process sounds like something that separates us from Nature. Yet by emphasizing our humanity in a particular way, such rules also restrain human power and strengthen our empathy with other animals

V.

In Judaism, this drive to elevate our human uniqueness is embodied in powerful rules about how we slaughter animals and prepare their flesh, which has become the central focus of *kashrut*. Separating the blood from the flesh is described in the *Torah* as the way we respect the animal's soul and life (*ki hadam hu hanefesh*³), even when we eat it. The imperative to not eat the blood, combined with the imperative to not cause an animal suffering, allows for only one way of kosher slaughtering, what we know as *shechitah*. *Shechitah* accomplishes both goals (if done properly) by using an extraordinarily sharp knife to cut the jugular veins and trachea of an animal in one single stroke, thus allowing the blood to flow out and the heart to continue pumping while instantly rendering the animal unconscious.

Salting meat to draw out any remaining blood, examining the lungs, and, most importantly, not cooking the flesh produced by an animal's death with the milk that nurtured its life (*basar b'chalav*, which, according to tradition, prohibits not only the actually cooking of an animal in its biological mother's milk, but also includes any mixing of *milchig* and *fleishig*⁴) are more ways of creating separations between the life of an animal, the death of an animal, and the act of eating, of incorporating an animal into our own life and body. This means not only separating killing from eating, but also, in the case of kosher meat, separating the preparation and the cooking from the eating.⁵

Just as rules about how we kill and prepare meat distinguish human beings from other animals, rules about the way people harvest plants, which underline the difference between farming and foraging (or between human agriculture and the way other animals forage), are also found in most cultures. In Judaism, laws about *pe'ah* (not harvesting the corners), *leket* (not harvesting the gleanings), and *kilayim* (not interspersing species in a single field), not only underline our humanity, but also add a dimension of holiness and restraint to the act of taking from the earth.

These rituals also create a separation between Jewish culture and other cultures, along with a sense felt by many Jews that Jewish culture is somehow more civilized. That sense of election, so to speak, is a strictly anthropological dimension, without any direct ecological significance. But the anthropological meanings discussed above, to the extent that they create a heightened sensitivity to the lives and species that we use and eat, and an awareness of death and life itself, are also ecologically important.

VI.

Returning to our main point: every religion arises or is shaped by a place and teaches how to live in that place. Though every ritual has many levels interpretation -- e.g., historical, theological, and personal -- the ecological meaning may be the soil in which all else grows. The depth of this meaning is not in generalities, but in the details.

In the case of *kashrut*, for example, the rule about not eating blood makes it almost impossible to eat hunted game. In an ecosystem where humans depended on large herds of wild animals such as buffalo, as we find in the North American plains, this rule would be almost impossible to follow. But in an ecosystem where wild herds and habitats are less productive, a hunting culture is unsustainable. A culture where humans can carefully control the size of domesticated herds to fit the limits of the ecosystem and the needs of the population is what is called for. That was the ecosystem that shaped the religion of our ancestors.

This brings us to that most puzzling of categorical rules: which animals we can and cannot eat. We all know the rule: mammals that chew their cud and have split hooves are kosher; all other land animals are not. What do these two characteristics of hoof and mouth mean? Anthropologically, there are many interpretations, some of which can be found in Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*⁶. But ecologically, there is a specific meaning, which goes far beyond any hygienic or other rationalistic or symbolic interpretation.

That meaning is practically straightforward: any animal that chews its cud can eat grasses and plants that are inedible to human beings, while any animal that has split hooves can walk (and graze) on land that is too rocky to farm with a plow. These characteristics together mean one very clear thing: the only land animals that we can eat according to the laws of *kashrut* are animals that do not compete with human beings for food. In an ecosystem that is in some ways marginal, that is, an ecosystem that depends on intensive human input (agriculture and herding), as well as upon intensive "divine" input (i.e., rain, as it was understood by our ancestors), there is no room for devoting agricultural land to livestock.

VII.

The rules we still follow in Judaism would have allowed a civilization in the ancient Mideast to thrive without destroying the ecosystem it depended upon. Embedded in this wisdom about locale is another truth: any culture that allows domesticated herds to compete with humans for food pits farmers against herders. More importantly, it pits the poor who have no land against owners who control both land and herds. We can even see this dynamics of this problem in the modern world too, where rising world food prices endanger the poor in many countries. Those prices are driven in part by the industrial practice of feeding cattle grain instead of their natural diet of diverse grasses and other pasture plants.⁷

In order to have justice, which may be the most important value within Judaism's culture, there needs to be a way for farming and animal husbandry to produce enough for all people, poor and rich. The way to achieve this value in different ecosystems might be different, but any culture founded on justice will always find a way to bring this value into alignment with its ecosystem.⁸

Turning from animal husbandry back to agricultural rituals, it is obvious how the farmers took care of the poor: enough was always left over for people to glean, and in every seventh year, when the land lay fallow and was treated as ownerless and the produce grew without being planted and tended, everyone (including every animal) had the right to take from any of the produce of the land. In the fiftieth year, the land was redistributed according to a plan that gave each family an equal share.

With respect to animal herds, the way that wealth was recalibrated was more subtle: the products of the sacrificial system, which combined offerings and tithes of animals (including all first-born and most male animals) with produce (first-fruits and tithes of produce and grain), went to the priest and Levite, and to the poor and disenfranchised. The Priestly class, those that didn't need land because they were entitled by their higher class, had exclusive rights to parts of the sacrifices, but they also received a significant portion alongside the lowest class, those who didn't own and who were entitled by need.

This system had the potential to eliminate any stigma associated with receiving charity and to minimize class differences. In combination with all the agricultural rituals and rules mentioned above, we can see the plan for a society that was socially and ecologically sustainable for many generations.

Ecologically, the sacrificial system also had a very specific lesson: the life and soul of the animal, found in the blood, remained holy, even after the animal was slaughtered, and the only suitable use for this lifeblood was as an offering to God. The kind of industrial meat-production we see in our time would have been impossible, because it would fly in the face of every ecological, humane, and health consideration that underlies *kashrut*. The sacrificial system also fit into a broader pattern of rituals and rules related to animals and to the land, a pattern that gives us a unique model for how to create a sustainable civilization.

VIII.

The theory we've presented for why animals must have cloven hoofs and chew their cud is just that: a theory and nothing more. It fits into a broader understanding of how the Jewish relationship to food is structured by the *Torah*, with its emphasis on equity and the sanctity of both human life and all life. If this theory should prove wrong (or be unprovable), *kashrut* would still have its other meanings. But in a time when all of the world's religions need to help us steer towards sustainability, it is worth something to know that Judaism from its earliest time has an ecological underpinning that we can all listen to and search for.

We need to hear this call to sustainability, if Judaism is going to be relevant in humanity's next century.⁹ If the ecologists are right, this search is also a way to become fully human.

1. Wilson, E. O. *Biophilia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
2. Levi-Strauss, Claude. *The Raw and the Cooked*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
3. *Deuteronomy* 12:23.
4. *Exodus* 23:17-19 and *Deuteronomy* 14:21
5. This essay is not focused on the rules for kosher sea animals. However, the prohibition against eating shellfish may also be a way of not eating animals in cases where it would be hard to separate killing and cooking, e.g., lobsters, or killing and eating, e.g., oysters.
6. Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: 2002.
7. A similar dynamic caused by the growing use of corn to produce ethanol for fuel has driven prices sky-high. We are entering a time in the U.S. when our society may have to choose between having enough fuel for cars or feed for cattle, and exporting enough food for human beings in other countries.
8. As societies change, our mores and rules also need to evolve if we are to guard technologies and economies from destroying long-term sustainability. The other consequence of overdrive in meat production is that the total amount of the greenhouse gas methane emitted by cow digestion is more dangerous to the climate than the total emissions from car exhausts. While the *kashrut* rules that required us to only eat animals that don't compete with us for food embody a worthy goal, they are not sufficient in an age of industrial meat production, in which even the "right" kind of animal can use up or destroy ecosystems.
9. Jewish law has not kept up with the ethical dilemmas created by modern agriculture, as is evident in the crisis over Agriprocessors. Judaism has the potential and richness to meet this challenge, but it can only happen if the value of sustainability becomes deeply integrated into every aspect of ethics and *halakhah*.

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The Genesis of Diversity

by Michael M. Cohen

In 1968, *Hanukkah* and *Ramadan* ended on the same date. The next day was Christmas Eve. That evening, one quarter of the world's population saw, for the first time, images taken by the Apollo 8 astronauts of the earth from a lunar orbit. The earth, a beautifully colored marble ball floating across the black backdrop of the universe, also looked lonely and vulnerable. Those pictures captured the imagination of the world, triggering something in the consciousness of humanity that gave birth to the environmental movement and, two years later, the first Earth Day.

To frame that moment forty years ago, a shared historic moment that would transcend all the divisions of the world, the Apollo 8 crew read from the beginning of the Bible, the first ten verses from the *Book of Genesis*. The opening chapters of *Genesis* include not only the account of the creation of the earth, but also tell us over and over about the importance of diversity, a lesson that should underscore all discussions about the environment.

In the first chapter of the *Book of Genesis*, all of creation is called "good," reminding us of the value of the multiplicity of the world that we live in. The text also teaches us, by describing everything that is created before humans as "good," that all things have intrinsic value in and of themselves, beyond any value that we may place on them. Once humans are created, "very good" is the adjective used in the text. An anthropocentric reading of the text would say this is because the world was created for our needs, and, once we are in place, we can do what we want with the world. A biocentric reading of the text says that "very good" means only that creation as described in the text was complete, and that we humans were the last piece of the biological puzzle.

This reading is supported by the reality that if humans were to disappear from the face of the earth, all that had been created before us would go on quite well, actually better, without our presence. However, if a stratum of the diversity of life that had been created before humans were to disappear, we, and all that had been created after it, would no longer exist. In a bit of Heavenly humor on Darwin's survival of the fittest, it is actually the smallest and least physically strong species, like the butterflies, bees, and amoebas, that hold the survival of the world in place. Unlike the other species of the planet, we have the power to commit biocide if we do not protect and preserve those smaller forms of life.

The importance of diversity is emphasized a few chapters later, in the story of Noah, where Noah is told to bring pairs of each species onto the ark so that after the flood they can replenish the earth. After the flood, God places a rainbow in the sky as a reminder that HE will never again destroy the world. It is both a symbol and a metaphor: a single ray of light refracted through water, the basic source of all life, produces a prism of colors. As with the Creation story, we again are reminded that the foundation of diversity is that we all come from one source. On its most profound level, this understanding should give us all the awareness that we have a relationship with, and are connected to, the rest of humanity and creation.

Immediately following the story of Noah we read about the Tower of Babel. The whole account takes up only nine verses. The conventional reading is that its message is one *against* diversity; the babble of languages at the end of the story is understood as a punishment. The Israeli philosopher and scientist Yeshayahu Leibowitz presented a different reading of the text. For Leibowitz, Babel represented a fascist totalitarian state where the aims of the state are valued more than the individual. In such a society, diverse thought and expression are frowned upon. The text tells us that everyone "had the same language, and the same words."

We read in the genealogies that link the Noah and Babel stories that the "nations were divided by their lands, each one with its own language, according to their clans, by their nations." Leibowitz sees the babble of languages not as a punishment, but as a corrective return to how things had been and were supposed to be.

That is still our challenge today. Diversity is not a liberal value; it is the way of the world. We know that the environment outside of our human lives is healthier with greater diversity, coral reefs and rain forests being prime examples. It also is true for humanity. We are better off because of the different religions, nations, cultures, and languages that comprise the human family. The Irish Potato Famine was caused because only one variety of potato was planted. Without diverse crops, disease spreads easily on a large and deadly scale.

The Bible, in its opening chapters, understands diversity not as a noun, but as a verb; diversity is the basic action for life as we know it on this planet. Its importance is underscored by the fact that three accounts in its opening chapters highlight diversity as a foundation of the world we live in. Such an orientation is essential for our survival as a species.

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Eco-Jewish Education – Motivating for Change

by Daniel Ziskin

More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.

Woody Allen¹

It has become apparent to most people that there is an environmental crisis occurring around us. And yet relatively few in the Jewish community are taking meaningful steps to address this reality. I believe one reason for our inertia is that leadership within the Jewish community has not recognized that the sustainability of life on earth is a Jewish issue. Secondly, Jewish leadership may not feel comfortable being too far ahead of their *chevre* on such a potentially frightening issue. People tend to affiliate with religious institutions that affirm their identities and do not introduce additional strife, such as the melting of arctic glaciers. This article, addressed to those who wish to motivate environmental change within the Jewish community, will describe some of the lessons I have learned. I hope this will make your efforts more graceful than mine have been.

It is particularly challenging to achieve balance while attempting to motivate Jews to live more gently on the earth and more in sync with her patterns. On the one hand, the enormity and gravity of the problem should be presented, and, on the other hand, people often react to challenges of this magnitude with despair, feelings of powerlessness, and other paralyzing emotions. Rather than find just the right tone that falls perfectly between white-washing a perilous situation (“everything’s going to be ok”) and terrifying people with dire predictions (“we’re doomed”), perhaps a better approach would be to focus on methodology. With the right techniques, perhaps the message will be heard regardless of whether you choose your words perfectly or not.

Start in 1st Gear

Start with where people are and give them a painless and clear way to begin. It is a well-know fact that one *mitzvah* leads to another,² and one eco-step follows the same pattern. Praise and encourage beginnings just as you would nurture a fire into existence from a single spark.

Before you get people to adopt a diet of foods grown within 100 miles of their home, live car-free, go off the electrical grid, and weave their own clothing, there are probably some more accessible steps they can take. Although the environmental benefits of changing your light bulbs to compact fluorescents are modest, asking people to take the first step and having them accept the invitation is HUGE. Some people have enormous resistance to taking any responsibility at all for the well-documented recent changes in

climate. I believe that on a sub-conscious level they fear that accepting the problem as real will automatically implicate them as the sole cause of the problem. Who wouldn't try to avoid that? So I suggest allowing people to feel comfortable with the concept that they can improve the situation without necessarily taking responsibility for how we got here.

Be Entertaining

It is tempting to treat with solemnity the imperative that we must live differently in order to thrive on earth. Yet our tradition has taught us to laugh at our adversity. We need to develop fun, creative, and humorous curricula around environmental education. The truth is that people will be far more open to your message if they are entertained. For example, I have written a series of "Eco-Jewish Holiday Skits" that re-cast the central holiday stories with funny environmental themes. I am happy to share them with you – just send me an e-mail (ziskin@jote.org) and I'll send you the scripts so you can put them on at your events.

Integrity of Execution

Take care that you support your teaching with the integrity of your actions. People are always looking for flaws and reasons why they can ignore your message. If you plan to speak about the importance of living lightly on the earth, demonstrate your points with your actions, such as how you travel and how you behave before, during, and after the event. Bring your own reusable mug!

If you are invited to speak about eco-Judaism, you can request that your host accommodate your environmental sensitivity and suggest that they follow some practices you endorse. For example, you might suggest that if food is served, that it be served on re-usable utensils and that it be vegetarian. Be bold, but polite and forgiving of the constraints your hosts might feel.

Tell Personal Stories

When I was growing up, we owned a little cabin in southern New Jersey. I remember spending hours lying on my back looking up at the night sky. How breathtaking were the stars, the Milky Way, and the symphony of crickets, frogs, and unidentified non-human utterances. Now, when I return there, the stars have vanished and the animal noises are sparse. We have traded the night sky for 24-hour commerce. Personal experiences, such as mine, are inspiring and should resonate with the memories of your audience. They can be used to illustrate why caring for the environment is not about "out there" such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, but rather is about right here. And it is not about someday like 2050; it is about effects we have witnessed in our own lifetimes. Remind your audience that environmentalism is not only about making the world better for wildlife and unspoiled places. Environmentalism also is about quality of life for us and future generations of Jews, too.

Avoid Shame and Blame

A common response to being forcefully awakened to the realization that actually it is WE who are the problem is to take on responsibility for the entire crisis. This reaction is neither accurate nor helpful. As messengers of the “bad news,” we must be careful not to create a sense of shame and blame for the choices that have been made by our community. Each person has reasons for the choices made and everyone will believe in the validity of their reasons forever (especially if the alternative is to feel shame). If possible, we should avoid “finger-pointing” and even blaming ourselves. Judgment is a fantastic way of zapping energy and preventing us from actually doing what needs to get done.

The film *What a Way to Go* begins with the context from the filmmaker's childhood. He explains that most of the momentum that has brought us to this ecological brink was already established in the world into which he was born. And that's true for most of us, too. We did not wake up one morning and decide to adopt unsustainable lifestyles. We must learn how to accept responsibility for our own actions and their consequences (including cleaning up the messes that were created in the past). However, we can end up getting hopelessly bogged down in feelings of guilt for actions and decisions that were not ours. It doesn't matter that much whose fault it is, because, regardless of the answer, it is still up to us to change the direction in which we're heading.

I believe the practice of *teshuvah* has deep psychological wisdom. It allows us to recognize our flaws, make amends, and hopefully proceed into a blameless future. Jews Of The Earth (JOTE), the eco-Jewish non-profit I founded, has adopted a ritual that brings *teshuvah* towards the earth into the forefront of our attention. For *Tashlich*, we lead a stream clean-up. First, we pull out from the water the harmful things we have allowed to be put there. Then, after we have undone some of the harm that was caused, we symbolically cast our sins into the living water with breadcrumbs. We make a point of begging forgiveness from the earth for our transgressions against it, since this shows disrespect to its Creator. I leave this event feeling a sense of relief from the debilitating guilt that can burden future actions.

It's Not Just for Kids

It would be a serious mistake to assume that we can leave the hard work of change to the next generation without seriously examining our own actions. If we try to teach our children environmental awareness without actually practicing such sensitivity ourselves, in fact, we would be teaching them hypocrisy. Rather than learning what our mouths are saying, they would learn cynicism and skepticism. If we wish to effectively teach environmentalism as a Jewish ethic, we must learn to live it ourselves first.

Just as we feel constrained by the world we were born into, so will our children. Although children may appear to have a “blank slate” compared to the limited choices we perceive we have, this is actually a delusion. The next generation certainly will be impacted by the choices we make today. For example, if we choose to build a nuclear

power plant, we are bequeathing them the puzzle of how to deal with radioactive waste for eons into the future. That's why we cannot afford to assume that it's too late for us to make meaningful changes.

Give Positive Suggestions for Action

Don't forget to suggest ways for folks to act on their ideas. Put some realistic suggestions on the table for your audience to consider doing, either alone or as a group. Create a menu with options ranging from simple and complete-able ones (such as writing a letter to a policy maker) to more open-ended and inspiring ones (such as living a life in reverence for the Creator's masterpiece). Don't be discouraged by the reactions you receive at the time. People will tell you months or years later that your words inspired them in ways you cannot dream were possible. At some point, you were probably influenced by some other person and yet that person had no clue what had happened.

Empower with Hope

We all want to feel hopeful. I encourage you to be positive and optimistic in your speech (even though I often am not). But beware not to give people the impression that things will get better all by themselves. Give people hope that they CAN make a difference, if they apply themselves. It is pointless and non-motivating to feed the idea that things will "somehow" work themselves out.

The concept that we are partners with the Creator as we serve as *shomrei adamah* (guardians of the earth) can be powerful. It reminds us that we have a role to play in the cosmic unfolding of history. Even if we have a small part in the drama, the Director cast us. So we must not feel hopeless since we are aligned with the Source of all life.

Conclusion

As Jews, we take pride in ourselves as living in a great chain of generations from Adam through Noah through Abraham until today and onward without end. Yet in this time we are using resources such as water and fuel at rates far in excess of how quickly they can be replenished. When future generations tap these same vital resources, they will be exhausted. In a sense, this generation is "stealing" from the very same future generations that we claim to cherish. When I consider the alarming statistic that as Americans we are 5% of the world's population, yet consume a quarter of her resources, it makes me aware of how powerful we actually are. There has never been a more affluent and empowered citizenry than we are now. We have the power to transform the way we use the gifts the earth provides. And I would argue that, as Jews, we have a moral obligation to do so.

Please glean what you wish from my ideas and use them to help create a new future.

Endnotes:

1. Speech to a graduating class in 1980. Quoted in Blech, Benjamin. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Jewish History and Culture*. New York: Alpha Books, 2004.
2. *Pirkei Avot* 4:2.

Dr. Daniel Ziskin earned a PhD in physics from The Johns Hopkins University; his dissertation was on how clouds act as a feedback mechanism on the Earth's climate. He worked at NASA and at the National Center for Atmospheric Research. He currently works at the National Geophysical Data Center within National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). In 1999, while living in Boulder, he founded Jews Of The Earth (JOTE); a non-profit that works to improve environmental stewardship within the Jewish community.

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National Jewish Environment Organizations

List compiled by Liore Milgrom-Elcott, COEJL Program Manager

American Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (ASPNI)

Tel: 212.398.6750; 800-411-0966

Fax: 212.398.1665

Email: robin@aspni.org

<http://www.aspni.org/>; birthright mission: <http://israelnature.com/>

Canfei Nesharim ("the wings of eagles")

Tel: (212) 284-6745

Email: info@canfeinesharim.org

<http://www.canfeinesharim.org/>

Green Zionist Alliance

Tel: 917-434-7859

www.greenzionism.org

Hazon

Tel: (212) 644-2332

Email: info@hazon.org

<http://www.hazon.org>

Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center

Shir Feinstein-Feit

Creative Director (860) 824-5991 x313

shir@isabellafreedman.org

<http://isabellafreedman.org/home5>

Jewish Farm School

Tel: 215-609-4680

E-mail: info@jewishfarmschool.org

www.jewishfarmschool.org

Jewish Global Environmental Network (JGEN)

Tel: 401-863-2499

<http://www.jgenisrael.org>

Jewish National Fund

Tel: 212.879.9305; 888.JNF.0099

Fax: 212.570.1673

Email: communications@jnf.org

<http://www.jnf.org/>

Jewish Nature Center
Email: webmaster@njycamps.org
<http://www.jewishnaturecenter.org/>

New Israel Fund
202-842-0900
202-842-0991 fax
info@nif.org
<http://www.newisraelfund.org>

Pearlstone Conference and Retreat Center and the Kayam Farm and
Environmental Education Center at Pearlstone
P: 410-429-4400
F: 410-429-4723
<http://www.pearlstonecenter.org/>

The Noah Project
Tel: 020 8123 2859
info@biggreenjewish.org
<http://www.BigGreenJewish.org/>

The Shalom Center
Tel: (215) 844-8494
Email: office@shalomctr.org
<http://www.shalomctr.org/>

ShalomVeg.com
Tel: (860) 967-1581
Email: info@shalomveg.com
<http://www.shalomveg.com>

Teva Adventure US
Tel: (718) 576-1302; (310) 765-4035
Email: info@tevaadventure.org
<http://www.tevaadventure.org>

Teva Learning Center
Tel: (212) 807-6376
Fax: (212) 924-5112
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TorahTrek
Email: info@torahtrek.com
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