

# Eco-Judaism: Is There Any Other Kind?!

## How Torah Pushes the Sustainability Envelope



8 pages of resources, assembled by R. Fred Scherlinder Dobb, of [www.adatshalom.net](http://www.adatshalom.net) & [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)  
for the 5777 Global Day of Jewish Learning (the 'Reconstructionist hour'), 11/20/16

### א: Key Themes in Eco-Judaism (*rashei p'rakim* / shorthand only)

1. Unity: Seeing the Big Picture -- "One glorious chain of love, of giving and receiving, unites all living things" (S.R. Hirsch, Ben Uziel 29). M.M. Kaplan and the Gaia Hypothesis. **אָהַד... שְׁמַע** *Sh'ma*: All is One.
2. The Earth is God's (Ps. 24:1), Not Ours -- Radical Amazement (AJ Heschel), humility, awareness. Reconcile Ps 24 with Ps 115, through blessings (Ber. 35a-b). See *shmita*; liberation theology; Deut. 11.
3. Environmental Justice: All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir (Bill Staines) -- Nothing is superfluous (Ex R 10:1); creation exists for its own sake, not ours (Rambam Guide 3:13). See Psalms, esp. 104.
4. Social Justice: All God's Children Deserve Equal Access to Creation -- See *Shmita* & *Yovel* (Lev. 25) for integration of social & environmental concern; **מִן-הָאָדָם**... **מִן-הָאָדָמָה** (adam/ah, Gen. 2); *tikkun olam*, literally.
5. Intergenerational Justice: Thinking on a Divine Time-Scale -- See God's Thirteen Attributes (Ex 34:6-7), **נִצֵּר חֵסֶד לְאֶלְפִים**; Honi & the carob-planter (Ta'anit 23a); "Choose Life, for you & progeny" (Deut 30:19).
6. Waste Not, Want Not: *Bal Tashchit* -- Deut. 20:19; "the tree of the field is the life of humanity" (Sifre); to burn less fossil fuel is halachic (Shabbat 67b); waste not "even a mustard seed" (Sefer Hachinuch 529).
7. Limits to Growth: *Shabbat* – production & consumption, which always come at marginal environmental cost, are not our highest goals – but growth in the realm of the spirit, as with *Shabbat*, is always sustainable!  
And these too, per the Sierra Club motto:
8. Explore: **קוּם וְהִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּאֶרֶץ**, 'get up and walk yourself around the land' (Genesis 13:17)
9. Enjoy: **וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד**, God saw the totality; it was very good (Gn 1:31)
10. Protect: **וַיִּנְחָלוּ בְּגֶן-עֵדֶן, לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ**, God put the human in the Garden of Eden [1<sup>st</sup> ecosystem], to serve it and to protect it. (others 'to till and to tend it', 'to work and to guard it' – Genesis 2:15)



תו דעתך שלא תהלקה  
ותחריב את עולמי,  
שאם קלקלת אין מי  
שיתקן אחריך  
"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"  
Kohelet Rabbah 7:13

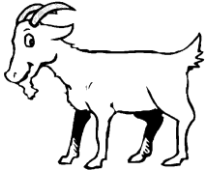
### ב: Taking Eco-Judaism to the Next Level: Challenging Case Studies

#### 1. Human Life Balanced with the Rest of Creation

*Pikuach Nefesh*, the saving of a human life, is the rare value that usually overrides all other mitzvot. Yet the long-term impacts of climate change, on human and non-human life alike, are emerging as a "*pikuach nefesh*" concern of their own, since lives are truly in the balance over the long haul. Enter: the goat, from this Talmudic dilemma.  
Background: the Mishnah (Bava Kama 7:7) says that **אין מגדלין בהמה דקה בא"י** "we do not raise small cattle in the Land of Israel." (Since we may do so in the desert, it seems this prohibition is about *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, the settling of the Land). Rabban Gamliel permits it **בלבד שלא תצא ותרעה בעדר אלא קושרה בכרעי המטה** "only if they don't go out and graze with the herd, but are tied to the legs of a bed" (80a). The concern? -- small cattle "destroy the fields" (Rashi), by grazing close to the ground, and killing the vegetation. See (Bava Kama 80a) what happens when this law conflicts with *Pikuach Nefesh*:

ת"ר מעשה בחסיד אחד שהיה גונח מלבו ושאלו לרופאים ואמרו אין לו תקנה עד שינק חלב רותח משחרית לשחרית

Our rabbis taught of this *hasid* (good person), whose heart groaned; he asked the doctors, who said his only remedy was to drink fresh milk every morning. And they brought him a goat, and tied it to the legs of the bed; and he drank from it every morning.



לימים נכנסו חביריו לבקריו כיון שראו אותה העז קשורה בכרעי המטה חזרו לאחוריהם

ואמרו לסטים מזויין בביתו של זה ואנו נכנסין אצלו After a while, his friends came in to visit him. When they saw the goat tied up to the legs of the bed, they turned around and said, “armed robbers are in his house, and we should visit him?!”

ישבו ובדקו ולא מצאו בו אלא אותו עון של אותה העז ואף הוא בשעת מיתתו אמר יודע אני שאין בי

עון אלא עון אותה העז שעברתי על דברי חברי They returned and checked [into his life], and found nothing [wrong] about him except for that one sin of the goat. And even he, at the hour of his death, said: “I know that there is no sin in me, except for the sin of that goat, when I transgressed on the words of my friends.”

## 2. Human Enjoyment Balanced with Ecological Concern

Above, the very life of a human being might not take precedence over the greater environmental good. It's an open question elsewhere. Look again at *bal tashchit*, the law protecting fruit trees (Dt. 20:19), based on their yield: this law is partly economic, and partly environmental. *Bal tashchit* is extended in the Talmud to cover various forms of ‘wanton’ or ‘egregious’ waste and destruction – but defining this is tricky. Today’s eco-challenges often hinge on differences between which destruction seems wanton, and which seems justified. Like:



שמואל צלחו ליה תכתקא דשאגא רב יהודה צלחו ליה פתורא דיונה לרבה צלחו ליה שרשיפא וא"ל אביי “For Shmuel [when he was sick and needed a fire], they chopped up an expensive, drum-shaped stool made of teak. For Rav Yehuda, they chopped up a juniper-wood table. For Rava they chopped up a [wooden] chair. At which point Abaye said to Rava, ‘aren’t you violating *bal tashchit*?’ He replied, [avoiding the] “needless waste” of my body takes priority for me.’ [i.e. -- to spare a chair, I shouldn’t sacrifice the divine gift of my body].” (Shabbat 129a)

אמר רב חסדא האי מאן דאפשר ליה למיכל נהמא דשערי ואכל דחיטי קעבר משום בל תשחית ואמר רב פפא האי מאן “Rav Hisda said: ‘one who is able to eat barley bread, but instead eats wheat bread [which costs more and takes more resources to grow], is violating *bal tashchit*.’ Rav Papa said: ‘one who is able to drink beer, but instead drinks wine [which is harder to grow and more expensive], is violating *bal tashchit*.’ But this is not what matters most



– [avoiding the] ‘needless waste’ of one’s own body takes priority.” (Shabbat 140b) [wheat was deemed more nutritious than barley (Peah 8:5), so Rav Hisda meant: “one should eat barley bread rather than wheat bread, so long as one does not neglect one’s own body in so doing.”

(David Stein in Waskow, Torah of E., 1:100)]

רב חסדא כד הוה מסגי ביני היזמי והגא מדלי להו למאניה אמר זה מעלה ארוכה וזה אינו מעלה ארוכה “When Rav Hisda had to pass through prickly shrubs and thistles, he used to lift up his garment, saying, ‘this [skin] will heal, but this [garment] would not heal.’” (Bava Kama 91b)



## 3. “Jobs vs. Environment”

This truly open-ended Talmudic tale (Bava Metzia 107b-108a) concerns two rabbis, one an owner of forested land. It raises vital questions, with no clear answers, worth our deep reflection even today: When are logging or other extractive industries appropriate? How do we balance commerce, with protecting nature? How do we use, but limit, ‘eminent domain’? When values conflict, who speaks for the environment?:

אמר רב יהודה ארבע אמות דאניגרא לבני אניגרא דנהרא דכולי עלמא מכריז רבי אמי מלא כתפי נגדי בתרי עברי נהרא Rav Yehuda said: “[a width of] four cubits next to the canal belong to those who live by the canal; [four cubits] by the river belong to everyone.” Rabbi Ammi announced: “cut down [vegetation or trees] within the shoulder-width of the barge-drawing animals, on both sides of the river.” ... רבה בר רב הונא הוה ליה ההוא

Rabbah bar Rav Huna owned a forest on the banks of the river. They said to him, “cut down [the trees within four cubits]”. He said to them, “let those who are above and below me [along the river’s edge be the first to] cut, and after that, I’ll cut.” ...

רבה בר רב נחמן הוה קא אזיל בארבא חזא ההוא אבא דקאי אגודא דנהרא אמר להו דמאן אמרו ליה

דרבה בר רב הונא אמר (עזרא ט) ויד השרים והסגנים היתה במעל הזה ראשונה אמר להו קוצו קוצו

Rabbah bar Rav Nachman was traveling in a boat. He saw this forest [of Rabbah bar Rav Huna]



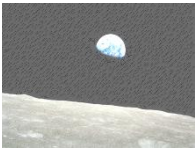
on the bank of the river. He said to them, “whose is it?” They said to him, “it belongs to Rabbah bar Rav Huna.” He said, “the hand of princes and rulers came first in this treachery” [Ezra 9:2 – i.e., it must be the fault of the next-door-nobles]. He said to them: “Cut it down! Cut it down!” **אתא רבה בר רב הונא אשכחיה דקייץ** אמר מאן קצייה תקוץ ענפיה Rabbah bar rav Huna came and saw that it had been cut down. He said: “whoever cut down this forest, may their own branches be cut down.”

אמרי כולהו שני דרבה בר רב הונא לא אקיים ליה זרעא לרבה בר רב נחמן It's said that in all the years of Rabbah bar Rav Huna, none of Rabbah bar Rav Nachman's children lived.

## א: Conservation, Conversation, Conversion – What the World & Our Tradition Need from 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish Leaders

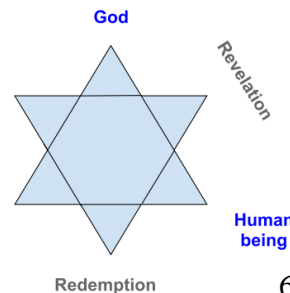
*R. Fred Scherlinder Dobb, Adat Shalom and COEJL (orig. for AJR, Heshvan 5775; updated 2016)*

### 1, Theology: Creation



### 2, Theology/Torah: Revelation

### 3, Theology/Tikkun: Redemption



### 4, Sufficiency, for us



-- דִּינֵנוּ

### 5, Sufficiency, from us -- לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה

### 6, Interfaith



### 7, Mere Conservation, or Major Conversion?

## Taking Climate Change Seriously - Climate Conversion in NY

By Rev. Jim Wallis, of Sojourners <http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/06/05/taking-climate-change-seriously>  
& <http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/09/25/climate-conversion-new-york>

...the most compelling narratives for dealing with climate change must be **moral** ones, **theological** ones, and biblical ones, especially if we are to reach and engage the faith community — which every successful social movement must do. God's instructions in Genesis to be **good stewards** of the world God has created are central now. And **generational ethics** are central to that.

לְעֹבְדָהּ  
לְשִׁמְרָהּ

We should not and cannot leave our children's children with a fundamentally different planet. Perhaps we should replace the classic image of a polar bear on a small floating piece of ice, with an image of our great grandchild standing in line for his or her water ration. Of course, the **poorest and most vulnerable** of us, who contribute least to these changes, are the **most dangerously affected** by them. Ultimately, as [religious people], climate change is about our faith, our theology, our moral identity, and our calling as God's children.

**Climate change is not another issue to move higher up the list of our concerns.**

**Rather it is *the* concern central to all other issues...**

“I was hungry.” Climate change could dramatically influence food supplies and create very serious **food shortages**. “I was thirsty.”

**Drought** is a direct result of climate change. “I was naked.” The impact of climate change could strip whole groups of people of all they have. “I was a stranger.” This text [Mt. 25] has converted a whole movement of [religious folks] around how we treat immigrants — but climate change is already creating **refugees** of island nations. “I was sick.” **Public health** is extremely affected by the pollutants in our environment, and climate change increases that. And we are already being jeopardized by these pollutants. “I was a prisoner.” Global warming could cause massive social and **societal disruption** that easily can create more crime and burden criminal justice systems. There is a direct correlation between rising temperatures and rising violence.



Our children's children will want to know why we were so selfish and short-sighted; why did we not listen to the biblical ethic of stewardship? This is certainly a matter of





**science**, but until it also becomes an issue of **faith**, we will not have the social movement that we need to change our whole way of fueling our lives. Reducing and ultimately eliminating dirty energy, investing our future in clean energy, and becoming seriously committed to saving energy are such big fundamental tasks that they will require the **imperatives of faith & the leadership of the faith community**...

[from St. John the Divine Address, post-PCM, 9/21/14]: [Tradition] also instructs us to be **peacemakers**, who take on the causes of terrorism and war — not only ‘peace lovers,’ who just hope their government comes up with an effective military strategy. Let’s tell the truth: we won’t see the end of threats like ISIS until we **repent of our addiction to the fossil fuel economy** with its legion of injustices. and its sins against God’s earth and God’s children through climate change....

We all know that the world is moving down a very dangerous path, and that we must reverse our direction. But so far, the credible and persuasive scientific case hasn’t accomplished that. Sensible economic proposals haven’t halted that direction either. And smart political arguments have yet to reverse our course either.

Why? Because **we are addicted to fossil fuels**. The results are planet-threatening climate change, and people-threatening terrorism.

**We need conversion. Nothing less.**

Only our conversion could change our dangerous direction. Two fundamental things could bring the kind of conversion we need.

One, our faith. Two, our children.

A re-conversion **to our faith, and for our children**, might **save us** from the dangers ahead.

These are the two things that many people around the world would **change** anything for, **give** anything for, or **sacrifice** anything for. All the people of faith and all the parents in this house of worship know that’s true.

**It’s a mistake to say we just need to move climate change up on our list of priorities** — the issues and concerns we care most about. **That’s not enough.** Rather, **we need a new and deeper understanding of how climate change is now impacting all of our lists** — and could **devastate** all the people and things we most care about. ...

Our **repentance** and conversion must become very practical. It’s also time for the faith community to preach the promise of **hope** that could sustain the long and hard struggle, that will help the world make the **transition** from dirty and dangerous to clean and renewable energy.

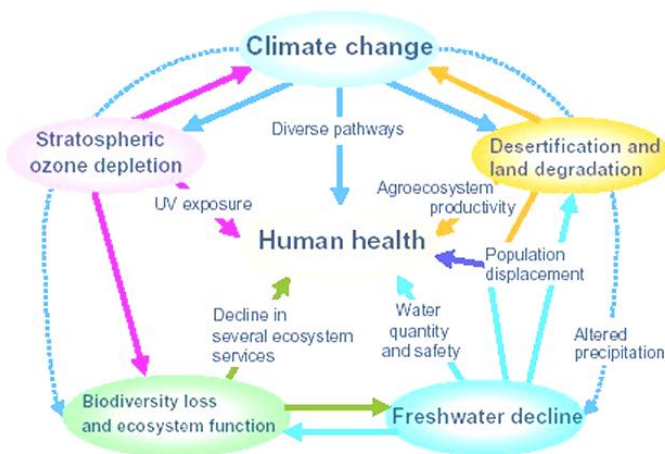
To be honest, the evidence for our making that crucial transition, and in time before too much irreparable damage to the planet is done, isn’t good. But as I often say, hope means believing in spite of the evidence, then watching the evidence change...

*Jim Wallis is president of Sojourners, and author of The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided (the updated paperback version of On God’s Side.). Follow Jim [@JimWallis](#).*



## **FROM OUR MULTI-VOCAL TRADITION**

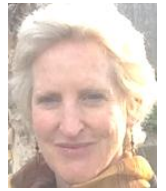
“...real relationship to God cannot be achieved on earth if real relationships to the world and to [hu]mankind are lacking. Both **love of the Creator and love of that which [God] has created are finally one and the same**. In order to achieve this **unity**, [we] must indeed



accept creation from God's hands, not in order to possess it but **lovingly to take part** in the still uncompleted work of creation... “ (Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, p. 209)

“We must **choose** in this tradition the elements that constitute **closeness** to the soil, hallowed worldliness, and absorption of the Divine in nature; and **reject** in this tradition the elements that constitute **remoteness** from the soil, detached rationality, and nature’s banishment from the presence of God.” (Buber, *On J*, 145)

“Cooped up in the concrete box of a classroom...kids don’t stand much a chance of finding God ...but outdoors ...they and we might remember our creator... **fulfill the biblical imperative to be *shomrei adamah***, keepers of the earth. **The rest is commentary.**” (Rabbi Ellen Bernstein, [CAJE](#) ‘08)



# ד: Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

## Eco-Judaism: Why and How to Care for Creation



### Values and Texts

### Actions

#### IN THE BEGINNING... בְּרֵאשִׁית

...male and female God created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the Earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and over every living thing that crawls upon the Earth." (Gen. 1:27-28)

And God said, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the Earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food." (Gen. 1:29)

God took Adam & placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, לַעֲבֹדָה -l'ovdah [to work/serve/till it] וּלְשֹׁמְרָה -u'l'shomrah [& to guard/tend it]. (Gen. 2:15)

#### WHOSE EARTH IS IT, ANYWAY? – לַה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ

The Earth is God's, and the fullness thereof; the settled land and its inhabitants. (Ps. 24:1) [Contradiction:] The heavens are God's heavens, but God gave the Earth to humankind. (Ps. 115:16) [Resolution:] Humankind is forbidden to enjoy anything without saying a blessing over it...the former verse applies before one pronounces the blessing; the latter verse applies after one pronounces it. (Talmud Bavli, Brakhot 35a-b)

...if you really listen to my commandments...to love YHVH your God and to serve God with all your heart and all your soul, then...you will eat, and be satisfied. [BUT!] be careful, lest your heart be seduced, and you turn away and serve false gods, and worship them. Then the wrath of YHVH will be upon you; God will stop up the heavens, and there will be no rain, and the Earth will not give its produce; and you will speedily be evicted from the good land that God is giving you..." (Deut. 11:13-17; שְׁמַע #2)

#### BAL TASHCHIT – DON'T WASTE – לֹא-תִשְׁחִית

When you besiege a city for a long time in order to defeat and capture it, do not destroy [lo tashchit] any of its trees, bringing an axe against it. You may eat from them, but you must not cut them down - for is the tree in the field human, that it can withdraw into the city before you? (Deuteronomy 20:19 – origin of the law of not destroying or wasting)

Rav Zutra said: Whoever covers an oil lamp, or uncovers a naphtha lamp, transgresses the law of bal tashchit. (Talmud Shabbat 67b)

And not only [does bal tashchit apply] to the trees; rather, anyone who destroys dishes/vessels, or tears clothes, or demolishes a building, or stops up a spring, or destroys food in anger -- [that person] transgresses the law of bal tashchit. (Maimonides, Mishnah Torah Melakhim 6:10)

Righteous people of good deeds ... do not waste in this world even a mustard seed. They become sorrowful with every wasteful and destructive act that they see, and if they can they use all their strength to save everything possible from destruction. But the wicked are not thus; they are like demons. They rejoice in the destruction of the world, just as they destroy themselves.... (Sefer HaChinuch 529; 13th century)

... Apply [bal tashchit] to your whole life and to every being which is subordinated to you, from the Earth which bears them all up to the garment which you have already transformed into your own cover. Yea, "Do not destroy anything!" is the first and most general call of God. (R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Orthodox: at Deut. 20:20; Horeb 56)

(1) Oved and shomer (serve and guard) this good Creation in all that we do – how we act, drive, eat, vote, buy, and live.

(2) Limit our "dominion" to "enlightened stewardship."

(3) Eat low on the food chain -- each pareve or milchig (vegetarian) meal saves hundreds of gallons of water, many pounds of carbon, and much topsoil, compared with one meat meal.

(4) Enjoy life to the fullest. Delight in small, simple things. Take nothing for granted. Too often we covet more 'stuff', rather than delighting in all that we already have. Blessings focus our awareness – Marge Piercy writes, "the art is in compressing attention" -- and cultivate gratitude. Treasure what you have, bless it, and learn to be satisfied by it.

(5) Begin practicing bal tashchit by not wasting trees. Americans use ½ billion trees each year for paper alone! To help, buy paper with 30% or more post-consumer pulp, and without dioxin-causing chlorine bleach. Save old single-sided memos or flyers, and use them in the copier or printer. Etc...

(6) Rav Zutra helps us see energy efficiency, and limiting our carbon footprint, as Jewish law. Bal tashchit plus climate change means we turn lights off... keep thermostats low... bike or walk, or drive cars with good mileage... use reusable plates & cups... use LED, not incandescent, bulbs... etc...

## שַׁבָּת SHABBAT / SABBATICAL – GREEN JUSTICE & SANITY

"Sabbath in our time! To cease for a whole day from all business, from all work, in the frenzied hurry-scurry of our time! To close the exchanges, the workshops and factories, to stop all railway services - great heavens! How would it be possible? The pulse of life would stop beating and the world perish!" The world perish? On the contrary, it would be saved. (Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal* 2:30)

To set apart one day a week for freedom ...a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our [fellows] and the forces of nature - is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for [our] progress than the Sabbath? (A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 1951, 28)

[The world] has never 'made Shabbos'!... It has never paused to say: 'making and doing and learning to control is not the goal'... Every seventh year all debts should be annulled, and the land should stand at rest. It should get to make Shabbos just like everybody else, because the earth (*adamah*) was as deeply God-given as *Adam*, its cousin. (Arthur Waskow, 'Rest,' *referencing the Sabbatical Laws from Leviticus 25*)

### OUR HUMBLE PLACE WITHIN CREATION

Earth is satisfied by the fruit of Your works ... the trees of God are satisfied; the cedars of Lebanon which God has planted -- there birds make their nests; the house of the stork is in the fir trees. The high hills are for the wild goats; the rocks are a hiding-place for the badgers... (Ps. 104:10-18)

Even those creatures you deem superfluous in this world -- like flies, fleas, and gnats -- nevertheless have their allotted task in the scheme of Creation. (Exodus Rabbah 10:1)

Do not believe that all beings exist for the sake of humanity's existence... [rather,] all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes... (Maimonides, 12th Cent. Egypt; *Guide of the Perplexed* III:13)

One day Honi was walking on the road, and saw a man planting a carob. Honi said to him, "since it takes 70 years for the carob to bear fruit, is it so clear to you that you will live 70 years and eat from it?" The man replied, "I came into a world full of carob trees. Just as my ancestors planted for me, so do I plant for my descendants." (Talmud Ta'anit 23a)

God took Adam and led Adam around all the trees of the Garden of Eden. And God said to Adam: "See My works, how good and praiseworthy they are?! And all that I have created, I made for you. [But,] be mindful then that you do not spoil and destroy My world -- for if you spoil it, there is no one after you to repair it." (Qohelet Rabbah at 7:13)

### TODAY – CLIMATE CHANGE; RESOURCES

Read: *Torah of the Earth I & II* (ed. Arthur Waskow, '00); *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit* (ed. Ellen Bernstein, '98); *Trees, Earth, and Torah* (ed. Elon-Hyman-Waskow, '99); *The Way into Jud. & the Env.* (Jeremy Benstein '06).

Surf: [www.coeil.org](http://www.coeil.org) (covering all eco-Jewish). [www.jewcology.org](http://www.jewcology.org) (misc). [www.iued.org.il](http://www.iued.org.il) & [www.heschel.org.il](http://www.heschel.org.il) (Israel). <http://http://interfaithpowerandlight.org> & [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org) (interfaith: DC-MD, check out [www.gwipl.org](http://www.gwipl.org)). [www.hazon.org](http://www.hazon.org) (sustainable food, bikes, shmita Teva Learning Center). [www.shalomctr.org](http://www.shalomctr.org) (Beyond Oil+). [www.canfeinesharim.org](http://www.canfeinesharim.org) (text). And more!



#### The Precautionary Principle

When you build a new house, you shall **make a parapet** for your roof – that you not bring bloodguilt upon our house, lest someone fall from it. (Dt. 22:8).

One is forbidden from gaining a livelihood at the expense of another's **health**. (R. Isaac b Sheshet 196, 14<sup>th</sup>C)

Life & death I've set before you, blessing & curse; **choose life**, so you & your descendants live. (Dt 30:19)

(7) Link *social & environmental* justice. Avoid toxins for you and for others in vinyl, pesticides, & coal.

(8) Traditionally, Shabbat is a day of *non-consumption* – of not buying things, driving, or flipping switches for electricity. However observant you may be, consume less – on Shabbat, and off!

(9) Shabbat stands for a value higher than money, bigger than producing and consuming. The answer to the ecological crisis lies in *valuing community and spirituality* – which are infinite – and not the finite material realm.

(10) *Biodiversity*, life's creativity, is in the millions of species who call Earth home. Our *wood* from cut rain-forests, *fish* from dead coral reefs, or *houses* and *malls* atop former swamps and fields, all diminish that diversity.

(11) If Maimonides is right, we must '*reduce our ecological footprint*,' change our ways, and use less – '*live more lightly on the Earth*' – so the rest of God's Creation can have its place too.

(12) Consider the future in all decisions. With free will given, "*choose life, that you and your children may live*" (Deut. 30:19) ובחרת בחיים - למען תחיה, אתה וזרעך

(13) "Explore, enjoy, protect." Become a true 'eco-Jew'; then act accordingly. '*It ain't easy bein' green*' – and 'it's tough to be a Jew' – but going green is key. As Jews, as citizens, and as human beings.

תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעשה לגדור ולאתשים דמים בביתך  
העדותי בכם היום את-השמים ואת-הארץ החיים  
והפועל נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה ובחרת בחיים למען  
תחיה אתה וזרעך:

*Lo alecha ha'm'lakha ligmor, v'lo ata ben khorin l'hibatel mimenah.* It's **not upon you to finish the task** -- but **neither are you free to desist from it**. (*Mishnah Avot 2:15*)



Jewish texts and values rarely point in just one direction; it's a gloriously wide-ranging tradition, shaped in different eras and cultural environments. Still, writ large, Judaism suggests an eco-ethic far more intense than what our society now practices. Jewish values can correct modern excesses, and bring us back into loving connection with Creation. Consider:

\* The creation story demands much from us as **enlightened stewards of Creation**. In this tradition, "fill the Earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28) is **conditional**. Rashi (11<sup>th</sup> century commentator citing an earlier source) explains, "if we merit it, *then* we rule; but if we don't merit it, we fall." To subdue the Earth is also a statement, not an order; it's descriptive, not prescriptive. After 12<sup>th</sup> century philosopher/legalist Maimonides says that "the Earth was *not* created for our sake" (*Guide* 3:13), he adds: "Gen. 1:28 comes merely **to inform us** about the human nature with which the Holy Blessed One has created us" – as if to say "yes humans, you *are* uniquely able to reshape the Earth in your image; I say so right at the start, so we can be clear who's really the boss!" Gen. 1:29-30 prescribe a vegetarian diet as the original ideal, and 1:31 reminds us that while humans in isolation aren't even called 'good', **the interconnected whole** of which we're a humble part is in fact 'very good.' We must **keep it whole**, per Gen. 2:15 – **לַעֲבֹדָה וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ** – "to serve & to guard the land".

\* A recurrent theme is that **God, not us, is the ultimate owner, the boss**. Leviticus 25 (describing the Sabbatical and Jubilee); Deuteronomy 11 (incorporated into our daily liturgy); Psalm 24 ("the Earth is God's and the fullness thereof," a rallying cry for social justice and environmental movements alike); and other texts remind us to **be humble in the face of Creation**. This is perhaps the core religious teaching to emphasize today, against the hubris with which we spew our carbon, sprawl our settlements, and slice through what remains of the wilderness and jungle and reefs where Creation is most diverse and glorious. **Humility**, a great virtue in Jewish thought, is what our species most needs to embody today.

\* The Jewish legal tradition frames a whole environmental ethic around Deut. 20:19, "*bal tashchit*" or "**thou shall not waste**." It is, for German 19<sup>th</sup> Century Orthodox Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, "the first and most glorious call of God." It's the great yardstick of righteousness in the medieval Sefer HaChinuch (530): "righteous people of good deeds are aghast at any wanton waste, and do all in their power to stop it," while "the wicked are not thus; they delight in destroying the world even as they destroy themselves." The Talmud (Shabbat 67b, Rav Zutra on oil versus naphtha fuel for lamps) even applies *bal tashchit* to carbon emissions, compelling us to use the best available technology and knowledge to burn fuel as efficiently as possible. **Rules and regulations** are holy tools – and **conservation** is a core Jewish practice.

\* Many other **commandments point toward ecological sensitivity**, as well: *tza'ar ba'alei chayim* (compassion for animals); *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* (making 'The Land' as habitable and sustainable as possible); and agrarian laws that cover crop rotation and letting the land lie fallow, in tandem with social concerns like saving gleanings and corners of fields for the poor and the stranger. Other laws are naturally applied to today's environmental crisis, such as Deuteronomy 22:8 – "when you build a house, put a parapet [low railing] around the roof" – the biblical basis for what ecologists now call "the **Precautionary Principle**," insisting that public safety and health come before private profits.



\* In Jewish liturgy and text, **we experience God through Creation** – all of Creation, imbued as it is with holiness and significance, forms one huge chorus of praise (Psalms 98, 148, 150, etc). If so, then we must protect all the glories of Creation in order to fully relate to God. As theologian-of-relationship Martin Buber (1878-1965) wrote, "finally, love of the Creator, and love of that which God has created, are one and the same." To be religious is to **love your human and non-human neighbor**. And it is to be concerned *l'dor vador* -- like God (Ex. 34:6-7), "**unto the thousandth generation**".

\* The Jewish calendar (solar like the Gregorian/Christian, *and* lunar like the Muslim), links us to sacred cycles of light. Our great annual festivals, all around harvests (Pesach, early spring; Shavuot, late spring; Sukkot, autumn), mark **sacred cycles of rain & growth & life**. The weekly cycle's Shabbat -- when tradition has us neither produce nor consume, but rather appreciate and enjoy -- is a striking antidote to all that ails today's society, economy, and polity. "A time of being rather of doing" (A. J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, '51), **Shabbat calls us to sacred sustainability**. While acquiring more "stuff" involves at least marginal environmental cost, the social-spiritual-communal rest and joy of Sabbath (and of *shmita* / sabbatical) can grow without limit.



In short, a strong environmental ethic emerges from Jewish tradition, insisting that we **do much more to protect what's left of Creation**, and inject humility and sustainability into what our one species is doing to the rest of the world. Many initiatives in the Jewish world are moving in just this direction – for more, see the national Jewish environmental coalition [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org); the eco-Jewish portal [www.jewcology.org](http://www.jewcology.org); great text materials from [www.CanfeiNesharim.org](http://www.CanfeiNesharim.org); sustainable food, "Jews on Bikes", *shmita*, and more via [www.hazon.org](http://www.hazon.org), plus green Jewish education at [hazon.org/teva](http://hazon.org/teva); Israeli environmentalism at [www.iued.org.il/english](http://www.iued.org.il/english) & [www.heschel.org.il](http://www.heschel.org.il); great resources via each major denomination (e.g. <http://rac.org/advocacy/issues/issueenv/>); plus key **interfaith** at [www.interfaithpowerandlight.org](http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org) & [www.NRPE.org](http://www.NRPE.org)...

Judaism reminds us that we're all in this together (as in the parable of a boat passenger who began to drill under their seat and 'justified' it in the name of 'private property', condemned in Lev. Rabbah 4:6). We must act strongly as *shomrei adamah*, defenders of Creation. And per Dr. King's "fierce urgency of now", we must ask with Hillel: "**If not now, when?**"





## Why Be a Jewish Environmentalist?

(R. Fred Scherf Dobb, COEJL, 2014)

First, **the state of Creation affects all of us**. Particulates and pollutants don't discriminate. All our good work on Jewish continuity and security, on Israel and world Jewry, on justice and democracy, threatens to be (literally) washed away by the threat of climate change, among other looming ecological challenges. It's in our own long-term interest to work on these issues. It's in *everyone's* long-term interest.

Second, from **community relations** we learn that we must cultivate allies in the larger society, and remain both relevant and credible, partnering in shared efforts. Others are likelier to support our particular agenda – support for Israel, religious liberty, funding of local initiatives -- if we have proven ourselves as solid coalition partners, genuinely concerned with the common good. Ecological issues are the ultimate 'common good', carrying special weight for younger folks in a generation with whom we need to build and maintain strong ties. Environmental justice issues, of particular concern for communities of color and low-income groups, are also a vital arena for ongoing connections with the Jewish community.

Third, our passion for **Jewish continuity** orients us toward environmental protection. Jews, especially younger and less-affiliated, share the growing social consensus behind ecology. Our community and its institutions must develop greener thought and take greener action in order to remain relevant and resonant to this and subsequent generations. Many under-affiliated Jews, of all ages, deeply 'get' the ecological crisis and its urgency, and will give no credence to any Jewish teaching or institution that isn't actively making green connections. We owe it to them, and to efforts at continuity, to reach out in sustainable ways that can keep them 'in.'



Finally (and foremost), **ecology is "a Jewish issue"** -- the depth of Jewish values, sacred text, and communal experience all point us toward an ethic of Creation care (see other side of this sheet), just as 'Jewish' as prayer, kashrut, or Shabbat... To say that we care for Creation, of course, does not automatically imply support for any particular initiative or strategy or piece of legislation; we must remain humble, even as we must apply Jewish values toward public policy in defense of Creation. Our holidays track nature's seasonal cycles, rooting us in the outdoors and in the larger world; our holy books bid us to preserve and protect God's good world, both halachically and aggadically (in law and lore); we are to avoid waste, observe Shabbat and sabbatical cycles, honor Creation, privilege future generations, respect animals, and more. These, with abundant other examples, establish **environmental efforts as an authentic, "organic" outgrowth of Jewish teaching and tradition** – and show how Jewish values can both align with, and help to drive, real social change.

## Why Be a Jewish Environmentalist?



First, there are many good reasons to be a **religious environmentalist**, via any faith tradition:

(a) Most Americans (and global citizens) identify as 'religious,' and all great religions address Creation care. So using religious language & imagery (and showing religious sensitivity) can help bring a **majority toward environmental protection**. And: if faith is yours, however strong (or weak) it may be, use it – **authenticity**, and **connection**, are key factors in bringing about enduring positive change.

(b) Every great social and political movement in our history, from independence to abolition to suffrage to civil rights, has **invoked religion**; every sustained justice effort has seen religious institutions and leaders play central roles. Environmentalism is no different; to succeed like these others, it too will be informed and partly led by faith communities.

(c) Against the slings and arrows and epicycles of political engagement, which can so easily overwhelm or disempower us, **we are sustained by faith** – as with Dr. King's enduring notions of the Beloved Community, and of the long moral arc of the universe bending toward justice. We must be in it for the long haul. [Jewish resources: Arthur Waskow's 1968 'aha moment' described in *Godwrestling*; Marge Piercy's powerful poem "The Art of Blessing the Day"].

And **Judaism, specifically**, offers key contributions to current social/political/eco- discourse:

(a) Every human, bar none, is uniquely created *b'tzelem Elohim* / in the Divine image – so a Jewish environmental outlook will evince real **concern for every person**, with special focus on those who are least advantaged. While mainstream ecological analyses too often leave out the people, ours will consider the human and the economic with the ecological, and consistently apply an '**environmental justice**' mindset.



(b) Consumerism is ingrained even within liberal & environmental circles; talk of living with less is counter-cultural. But Judaism is counter-cultural! **Shabbat**, and **shmita**/sabbatical, are a **profound critique** of the rat race of production and consumption, and a reminder that our best and holiest times are those when we enjoy rather than make – "being, not doing" (Heschel). And while sustainability may require **sacrifice**, that's not negative; it's **sacred** (*korban* / *karov* / close).

(c) Voluntary efforts, by industry or individuals, won't bring the swift dramatic changes demanded by the science. Only **law** and **regulation** can do that. Against American individualism, Judaism's communitarian spirit is desperately needed. Paul was half-right: Judaism *is* a religion of **law**; through law, **love** is made sustainable [H. Bialik].



(d) Divine concern is not measured in quarterly earnings reports or biannual electoral cycles, but in epochs; it's to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> and even 1000<sup>th</sup> generation (Ex. 34:7). The Jewish community must bring its values, with this kind of **long-term thinking**, into contemporary ecological discussion. Doing so is truly a life-and-death matter, for us & for those who follow ("choose life, that you *and your descendants* may live," Deut. 30:19). **L'dor vador**, from generation to generation, let's be among those who defend Creation.