

Greening Sustainable Synagogues:

**Resources for helping your congregation
to become *shomrei adamah***

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Greening Sustainable Synagogues

As a co-sponsoring organization of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (www.coejl.org) -- itself the Jewish 'quarter' of the interfaith National Religious Partnership for the Environment, www.nrpe.org), JRF and the broader Reconstructionist movement are already committed to an ecologically sustainable path. Below we offer additional resources to help you and your congregation or havurah to walk that path with greater ease, conviction, and spirit. These resources are arranged by categories, to simplify your search for the right material at the right time. Opportunities for learning and education precede those for action; issues concerning a community's physical plant are found toward the end. We are also happy to serve as resources ourselves, in any way possible. Thank you for being a *shomer/et adamah*, a defender of Earth, along with so many of our fellow Reconstructionists.

Nathan Martin, RRC student

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I. Torah: Resources for Education on Ecology and Judaism

General publications:

Benstein, Jeremy The Way Into Judaism and the Environment. Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, VT

Bernstein, Ellen ed. 1998 Ecology: the Jewish Spirit. Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, VT.

Bernstein, Ellen and Dan Fink, 1992. Let the Earth Teach you Torah

Biers-Ariel, Matt; Deborah Newbrun; Michal Fox-Smart, 2000. Spirit in Nature: Teaching Judaism and Ecology on the Trail. Berman House.

CAJE, 2001. Reinventing Jewish Environmental Education.

Elon, Ari; Hyman, Naomi; and Waskow, Arthur, eds. 1999 Trees, Earth, and Torah: A Tu B'Shvat Anthology. Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia.

Waskow, Arthur, 1991 Seasons of Our Joy. Beacon Press

Waskow, Arthur, ed. 2000 Torah of the Earth, Vols. 1 & 2. Jewish Lights: Woodstock, VT.

Website: www.coejl.org.

Experiential Education:

Teva Learning Center – Runs numerous youth seminars on Judaism and ecology, including their signature programs for Jewish day schools, and a yearly training seminar for Jewish educators. (Phone: 212-807-6376; www.tevacenter.org)

II. Avodah: Liturgy Reflecting Environmental Values

In the introduction to the 1945 Reconstructionist Prayer Book, we learn that "Each of us should learn to think of himself [sic] as though he were a cell in some living organism -- which, in a sense, he actually is -- in his relation to the universe or cosmos." Word for word, this expresses the then-unnamed 'Gaia hypothesis', wherein each creature is like a cell within the self-regulating organism known as Earth. Mordecai Kaplan and our framers add that the world "is more than nature; it is nature with a soul. That soul is God."

Respect for nature has been found in the siddur throughout its development; it has only become more visible in recent decades. Our own *Kol Hanesbama: Shabbat V'Chagim* is replete with many ecologically-

oriented poems (see Marge Piercy's "Alternative Nishmat" on pp. 232-33, and the entire "Nature" section on pp. 754-766) and *kavvanot* (in Ma'ariv alone, for instance: p. 20 on psalms; p. 68 on Sh'ma; p. 94 on G'vurot; and "And Then" on p. 127).

Conducting an environmentally-themed service is easy given these resources. Numerous prayers from the Shacharit liturgy already contain these thoughts; you, along with the "below-the-line" (BTL) readings, can bring these out. Along with the readings elsewhere in *Kol Hanesbama* and drawn from other sources, a short sample sustainable shacharit might include:

162, BTL, on "rofeh khol basar"

185, BTL, on Ps. 19

229, Psalm 148 – note that that which is not obviously useful or even dangerous for humans (*ha-khayab*/wild animal and *arazim*/non-fruit-bearing trees) sing praise to the One in equal measure with safe and useful creations (*behemah*/cattle and *etz pri*/fruit trees)

231, Psalm 150 – "let every thing (not just humans!) sing God's praises"

232-33, Marge Piercy's "Interpretive Nishmat," and Nishmat itself and BTL on p. 235, 236

247-269, the entire Yotzei liturgy (and many BTL comments) stand out with eco-themes

283, the second paragraph of the Sh'ma (from Deut. 11), and BTL

307 ff, the centrality of Shabbat as an 'eco-day' (see below), including BTL on 307 & 308

315, in Modim, we thank God for everyday miracles: the order of creation / *Seder Bereshit* itself (birth, life, nature, photosynthesis, etc), rather than the suspension of that natural order

323, Oseh Shalom -- "Shalom" (see also 321, etc.) comes from *Shalem*: whole, healthy, sustainable. In Recon nusach, our hope for peace extends to all who dwell on Earth (eco-justice?!)

Useful resources for Shabbat worship include the following readings:

On the Sabbath, the traditionally observant Jew does more than rest, pray, and refrain from ordinary work. There are at least three other elements of Sabbath observance that are relevant to stewardship: we create nothing, we destroy nothing, and we enjoy the bounty of the earth. In this way the Sabbath becomes a celebration of our tenancy and stewardship in the world.

Nothing is created, and this reminds us of God's supremacy as Creator and our comparative inadequacy. Nothing is destroyed, and this reminds us that the creations of this world are not ours to ruin. We enjoy the bounty of the earth, and this reminds us that although our work, if properly done, will uncover for us far more of God's bounty than we would otherwise have enjoyed, nevertheless God, and not human invention, is still the ultimate source of that bounty...

For Jews, it is the awareness of the Sabbath during the working days that can bring the realm of time and its accompanying sense of restraint and limit to stewardship. It is the Sabbath that defines the relationship between steward and Ruler. It is the Sabbath, ultimately, that completes and confirms the environmental wisdom of Judaism.

(David Ehrenfeld and Philip Bentley, 1985, *Judaism* 34:310-311)

'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, 19th Century German Orthodox Rabbi, *Judaism Eternal* 2:30)

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction – a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence from external obligations – 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 fellow humans and the forces of nature – is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for humanity’s progress than the Sabbath?

(Adapted from Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1951, *The Sabbath*, p. 28)

III. Gemilut Hasadim: Partnerships for Environmental Justice

Environmental activism should never come at the expense of our commitments to social, economic, and racial justice. At best, our tikkun olam committees and efforts can not only address both social and ecological concerns in our programs, but can combine the two. Our advocacy on global warming involves an eco-justice component, since the impacts of climate change are borne disproportionately by the poor, disempowered, and vulnerable. Many individual and local efforts showcase a uniquely Jewish or religious angle, uniting our simultaneous needs to protect Creation and humanity. Examples of Jewish involvement in coalitions working toward eco-justice include:

Alternatives for Community and Environment: Law and Education for Environmental Justice (<http://www.ace-ej.org>) -- Dorshei Tzedek member and COEJL board member Jodi Sugerman-Brozan is the Program Director, working among other issues on bringing equity to public transit in Boston.

Green Restaurant Association (www.dinegreen.com) – COEJL activist Michael Oshman founded this group, originally in San Diego but now throughout California and extending nationally, dedicated to helping the restaurant industry become sustainable.

Children’s Environmental Health Network (www.cehn.org) – This group, empowers under-resourced families and communities to protect children’s environmental health.

Blue Vinyl and Healthy Building Network’s “**Building in Good Faith**” initiative – award-winning documentary filmmaker Judith Helfand tells her own story (drawn heavily from her Jewish roots on Long Island) along with that of environmental racism and injustice through the vinyl industry. The upshot of her organizing efforts is that we should avoid PVC as much as possible (www.myhouseisyourhouse.org/).

Other remarkable efforts have taken place, including a coalition to stop the placement of an incinerator in an under-empowered neighborhood of St. Louis, in which members of the St. Louis Reconstructionist Minyan played vital roles. The cover story of the Jewish Fund for Justice newsletter recently featured such a Jewish / African-American partnership around environmental justice. Opportunities abound...

IV. Holidays: Greening our Celebrations

Find extensive programmatic and liturgical celebrations for the High Holy Days, Sukkot, Hannukah, Tu B’Shvat, Pesach, Earth Day, and Tisha B’Av at the COEJL website (<http://www.coejl.org/celebrate/index.php>). There is information for schools, adults, rabbis, etc... The Hannukah section, for example, offers among other ideas: a sheet of “Eight Actions for Eight Nights”; green gift ideas; blessings along the theme of “Let there be Renewable Light”; how to distribute at cost a bulk order of compact fluorescent light bulbs that use just ¼ the energy of regular

incandescent bulbs (halfway toward the Maccabean eight-fold efficiency goal, when one day's worth of oil lasted for eight!).

Other resources for environmental holiday celebrations are found in the writings of Arthur Waskow, particularly *Seasons of our Joy* and *Down to Earth Judaism*; in Shomrei Adamah of Greater Washington DC's 1995 *Green Shalom Guide*; in an early Shomrei Adamah (national, founded with JRF help in 1988) publication called *Greening the Holidays* (for children) by Ellen Bernstein, and elsewhere.

V. Tikkun Olam – Local and National Advocacy

National – Jewish/Religious

Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) (www.coejl.org) COEJL, the primary environmental voice of the American Jewish community, advocates through the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (www.rac.org) and the Jewish Council on Public Affairs (www.jewishpublicaffairs.org). COEJL, a membership organization, represents 29 major national Jewish organizations, including the JRF and the RRA.

National Religious Partnership for the Environment (www.nrpe.org) -- The NRPE is a formal alliance of major faith groups and denominations across the spectrum of Jewish and Christian communities and organizations in the United States, including COEJL, the Eco-Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches, the Evangelical Environmental Network, and the US Catholic Conference's justice office.

Israel Union for Environmental Defense / Adam Teva V'Din (www.iued.org.il) – Israel's first western-style environmental organization, modeled by American *olim* (immigrants) on the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), to protect Israel's environment primarily through legislative and judicial means.

National – Secular/Environmental

NRDC – (www.nrdc.org) The National Resources Defense Council uses law, science, and the support of national membership to protect the planet's wildlife and wild places and to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all living things.

Sierra Club – (www.sierraclub.org) The Sierra Club promotes environmental conservation by influencing public policy through legislative, administrative, legal, and electoral means.

American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy (www.aceee.org) The ACEEE is dedicated to advancing energy efficiency as a means of promoting both economic prosperity and environmental protection.

Greenpeace (www.greenpeace.org) Greenpeace uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems and force solutions.

The Nature Conservancy (www.tnc.org) The Nature Conservancy preserves habitats and species by buying the lands and waters they need to survive.

Local

COEJL chapters are already in place in many metropolitan areas where JRF affiliates are located: including Boston, Philadelphia, Southeast Michigan, St. Louis, Los Angeles, the Bay Area, and Eugene/Portland. Other budding Jewish environmental groups are in New York, Washington, Chicago, Atlanta, and other communities with a strong Reconstructionist presence. In many cases, our JRF affiliates are already quite involved. We urge you to find out if there's an established or information COEJL chapter in your area, and if not, to help establish one! Check www.coejl.org for more information on regional/local groups; if interested in getting more involved, contact the COEJL office, info@coejl.org.

Important environmental advocacy takes place at the local level every day. It is vitally important for the Jewish community, the Reconstructionist movement, and your synagogue or havurah to be represented in the many secular environmental efforts that are happening in your community.

VI. Eco-Practice –Greening your Daily, Personal, & Community Life

General

Transforming our lives in directions that allow us to lessen our “environmental footprint” in the world often results from a gradual process of adaptation. Thankfully today there are increasing resources and information that help our communities and us to incorporate greener practices. Perhaps the best mnemonic for thinking about greening our practice is the **three “R’s”**-

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle



Are there ways in which we can reduce our use of materials and resources to live a comfortable life? Are we re-using what we can? And do we have systems in place to make sure that materials can be recycled back into our larger economy? The following resources are some samples of what is available to support our personal transformation.

The Green Guide (www.thegreenguide.com) – The Green Guide is an environmental lifestyle newsletter and website resource for practical everyday actions benefiting environmental and personal health.

Center for a New American Dream (www.newdream.org) –The Center for a New American Dream is a resource for personal, institutional, and societal sustainability.

Composting / Gardening

Composting is a vital part of sustainability – it diverts organic waste from the waste-stream (landfills or incineration), and converts it into healthy soil. Composting can be incorporated into the synagogue setting fairly easily. The Germantown Jewish Center in Philadelphia uses the dirt produced by their composting to plant an Israel garden on the grounds of the synagogue. Gardening can also be an important way to connect the synagogue to its environment. Additional resources for composting include:

The U.S. Composting Council (www.compostingcouncil.org) The U.S. Composting Council is a trade and professional organization promoting compost.

Earth 911 (www.earth911.org) Earth 911 is an organization dedicated to providing information on backyard composting, as well as many other green ideas.

Mastercomposter (www.mastercomposter.com/) Mastercomposter is a web site that gives information on bins, tools and many other issues. It can connect you to the master compost program nearest you and answer your questions via its message board.

EPA's composting web page (www.epa.gov/compost/) The EPA provides additional background information on regulations, educational web sites, and publications.

Recycling

Various materials that are used in a synagogue environment can be recycled. Background information and resources for recycling include:

The Internet Consumer Recycling Guide (www.obviously.com/recycle/) The Internet Consumer Recycling Guide provides basic information and resources for consumer recycling with great tips for beginners.

The National Recycling Coalition (www.nrc-recycle.org) The NRC is a non-profit organization whose members include recycling and environmental organizations; large and small businesses; federal, state and local governments; and individuals. The organization includes a listing of state-affiliated organizations and has additional resources on their web site.

Global Recycling Network (grn.com/) GRN is a site that provides a wealth of resources and information on recycling of various materials.

Recycle Bank (www.recyclebank.com) Recycle Bank is company that will actually pay you to recycle! Check out their website for participating neighborhoods and townships and keep an eye out as they continue to expand.

Green Electricity

The purchase of electricity produced from renewable energy resources is a relatively simple way to reduce the environmental impact of energy use at a synagogue. Useful web sites for this include:

Green-e (www.green-e.org) Green-e is a non profit organization that certifies renewable electricity products that meet the environmental and consumer protection standards established by the Green-e Program.

Replacing light bulbs in your synagogue with low-energy bulbs is also a great way to save money and the environment at the same time.

Greener Transportation

U.S. transportation sector emissions are one of the most significant contributors to the growth of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere (the cause of global warming), as well as local air pollution. Lessening our driving can be an important component of a synagogue greening strategy. Options include:

Carpooling: EPA's site (www.epa.gov/rtp/transportation/carpooling/carpooling.htm)

Carpooling web sites including:

AlterNet rides (alternetrides.com)

Carpool world (www.carpoolworld.com)

Car cooperatives: See (www.autoshare.com)

Alternative Transportation: bicycle, walking, mass transit. The Coalition for Appropriate Transportation (<http://www.car-free.org/>) provides some suggestions for alternative transportation.

Use of more efficient vehicles: Options of hybrid vehicles are increasing and also becoming more affordable.

Organic Food

Organic Consumers Association (www.organicconsumers.org) The OCA promotes food safety, organic farming and sustainable agricultural practices in the U.S. and internationally

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (www.nal.usda.gov/afsic) -- a general web resource on organic agriculture, community supported agriculture.

Purchase and Use Environmentally Friendly Materials (e.g. cleaning supplies, paints, recycled paper, office supplies, etc.) – see Center for a New American Dream's "Responsible Purchasing Guide for Faith Communities" (www.newdream.org), or open the pages of any environmental publication for ideas and resources.

VII. Hiddur Mishkan – Construction Choices, Energy Use & Audits

Redesigning and retrofitting an existing building to reduce its energy and environmental impact is both a challenging and rewarding process. Greener buildings are a good long-term investment. They are healthier places to spend time in, cost less to operate, and represent the translation of our values into concrete actions. We are including some initial resources that could be useful getting technical support and learning about what opportunities exist when thinking about improving the building.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Green Buildings Site & Energy Star Congs.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has designed a program geared toward churches and synagogues to help them become highly energy efficient. The Energy Star Congregations program (www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=small_business.sb_congregations) offers technical and consulting support, information on opportunities, and links synagogues into a national network of religious organizations working on improving their buildings. In addition, the EPA provides general information on green buildings in a single portal website designed to give convenient general information on the topic (www.epa.gov/greenbuilding/).

Green Buildings Information Council (greenbuilding.ca) The GBIC is a non-profit organization that disseminates information about energy and environmental issues in the building sector. GBIC itself is a small organization with extensive international links, and through this Web Site it brings you a broad range of information from other sources and organizations around the world, all of which are separately identified.

Green Building Concepts (greenconcepts.com/) Green Concepts is a source of reports and guides for building an energy and resource efficient home, and knowing why sustainable building, or green architecture, is important to ameliorate greenhouse gas emissions.

Oikos: Green Construction Source (www.oikos.com) Oikos is dedicated to information on energy efficiency and sustainable building construction. The site offers architects, designers, building contractors, consultants and consumers detailed information on products and techniques.

U.S. Green Buildings Council (www.usgbc.org/) The USGBC provides services to its membership and constituents, including building owners and managers, product manufacturers, architects/engineers and others with vested interests in the greening of buildings and the communities in which they reside. The Council provides membership services to these organizations to enhance their businesses, including information sharing, networking opportunities, business leads, and publicity.

Using Green Building Consultants – Find them in your area (they're there!). In PA for example, Scot Horst of Pennsylvania Power and Light (Horst@SevenGroup) audits synagogues and churches. There is a qualified network of consultants who work in various areas.

U.S. Department of Energy – Office of Energy Efficiency, Energy Efficiency Clearinghouse (www.eere.energy.gov/) EREC offers information and assistance to a broad audience (consumers, educators and students, builders, businesses, government agencies, entrepreneurs) on a wide range of topics by providing publications, customized responses, and referrals to energy organizations.

Environmental Building News Magazine (www.buildinggreen.com/) EBN is an international publication on environmentally sustainable design and construction. The website features news, a calendar of events, an annotated "green links" page, and highlights from past issues, including many detailed product reviews.

Green Building Resource Guide (www.greenguide.com/) In this guide, mainly for homebuilders, each of the nearly 600 product listings includes a brief product description, icons representing categories of environmental benefit, contact information for the manufacturer, and a cost comparison with its most likely conventional alternative. Icons identify nontoxic, recycled-content, resource efficient, long life-cycle and environmentally conscious products. You can order the Green Building Resource Guide in two forms: a reference manual or a CD-ROM database.