

# SAVING THE PLANET

*High Holy Days supplement 2019 - 5780*



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# A WINDOW OF REPAIR FOR THE PLANET

ELAN EZRACHI

The High Holy Days are closely associated with food - festive meals, special traditional dishes and colourful rituals such as dipping apples in honey. Traditions from East and West infuse the High Holy Days with activities that involve offerings, blessings and eating special food. All our senses are activated. Refraining from eating on Yom Kippur also reminds us about food.

The food-related practices emphasise abundance, elegance, a sense of achievement and the licence to splurge on high quantities and expensive items. The pomegranate, with its myriad seeds, is the beloved fruit

symbolising the season of plenty. The celebratory expression involves eating costly animal delicacies: beef brisket, lamb and fish.

On the table we place silver cups and other Judaica objects, imported goods, expensive wines and more. And once we are seated around the elegant table, we show off our new wardrobe of fancy clothes, shoes and jewellery. Gifts are often exchanged. A similar mindset occurs around the celebration of Passover.

In big families and community gatherings, we also tend to use throw-away goods and create a huge amount of waste. These are all common ways

Jews practice their holidays and traditions.

From reading through the powerful set of articles in this publication it appears that we need to reconsider these practices. Almost every activity mentioned involves consumption, or rather, overconsumption. And even though the High Holy Days are a “once-a-year” symbolic activity, it is important that the message of concern and restraint starts here. The state of the planet requires significant lifestyle changes, holidays included.

Although we know we can change our habits to make a difference, there is also a broader question raised by the reflective climate of the New Year: is there an obligation on Jews to make a difference?

As we all know, the climate crisis is a global crisis. What can a small and scattered group like the Jewish people do? Our contributors, from Australia, Israel, Europe and the US, think Jews have an important role to play. Jews can make a difference in specific channels of classical and contemporary ideas as well as in actions. Moreover, they offer a range of precedents, rooted within our foundation texts, articulating the Biblical imperative to practice responsible stewardship of the earth.

Fast forward to modern Israel, that

tiny country in the Middle East which may not consciously invoke the Bible in its environmental pioneering but is undeniably making a difference: desalination plants, solar energy and drip irrigation – these are all innovations that stem from Israel and affect the entire world (this does not preclude the fact that in Israel and in the occupied territories there is much work needed at the local level).

Our contributors address many of these issues. They are spiritual leaders, social activists, business leaders and politicians. They reflect on global trends as well as on local communities and personal lifestyles. They agree that though the planet is on the verge of a catastrophe, there is a window of repair. And they add a Jewish perspective.

The liturgy on Rosh Hashana is a re-enactment of Creation, *Ha-Yom Harat Olam* (today the world was created). The implicit message is that God began the process and humans are assigned to be the custodians of Creation. Our special publication raises a set of ideas and practices that apply to our day-to-day living and suggests that we can and must have an impact on the entire world.

L'Shana Tova  
Elan Ezechai



# JUDAISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE

RABBI DR BENJAMIN ELTON

The strong consensus of scientific opinion is that the Earth's climate is changing and this is the result of human activity. This change in climate is already having deleterious effects which will become even more drastic unless action is taken soon. There will be more droughts and heatwaves, hurricanes will become stronger and more intense, sea levels will rise, the Arctic will lose its ice, ecosystems will be disrupted.



This trend will affect all life, including human life: where we can live, what there is to eat, the natural events we must endure. Do we have a religious duty to do anything about it?

The first and most obvious source of a religious obligation is our duty to each other. Leviticus 19:16 instructs: "You shall not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord". If our fellow men and women are going to suffer, even die, as a result of climate change that we have caused, then we have a responsibility to avert it. That is straightforward, but there is another

possible aspect we need to explore: Do we have any God-given responsibilities to the planet itself and its non-human creatures?

At first glance, we seem to have no such obligations. The Earth is ours to rule and to do with as we wish. The Psalms tells us:

*"The heavens are the Lord's, but the earth he has given to the children of man"*  
(Psalm 115:16).

That right dates to the beginning of humanity and the people within in. The

story of creation in the first chapter of Genesis unambiguously give humanity dominion over the rest of the world and everything that is in it:

*"God said, 'Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.'" (Genesis 1:26).*

When Nachmanides, the medieval Spanish Rabbinic commentator (1194-1270) looked at that verse, he understood that the Torah has given us tremendous licence to harness the world.

He wrote: "God gave them power and dominion over the world, to manipulate the animal kingdom, to build and to uproot, to mine the ground for metals and everything of a like nature".

That is indeed what we do. We breed animals, chop down forests to create pasture, derive metals, oil, gas and precious stones from the earth. Human beings have always done that. The question is only whether it is done responsibly and sustainably.

If I own a home, and I want to trash it, that might be foolish. It might have regrettable consequences for my own wellbeing, but it remains my right. That is not true if I am housesitting for someone else. They did not lend me their home to

*"We can enjoy the world, without endangering it. That is the golden mean that the Jewish tradition wants us to seek out."*

destroy, only to maintain.

The Rabbis asserted our duty to maintain our earthly home, as an implied quid pro quo for being given such a beautiful world to inhabit. The Midrash (early rabbinic exegesis) on the book of Ecclesiastes makes this point emphatically:

*When the Blessed Holy One created the first human, God took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: "Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And all that I have created, it was for you that I created it. Pay attention that you do not corrupt and destroy My world: if you corrupt it, there is no one to repair it after you."* (Kohelet Rabbah 7:13).

God gives us a stark warning. If we ruin the world then no one, not even God

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Himself, will repair it for us. We have a unique capacity to destroy the world and a unique capacity to preserve it. We are instructed to keep it in good condition, and if we do not, the consequence and the punishment will be the same.

Responsible stewardship of the world is therefore the expectation of the biblical and rabbinic traditions. That ancient message was taken up by rabbis in the industrial age. Nowadays we are well-aware of the dangers to the planet that come from overconsumption. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) warned us about this in his book discussing the philosophy of the commandments Horeb.

*Only for wise use has God laid the world at our feet when God said to humanity, "subdue the world and have dominion over it." (Genesis 1:28). Destruction does not only mean making something purposely unfit for its designated use; it also means trying to attain a certain aim by making use of more things and more valuable things when fewer and less valuable ones would suffice consuming more than is necessary.*

If we only consumed what we needed, the dangers of climate change would be radically reduced. We would be able to take advantage of the permission Nachmanides identified in the Torah, without straying into the destruction the Rabbis warn us against.

We can enjoy the world, without endangering it. That is the golden mean that the Jewish tradition wants us to seek out.

# AN ENVIRONMENTAL BYSTANDER NO MORE

REBECCA FORGASZ

My journey into the world of climate activism began less than a year ago, when my sister, Rachel, and I decided to educate ourselves about climate change and figure out how we could make a difference.

I had known about climate change for many years, of course. I went to see Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* back in 2006, and remember feeling shocked and disturbed. This lasted for a few weeks, maybe months, and then it disappeared off my radar. Certainly, in recent years, I hadn't given the issue much thought.

I was busy with a full-time job and two young children; I had no headspace, let alone time, to think about such seemingly abstract and far-away issues. And I probably thought there were plenty of good people working on this issue. Basically, I had my head in the sand.

Over the first few months that my sister and I met, I started to hear people talking not about climate change but about the climate emergency and the need to act with speed and urgency if we are to prevent an irreversible chain of catastrophic impacts that could render large parts of the planet uninhabitable, or, worst case scenario, see the extinction of humankind.

Over these months, I experienced feelings of intense fear, grief, and anger. I felt a sense of disbelief that people weren't running around in the streets like Chicken Little shouting "the sky is falling, the sky is falling", because the sky may not be falling, but the ice is melting, the oceans are dying and the earth is burning.

And then one day, the penny dropped. I was talking to the CEO of Courage to Care, an organisation in our community that does important work educating non-Jewish school students about the Holocaust. He told me that their focus was not on the events of the Holocaust, but on one of its the key moral lessons – not to be a bystander.

They usually talk to students about not being a bystander to racism or even the bullying they see in the school yard. As we were talking, it occurred to me that climate change is the greatest catastrophe confronting humankind, yet so many of us are standing by, letting it happen. We are being bystanders.

“One of the key moral lessons of the Holocaust is not to be a bystander.”

I thought about my kids, 20 years from now, looking at me and asking, "Twenty years ago when the world still could have done something, everyone knew what was happening. You knew what was happening. What did you do?" It felt unbearable to me to imagine saying to them, "I did nothing. I just carried on life as it had always been." It became clear to me that I was not going to be a bystander.

With a background as an educator and public speaker, I decided to do what I did best. Together with my sister, I developed an interactive presentation aimed at raising

awareness about climate change, initially among our personal and professional networks. We wanted to take them on the same journey to "awakening" that we had been on.

In March, we invited 14 friends and colleagues to my home to participate in our first session. Among the attendees were four people who had been engaged with the issue for far longer than me and had been thinking about doing something to mobilise the Jewish community. We decided to form the Jewish Climate Action Group, with the aim of raising awareness and inspiring action in the Jewish community.

So why a Jewish climate group? Eytan Lenko, one of the group's co-founders, wrote in a recent op-ed piece in the *Australian Jewish News*: "Australia's Jewish community is one of the most engaged and organised in the country. We have strong institutions that get involved in national issues such as marriage equality, refugees and the rise of racism.

"Many of us individually volunteer with our schools, synagogues, sporting clubs and the care of our elderly. Jewish philanthropy is helping to solve many of our social problems and are great benefactors to arts and culture. However, climate change is a societal issue that we are not engaging with in a significant way."

The Jewish Climate Action Group is working to change that. We have run numerous sessions, adapted from the one I

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developed with my sister, for small groups in people's home raising awareness about the climate emergency and providing a Jewish perspective on the importance of taking personal responsibility and action.

In May, we held an event attended by over 200 people and called on the Jewish community to "vote climate" in the federal election; to add climate policy to the mix of issues they would take into consideration when deciding who to vote for.

That election saw a party returned to power with climate policies that were rated four out of 100 by the Australian Conservation Foundation. Despite this, we are determined to keep moving forward. We have plans to evolve our group into a small but potent professional organisation that will harness the social capital and philanthropic culture of the Jewish community to create a powerful movement advocating for and acting against climate change.



# CAN WE CHANGE BEFORE THE CLIMATE DOES?

YOSEF ABRAMOWITZ

My wife, a rabbi, used to have us skip shul with the kids on the second day of Rosh Hashanah to hike around Walden Pond in celebration of the birthday of the world. The kids would run ahead, shofar in hand, to find a beautiful spot to do family tashlich, as the colourful leaves of the surrounding woods would wave to us in the gentle wind.



The small pond in Concord, Massachusetts has an outsized influence in Western letters and thought due to the writings of Henry David Thoreau, a student of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who lived simply for two years in a basic cabin and wrote of his simple life. His transcendent thoughts on nature, the need for a spiritual awakening and the realisation how much humanity is inseparable from nature all flow through his signature book, *Walden*.

So much of Rosh Hashanah, and the Ten Days of Repentance, is about prayers, food and supplications that one would be forgiven

for missing one of the central tenets of the holiday, taught by Thoreau: That material goods cannot fix inner brokenness. And only by fixing inner brokenness can we truly stand up to injustice in government and economic corruption in the world.

This scorching year will determine for millions of people who shall live and who shall die. Who by water - super storms and

rising sea levels; and who by fire - increased wildfires due to drought. Who by famine - due largely to climate change and who by thirst, with growing desertification. And who by earthquakes - which now plague lands being fracked; and who by plague, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) warning that diseases will rapidly spread by bugs migrating from increasing heat zones. And who will be at peace, who shall wander - note the record number of refugees in the world; and who shall be pursued.

These Days of Repentance are truly awe-some and we must repent not just with

beating our fists on our hearts but with action. The Jewish people have shown that when we put our minds to work, we can make miracles happen. We demonstrated that clearly with the improbable return to Zion after 2000 years, the various rescue operations of Jews in far-flung countries and the creation of one of the most innovative economies in history.

This Rosh Hashanah there is no more noble cause for the Jewish people than saving humanity itself, ensuring that God's covenant not to wipe out the planet with rising waters will be - in some small measure - because of our actions.

It is for this purpose that we have been created, that we have survived and flourished. There is no higher fulfilment of the Jewish mission than to honour and save the

*“Religion, catalysed by the Jewish people, can save the planet. Greenhouse gas emissions in Israel on Shabbat are reduced by a third.”*

majesty of God's creation and to do so as individuals and as part of a global Jewish collective with Israel as our national platform.

It is time for the Jewish people to “choose life so that you and your children may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

This can be accomplished by community actions, positive examples from our leaders, vastly increasing donations for green activists in Israel and investing in sustainability, and, most importantly, by a grand theological awakening.

The process of raising, feeding, killing and transporting beef is one of the most destructive forces on the planet and demand is only

Winner of Israel's Green Globe Award in the Knesset, Yosef Abramowitz serves as CEO of green energy developer Energiya Global Capital, was named by CNN as one of the world's top six Green Pioneers and served on the Israeli negotiating team to the Paris Climate Conference.



increasing. Your grandma's brisket and that pastrami on rye collectively contribute as much greenhouse gas emissions as all the world's cars and trucks. By the next Shmita year (sabbatical year) in 2021, let's eliminate all kosher beef consumption.

Chicken has one quarter of the carbon footprint of beef and plant-based beef substitutes are only getting better. Tel Aviv has been ranked by the *Independent* newspaper as “the vegan capital of the world”. Jewish communities worldwide should follow suit. Making this switch can be an example for other communities.

The other switch we can make with ripple effects globally is to electric vehicles. By the 2021 sabbatical year, let's decree that anyone who purchases a combustion engine car in the Jewish community will be committing a *hillul Hashem* (desecration of God's name). We are working now in Israel to ban the sale of petrol cars, and a draft government decision on electric vehicles awaits a new government.

According to WHO, about six million people die each year from air pollution. Transportation contributes about 14 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, which is accelerating deaths by wildfires, extreme droughts, supercharged storms, civil wars, and soon a jump in sea levels.

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# SHABBAT'S NEW ROLE IN A CONSUMER ERA

EINAT KRAMER

*“Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh day we try to dominate the self.”*

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

One of my strangest experiences when I was active in a student environmental organisation (Green Course) was our raid on shopping malls in Beer Sheva during a Buy Nothing Day (BND), an international day of protest against consumerism. As we were going up and down the escalators urging passersby to abandon the consumption culture and devote themselves to what really matters, I couldn't stop thinking that there already was a 'Buy Nothing Day' that occurred every week.

On this day, I consciously leave the world of “doing”, refrain from consuming and dedicate myself to family, community and spirituality. This day has an impact on my life far greater than a once-a-year, self-righteous BND. Years later, a similar thought crossed my mind when a famous advertiser that became environmentally concerned spoke to me about an idea he was promoting. It was to place stickers on cars that read: this car does not pollute the environment on day X, meaning that on that day the car was parked. Once again, I wondered how this innovative idea was not tied to the fact that there are indeed many cars that are not used for 25 hours in the course of a week.

Sadly, in today's Israel, the concept of Shabbat is lost between religious people who resist applying the language of Shabbat into

the current social activism discourse, and secular people who are afraid of any attempt to impose Jewish concepts in Israel's public sphere. However, we have in recent years heard new voices calling for the positioning of Shabbat as a foundational model for a progressive society. These initiatives are labelled “Israeli Shabbat”.

*“As a collective day of rest, Shabbat can become a domain of social justice, since by reducing consumption people will work less and regenerate.”*

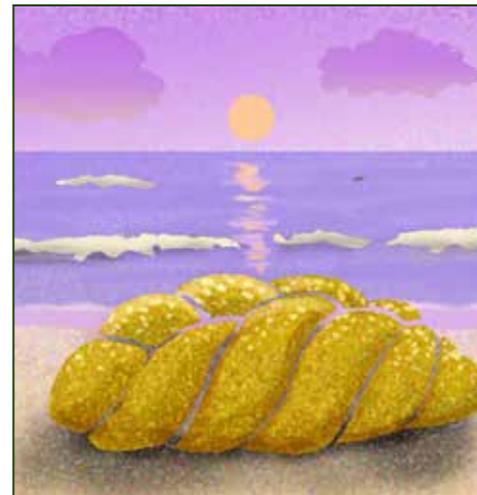
Here are a few ideas that come out of this concept:

A weekly day of rest is already an accepted notion around the world. But the Jewish (Israeli) Shabbat offers more than rest. Shabbat offers a day when people are also free from production and consumption and can focus on self-fulfilment in areas that are typically pushed aside in the race for materialistic achievements.

Both the blind belief in economic growth as a key to progress and the practice of unrestricted consumption need to be examined. The high pace of growth and

consumption has turned the dream of progress into a nightmare, not to mention those who cannot participate in the shopping extravaganza. Vulgar consumption leads to a vulgar consumption of time and a dramatic change in the pace of life. Work hours are longer and leisure time for family, friends and community dwindle.

This pattern can also take place on Shabbat, when consumerism can be seen as self-fulfilment, quality time with the children or socialising with friends. Shabbat designed as a day of rest from consumption has the potential to create a space for the real values behind these words. This would restore the classical meaning of Shabbat, *Shamor Ve'zachor* (keep and remember), cease and renew, and so on, an opportunity to taste the “world to come”.



Another central value in a democratic system that can be enhanced by Shabbat is freedom for the individual. In this regard, “freedom” is not liberation from restrictions and prohibitions but rather freedom for – an encouragement to create, to insert meaning to time and space.

As a collective day of rest, Shabbat can become a domain of social justice, since by reducing consumption people will work less

Einat Kramer is the founder and director of Teva Ivri, an organisation dedicated to the interplay of Judaism and the environment. She has written a paper on Jewish-Israeli approaches to sustainable economy for the Rio +20 Summit.



and regenerate. Moreover, the people who tend to work on days of rest tend to be from lower socio-economic strata. The design of an Israeli Shabbat will provide opportunities for free choice and quality leisure time, and by doing so strengthening individuals, families, communities and local economies.

My dream is that Israel will have a public policy that will set boundaries and set distinct time frames enabling a true day of rest, free of labor, production and shopping; a day that the market economy does not rule; a day that is protected from economic activity and unfair competition. On the local level, there should be a discussion on how to construct Shabbat in a fashion that will not stand in the way of local trade and local economy, and secure a lifestyle that meets basic human needs and an enhanced quality of life.

Viewing Shabbat in such a way will alleviate the image of Shabbat in Israel as a problem that needs to be solved by compromises and political arrangements. Shabbat, as described here, is a part of a solution, of a real *Tikkun* (rectification) in Israeli society. Shabbat is one of the great gifts that Judaism has given to humanity. In the modern State of Israel, we can elevate the value of this gift and renew its meaning.

*Special thanks to Dr Jeremy Benstein, board member of Teva Ivri, for his inspiration*

# OUR MORAL AND PRACTICAL COMPASS

RABBI FRED SCHERLINDER DOBB

Our actions, and their consequences, endure. Our iniquity poisons the wells from which our own great grandchildren will yet drink. That notion is no metaphor, or figure of speech; it's both Torah and science. Throughout our holy days we recite the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy: *Adonai, Adonai, El Rachum v'Chanun* (God, God, Ruler who is Compassionate and Kind). Depending on how you count, that final attribute, *v'nakeh*, makes just 12.

What's missing from the original quote (Ex. 34:7) is quite the opposite: *v'nakeh LO yimakeh*. And God wipes the slate clean? No, God *doesn't* wipe it clean! God passes the guilt of parents onto their children; their grandchildren; and onto the third and fourth generation.

Methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, lasts, on average, a couple decades. This is bad enough. Carbon dioxide endures for a century. Yes, the coal burned for a moment's power in Paris or Perth and the petrol consumed to get once around Pittsburgh or Petach Tikva will wreak atmospheric havoc long after we're gone. It's just not sustainable, or just – but that's the scientific reality in which we're all complicit. Changes will require moral clarity and spiritual fortitude. Enter Judaism.

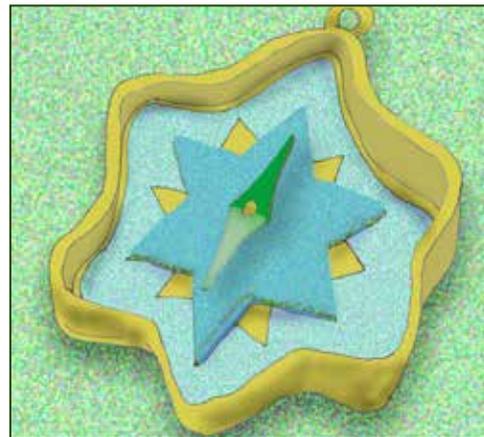
Jews tend to be pro-science. The Talmudic rabbis who shaped Jewish law sought secular knowledge and empiricism for their rulings. Medieval masters were agronomists (Rashi), doctors (Maimonides), and astronomers (Rabbi Levi Ben Gershon). We thank the maker of the natural world and bring our

God-given intellect to its study.

So where are we now, as Jews, on the defining challenge of our times? In the beginning, God announced the interconnected Creation project as *tov me'od*, (very good, Gen. 1:31) – yet in today's clear scientific consensus, we are now remaking the biosphere in *our* image. Our fossil fuel addiction, and the concomitant spike in atmospheric carbon dioxide, shows no sign of abating.

The good news: We can still make a difference. Here are seven key Jewish values for this ecologically imperilled era:

**Social Justice** (*Tzedek*): Many of us still feel removed from the most direct consequences of the climate crisis. The poor, who



can least afford the needed adaptations, are the first and worst-hit victims of climate devastation. If we're serious about feeding the hungry (see worsening droughts and floods), loving the stranger-immigrant (growing numbers of climate refugees), and

protecting the vulnerable (rising sea levels), we'd best curb our carbon, pronto.

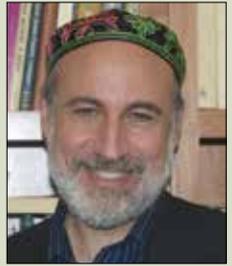
**Creation Care** (*Shmirat ha'Teva*): Martin Buber said: "Love of the Creator and love of that which God has created are, finally, one and the same." To love Creation is "to serve and to protect" it (*Povdah ul'shomrah*, Gen. 2:15); until we emit net zero carbon, we fail this key calling. Noah was the first endangered species activist, and the rainbow covenant was with all life on Earth, yet countless species go extinct on our watch, from the Great Barrier Reef to the Amazon to our own backyards.

**Humility** (*Anavah*): In the Mussar (ethical analysis) stream of Jewish thought, we seek to strengthen our own attributes. Here, humility looms large. Do we take up the right amount of space? Collectively, humans now take up far more than we should; the rest of Creation suffers as a result. Psalm 24:1 couldn't be clearer: "The Earth is God's and the fulness thereof" – God's, *not* ours. And Deuteronomy 11, also recited as the Shema's second verse, warns that if we turn away from what's right and godly, we "will speedily be evicted from the good land."

**Frugality** (*Kimutz*): A more obscure Mussar attribute, frugality, or thrift, is not just financial but ecological. Deut. 20 forbids cutting down even an enemy's fruit trees in wartime, which undergirds the law of *Bal Tashchit*, that we should waste nothing. Not even fuel. The Talmud's tractate Shabbat 67b has us use either naphtha or olive oil, so different lamps burn more efficiently, which applies just as well to today's internal combustion engines. "Thou shalt not waste," 19th Century Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch said, is "the first and most general call of God." We must heed that call.

**Life** (*Chaim*): Tradition places *pikuach nefesh*, the very possibility of saving a life – even when it might not succeed; even when experts disagree – above nearly every other

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*mitzvah* (commandment). Today, aware that climate is a life-and-death matter, this core Jewish value puts life before most anything else which props up an untenable status quo.

**The Precautionary Principle** (*Ze'hirut*): Most compellingly, we must practice intelligent risk management, and take all reasonable precautions. Deut. 22:8 says: "When you build a new house, put a parapet around its roof – that you don't bring blood-guilt upon your house, lest someone fall from it." Don't argue over the roof's angle; don't delay over

“Changes will require moral clarity and spiritual fortitude. Enter Judaism.”

the parapet's height; don't obfuscate until injuries and deaths overwhelm the industry-funded "studies" claiming that parapets aren't necessary; just build the darned parapet. Let it be paramount. Finally, **Shabbat**. On the day of rest, we not only refrain from making or doing, we focus on being and relating. We find greatest meaning when we step out of the rat race of production and consumption, say *dayenu* (what we have is enough for us), and declare "armistice in our economic struggle with [one another] and the forces of nature" (AJ Heschel, *The Sabbath*). Then, and only then, can we begin to make the world livable, unto the third and fourth generation.

# THE JEWISH SOLUTION LIES IN COMMUNITY

MIRELE GOLDSMITH

My friend Amy was personally impacted by Hurricane Sandy, the deadliest and most destructive hurricane of the 2012 Atlantic hurricane season, but not in the way you might expect. In October that year, when the storm devastated the east coast of the United States, Amy lived in Belle Harbor, a neighbourhood in the New York borough of Queens. Her home was flooded and her car destroyed. Her elderly parents, who lived nearby, were trapped in their apartment with no electricity or heat.

Within days congregants from North Shore Reform Synagogue, where Amy was working, came to the rescue. They evacuated Amy, her husband and her parents, and brought them to the synagogue. In addition to the relief Amy and her family received, she helped organise the synagogue as a warming centre for local residents who were without power because of the storm.

For a few nights the synagogue even served as an overnight shelter. Within days congregants found new homes for Amy and her parents and helped to furnish them. The community rallied in acts of solidarity and compassion.

At the time, scientists determined that the impact of Hurricane Sandy was worsened by a rise in sea level caused by the changing climate, and they described the storm as a “sneak peak of the future”. Now climate change is bringing more extreme weather across the globe and directly impacting Jewish communities.

Thousands of Jewish families lost their homes to Hurricane Harvey which brought

catastrophic rainfall-triggered flooding to the Houston metropolitan area in 2017. The damage to Jewish institutions was also severe. According to the director of the Jewish Federation, the ongoing recovery will eventually cost \$A60 to \$A75 million. We also experienced in recent years the burning of summer camps, synagogues and schools in California wildfires.

We still have time to avert the worst effects of climate change. The High Holiday season is an important time to take stock of

“*The Jewish Earth Alliance is mobilising Jewish communities to bring a moral voice on climate issues to Congress.*”

the size and strength of our Jewish community and recognise that if we commit to get involved, we can have a significant impact. What we can do as individuals may be a drop in the bucket, but as communities we can fill the bucket.

Following decades of research and development in multiple disciplines, solutions are available to halt and reverse damage to the climate. One essential step is a rapid transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy from solar and wind. For example, in addition to installing solar panels on the roof of our sanctuary, my congregation increased our impact by encouraging members to buy electricity from the first community solar farm in our state. We recently honoured 60 families for taking this important step.

To implement solutions at the speed and scale required, government action is crucial. In the US, the Jewish Earth Alliance is mobilising Jewish communities to bring a moral voice on climate issues to Congress. Working alongside communities of many faiths, we are pressing our political leaders for an urgent, ambitious, and holistic response. This advocacy can only be effective when individuals join together to get involved.

When I spoke to Amy a couple of weeks after Hurricane Sandy, she told me how grateful she was for the love and compassion she received from the members of her congregation. She had experienced the awesome power of Jewish community. But what we really need is to activate our communities’ sense of purpose and capacity for action to prevent such disasters.

This year, as you join Jews around the world celebrating Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, look around you. What can your

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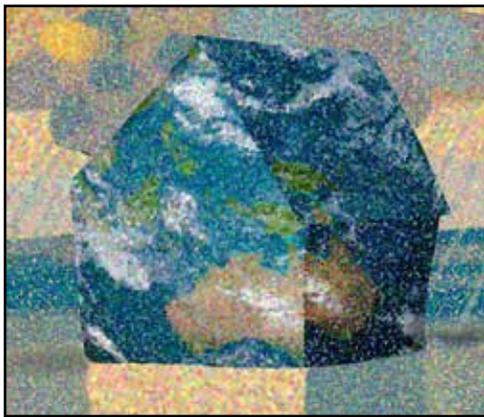
friends and family contribute to building a world that is safe from climate change? How can your community turn this existential crisis into an opportunity to live out your values? What will you do to activate your Jewish community? We know what we need to do. Let’s join together to do it.



# OUR PRIVATE HOME, OUR GLOBAL HOME

DAVID RITTER

“I am for homes” is one of the many powerful statements of inclination contained in Sydney writer Miriam Hechtman’s recent poem *I Am For*. The pluralisation is important, lifting the affirmation beyond the personal, to a wider quest for the universal urge for belonging.



Jewish relationships to the idea of home are, of course, particularly fraught. My own father, an escapee from occupied Prague in 1938, would say that he never felt at home again, at least not until he arrived in Perth as a skilled migrant in the mid-1960s. The hoarding and piling in which my Dad indulged to a fault were perhaps an effort to bulwark a renewed sense of security.

I privately wondered, but never asked him, if the stacks of old architectural journals, heaps of newspapers and boxes of empty polystyrene containers were like a physical echo of the shelves of our family’s prewar haberdashery between which he had some-

times lurked as a child.

In contrast to private experience, the environmentalist’s conception of home is often expressed as a reference to planet Earth. We must, we say with honesty, “save the Earth” because “it is our only home”. But the abstraction of a whole planet washes superficially over the fabric of the day-to-day. Home at human scale rests on familiarity comprised of a set of physical and emotional feelings that, with luck, are signs of the cozy satisfaction of material and non-material needs.

The last time I walked through my childhood home, I ran my palms along the surfaces of the door frames, wanting to absorb the texture of dark jarrah of the entry to the place where I grew up. Some part of me will always be there, walking out through that doorway, down some brown concrete steps to a grey sloped path that leads to a small clearing under two old plum trees, where in the lightest of rain I once buried a small Alsatian, Sonsie, whom I loved. The intimate nature of home is embodied in such memories.

Global warming is an existential threat to the stability of our shared home, the biosphere of the Earth, but it is the quotidian immanence of the climate emergency that is now rupturing individual lives. Already there are more people displaced than at any time since World War II; the multiple crises that have sent this mass of humanity fleeing in search for sanctuary are often linked to global heating. But as the climate emergen-

cy deepens, cause and effect are becoming more immediate and obvious.

Dwellings are being physically destroyed by heat, storms, floods and fires, but so, too, is that harder-to-define sense of home now being lost or harmed. As the weather changes, patterns of social life are being lost or obscured, and the meaning of habits, rituals and sensory stimuli associated with our feelings of belonging are under siege.

The dissolution is there in our planter boxes, gardens, neighbourhoods and towns: in the lake that no longer freezes; in a certain smell of April that can now only be recalled as a thing past; in flowers blooming at the wrong time; in the distress caused by environmental change for rhythms of the world that no longer pertain, of things too elusive for precise definition, but known in their absence.

The forces driving this radical disruption

“As the weather changes,  
patterns of social life are  
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are under siege.”

of our homes are not mysterious. Above all, it is the fossil fuel industry that has made the greatest contribution to global warming. This has been known for many years, and the clean energy alternatives are now cheaper and abundantly available.

Vested interests maintain the power of the fossil fuel sector. Led by a prime minister who carried a lump of varnished coal into federal parliament, there is in Australia an army of politicians, lobbyists, lawyers, industry bodies, accountants and corporate decision-makers who are enabling this assault on our homes.

As the former president of Ireland and chair of the Global Elders, Mary Robinson, said recently, “[w]e have entered a new

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Australia



reality where fossil fuel companies have lost their legitimacy and social licence to operate” and so we must “be fiercely determined to challenge vested interests, especially in the fossil fuel sector.”

There are direct ways to act against fossil fuel interests. Getting involved with one of the many groups campaigning for transformation to clean energy is one way of standing up for your home. Another is to take a stand within your business or workplace.

The mantra of *don’t buy, don’t supply, say why* is one way of ensuring that your institution is not complicit in the destruction of our homes being driven by the fossil fuel industry. The principle is that not only should organisations only buy clean power, but they should also refuse to sell goods or services to fossil fuel corporations and publicly say why.

Loss of place is irrecoverable, but it is equally true that new homes can be created with time and application. A shared support “for homes” in an age of climate emergency implies both a sensitivity to the threatened feeling of belonging, but also an abiding faith in our resourcefulness, resilience and capacity for care, which can be realised under the concept of “Australia remade”.

New edifices can be built on the actual or remembered foundations of the old. What is wise and decent may be carried through the storm. Let us grieve for what is lost, face the uncertainties of these new times, and together pledge our determined commitment for homes of the future, magnificent and flourishing once again.

# AND A SMALL YOUTH SHALL LEAD THEM

RABBI SHIRA KOCH EPSTEIN

“Hey bud, what part of your Torah portion are you thinking of writing about? What’s interesting to you in *B’ha’alotcha*?” My son Amichai’s barmitzvah was coming up. As his mother and a rabbi, I wanted to help him develop a meaningful barmitzvah D’var Torah, where he would mine our tradition to further his thinking on issues that concern him and impact his behaviour, and in turn allow him to teach and inspire our community.

Ami had a quick answer. “The quail! Did you know that the Israelites said they wanted to go back to Egypt because they missed having free meat, so God gave them crazy amounts of quail. They ate it and then died of a plague. It makes no sense,” he shouted. Then, he asked a compelling question: “Why would God give them what they want and then kill them for taking it?”

“Our children know the impact of climate change is not in the distant future but during their life spans.”

Our synagogue rabbi-educator had helped Ami use Sefaria.org to find rabbinic answers and when he returned to the site, he found Rashi’s teaching that the Israelites begged for quail even though they possessed cattle. Ami recognised a desire for freedom to mean having abundant luxury without having to give up precious resources. Ibn Ezra furthured the idea saying that rather than being

satisfied with what they had, in gathering so much quail, the Israelites demonstrated that they wanted more than enough.

“Mummy, this is exactly what you remind me when I want too much. You quote Ben Zoma, who says: ‘Who is rich? The one who is satisfied with their portion!’” Ami immediately saw a direct parallel to our environmental condition, saying, “We are killing the planet because we want more than we need, all the time, without having to pay the price or take responsibility for it!”

At 13, Ami shares with so many of his peers an overriding moral and political concern for climate change, and its impact on our future on this planet. In our neighbourhood in Brooklyn, New York, he has already experienced a deadly tornado and the devastation of Hurricane Sandy.

Our children know the impact of climate change is not in the distant future but during their life spans. As Ami wrote in his D’var Torah: “Climate change affects me as a New Yorker because the rising sea waters are on pace to put the Statue of Liberty underwater by the year 2100. That’s when I will be my Nana Shirley’s age.”

Our children cannot trust the covenant of the rainbow to mean the Earth will never be destroyed by floods again, and our children see that God cannot protect us from disasters we bring upon ourselves. And often, it is our children who are telling us to pay attention and take responsibility. In his Torah portion, where I saw lampstands, trumpets and warnings about gossip, my son found a message of environmental responsibility.

Ami wrote: “Often, in trying to satisfy ourselves, we don’t think about how the generations ahead of us will be harmed. The industrial revolution made it easier to mass produce all kinds of things, which had the effect of making it seem as if food, clothes and other things that we buy, are easy to come by, and that we don’t have a lot of direct responsibility for the impact of making and getting them. We get it, and forget it ... As we pollute the earth with plastic crap, we turn it into a burning wasteland. I bet you don’t think of that when you eat a burger or order a box for home delivery online. I know that I don’t.

“The consequence of the Israelites’ selfishness was that they were killed. If we don’t change our actions towards global warming and climate change, then that could happen again - but to us.”

It is our responsibility not only to teach our children, but to learn from them. We can teach them of the past, but they are reminders of our responsibility for the future. Genesis instructs us that we are stewards of creation, and that our first responsibility is to bear children. The rest of our tradition is rife with the instruction to be responsible



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for teaching our children.

However, it is Isaiah, whose messianic vision of the wolf lying with a lamb, who teaches “... and a little child shall lead them.” Many adults decline to take action on climate change because we worry that our small acts will not have enough impact. Yet our children are those who will suffer most if we do not try. And it is their vision and idealism that can inspire us to take action.

Again, from Ami: “I hope that you recognise that there is a problem with how we are negatively impacting climate change, and that while it was broken some time ago, we have inherited a problem that we need to fix.

“Like the Israelites, we have two choices: eat lots of meat and risk climate catastrophe within 10 years, or respond differently to our cravings and live a full life. If we want to survive on this planet, we need to stop expecting our meat to come to us without any responsibility attached to it.

“One way you can take responsibility is to look up how to reduce your carbon footprint and pick one of the ways to reduce yours. I love meat, but I plan to try to limit the meat I eat. If we all take part in making change, we can impact the climate for the better.”

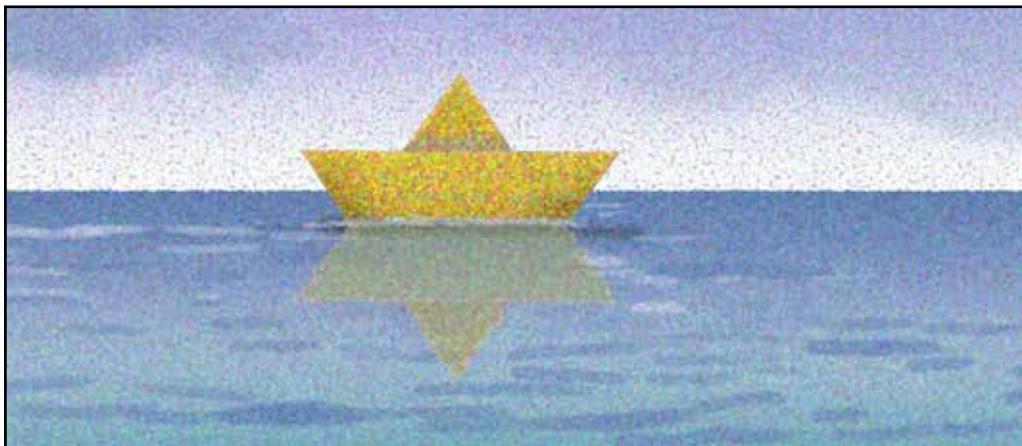
The prophet Joel says “the old dream dreams, the youth see visions”. As experts are working around the world to develop creative solutions to the climate crisis, it is up to us to will the visions of our children into reality.

# THE FLOOD WE BROUGHT ON OURSELVES

RABBI SERGIO BERGMAN

When Noah heard the voice that called him to build an ark to save human lives and animal biodiversity from the approaching flood, he complied with devotion. Most likely, Noah built his ark while his neighbours were watching, oblivious to the corruption of humankind that he had observed. Only when a few drops fell of what would soon become the largest natural

The difference between the sophisticated creatures we are, and the sensitive humans we should be, is reflected in the flawed criteria we apply to the distribution of resources and lack of fairness in the social order. By disregarding the freedom we enjoy through living in community, we are shirking responsibility for our fellow human beings and sharing planet Earth.



disaster in biblical history, did Noah's work start to make sense.

Global warming is the current manifestation of the flood that we have brought on ourselves. It is a warning of how ill our Earth is. This disaster is caused by our crimes against mother nature. The urgency transcends ideological discussion.

We must address the consequences of our consumption and production of goods and services. The list includes overexploiting the soil, the water, the air and the natural resources.

The starting point, then, is an acknowledgement that we must change our habits.

Being sustainable is everyone's responsibility and it needs to be assumed personally. Changing our habits requires values that shouldn't simply be announced. Instead, each one of us needs to embody and act accordingly in what we consume, eat, produce and in the way we use water, energy and recycle waste.

We no longer need to look for those who are guilty, nor do we need to disclose and report. And just like Noah devotedly listened

to the voice that called him to build the ark, we are being called to immediate action as individuals, communities and nations.

The Torah actually describes the materials and the highly specific construction plan for the ark. We could say that the flood that we have brought upon us - destroying biodiversity, leading animals to extinction, and contaminating the seas - is a calling to all nations to build an ark. That way we can reverse its effects.

The environmental issue has been challenging us since the Industrial Revolution, when the burning of fossil fuels and later, the invention of the steam engine, became trademarks of industry.

Since then, rises in global temperatures have been recorded, indicating that we are

“*Being sustainable is everyone's responsibility and it needs to be assumed personally.*”

in a state of crisis and very close to the flood the Torah warns us about. There are no longer any stormy rains or short droughts. Global warming is the alarm that our time is up.

Producing and consuming in a linear economy with no boundaries pressures us to consume new products and services, and to throw away what is still useful. Not only do we leave waste and pollution behind, but millions of people are victims of exclusion, hunger and extreme poverty.

This results in a fundamental lack of fairness in the distribution of resources around the globe. It is not about everyone having the same, but about no one lacking what is basic to all human life. This time, however, it's not only the voice of God we must listen to, but to every single one of our children who wisely insist that we stop arguing and start working.

Rabbi Sergio Bergman is the Government Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Argentina. He is a graduate of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem and is active in the Jewish community of Argentina as well as in the country's broader society and politics.



This new ark for the upcoming flood is the sustainable development goals (SDG) of the 2030 UN agenda. Nations are reuniting in conference rooms instead of reuniting in action and alliances, but their goals are the materials and construction plan to build the ark.

The 169 UN goals and their indicators range from zero hunger to gender equality to education, water access, renewable energies, health care, sustainable cities, and biodiversity conservation that bring resilience and peace among people. In this context, global warming and climate change are the highest priorities. All the goals help us re-think the way we perceive our home: Mother Nature.

It's time to send our dove of peace, just as Noah did, to get that olive branch so we can sign the final draft of the treaty that was started in Paris in 2015. Then we can reclaim a new *brit shalom* between humanity and nature, this time worshipping all life on earth.

I hope that at the next climate conference in Chile at the end of this year, we can seek to understand that the 2030 agenda of sustainable development is not a technical discussion, but an ethical one that involves a new understanding of human rights. Then we can live as brothers and sisters, and together strive for *Tikun Olam* - the restoration of our beloved planet Earth.

# WE MUST ALL BE ACTIVISTS FOR THE PLANET

RABBI JONATHAN WITTENBERG

My memory begins with green hills opposite the house where I was born. Love of nature has framed my life. I seek God in all life: trees, birds, animals, the human spirit. “No place is devoid of God”.

I want my children to inherit the same wonder as I did. Every one of us shares a responsibility to all the world’s children to bequeath to them a viable, biodiverse, sustaining and beautiful planet. Judaism views creation as a daring and profound act of trust. God places the world in the care of our human, unreliable hands.

Therefore, I feel guilt and terror at the devastation of the world’s beauty. When on Yom Kippur I say “*Bagadnu* - We have betrayed,” I experience visceral shame at belonging to a generation destroying God’s earth. The kabbalists called a sin “tearing branches off the tree of life”. Once this was a metaphor. Now it’s the literal truth.

We must change our attitudes and our conduct. The environmental crisis is caused by how we consume; better choices will make for a better world and we need to take them quickly.

But that is only part of the truth: this is also a crisis of values, a moral and spiritual challenge to the excessive role consumption plays in our lives. Most of us possess more material things than any generation preceding us. Yet, driven by incessant marketing and the ready provision of endless products, this makes us want more and more.

Judaism has always regarded justice, compassion and the service of God and life

as the supreme values. We must not displace them with the idolatry of wealth, economic growth and power. These are only the means to an end: caring for all life. We must urgently re-educate ourselves to care for all life.

That is why two of my heroes are David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg; why I believe we must all be activists for the planet. Every home and community should have a policy on consumption and waste and put the environment high on its charitable priorities.

Eco Synagogue, developed in the UK following the lead of Eco Church, helps congregations assess and change practices in the use of kitchens, buildings and land, and

“*We have negotiated a rebate to the synagogue for any member who moves from fossil to green electricity.*”

maximise their influence through teaching and preaching on the lives of their members and the surrounding community.

Waste is an easy place to start. The principle of *Bal Tashchit* was developed by the rabbis from the Torah’s specific prohibition of cutting down fruit trees and turning them into instruments of war, into a comprehensive ban on all needless waste. I’m dismayed to see kosher bakeries sell challot in individual plastic bags which are then put into plastic carrier bags. I’m tempted to declare

such practices unkosher.

The same applies to single use plastic cutlery and throwaway cups and plates. One of the first steps a synagogue can take is to stop using them at kiddush and communal functions. This change has put an end to my synagogue throwing away 30,000 plastic cups per year.

Wherever possible, leftover food should be given to the hungry through local organisations doing similar work to the Israeli NGO Leket Yisrael, or Oz Harvest in Australia. Food that cannot be saved should be composted.

A deeper challenge concerns what we buy in the first place. I am a passionate vegetarian. This is both out of concern for animal welfare, *tsa’ar baalei chaim*, the avoidance of animal suffering, and because of the huge environmental cost of raising cattle and growing the fodder they require. The dairy industry is also implicated; while not a vegan, I have cut my dairy consumption considerably.

If before we took a product off the supermarket shelf, we had to watch a 20-second video showing us the true cost of the item, the conditions in which the workers and growers lived, the effect on animals, the impact of the chemicals and water used on the land, and the environmental price in trans-

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port, I am convinced that we would radically rethink our habits of consumption.

Only buy clothes you intend to wear at least 30 times, I recently read. I am trying to practice the “Do I need it” test, before buying clothes or throwing away anything supposedly old or outdated.

We have recently changed our private car from diesel to electric. As a rabbi, I didn’t want to model worst practice. But even this is not the ideal; the future will lie not in private ownership, but in sharing cars and city bikes.

I’ve determined to cut my flying. I put it to my community that we should use rail whenever we can, holiday nearer home, and, when we must fly for work or to visit family or friends, we travel less often but stay longer.

*continued to page 26*



*from page 11*

When the rapidly melting Larsen and Ross ice shelves in Western Antarctica slip into the ocean, sea levels will rise enough to drown Amsterdam, Miami, New York and most island nations, especially in the Pacific. Hundreds of millions of lives will be threatened in the coming four years by the effects of climate change. Jewish people should provide leadership to save lives through our actions.

By next Rosh Hashanah, the Arava region of Israel will be 100 per cent powered during the day by the sun - and that includes the vacation city of Eilat and all its air conditioning. This should be the model for Israel and the world. And this can come about through investing in renewable energy, which is cost-effective and moral.

Indeed, religion, catalysed by the Jewish people, can save the planet. Because of Shabbat observance in Israel, greenhouse gas emissions are reduced by a third - and are nearly zero on Yom Kippur.

If every denomination of the Jewish people truly sanctified Shabbat as a non-consumer day of rest and this example was followed by other faith communities, then Shabbat would save the Jewish people along with the entire planet. A universal day of rest could cut greenhouse gas emissions by one seventh, allowing our turbulent planet to calm back into balance.

Then the Jewish people could truly become a renewable light unto the nations. Have a life-changing, world-changing sweet and green New Year.

*from page 25*

We have negotiated a rebate to the synagogue for any member who moves from fossil to green electricity.

These are only beginnings. But we must all make a start, then inspire and challenge each other to better practice. We should spend more time in nature, experience the joy of belonging to the wider life which fills this living, breathing world, and urgently support rewilding and reforestation projects near our home and across the globe. We can and must help regrow the heart and lungs of the world.

It's said that individuals make no difference, that this is a matter for governments and multi-nationals. I disagree.

Maimonides taught that the fate of the world is exactly balanced; our next action will tip the scales for good or bad. The destiny of life itself is in the balance. Our generation's actions may make all the difference.

# Do you want to learn more about climate change? Are you interested in a Jewish perspective on climate action?

The Jewish Climate Network can run an interactive session for you and your friends in your home or for members of a community organisation to educate your group about the climate emergency and help you take effective action.

To register your interest in hosting a session, or to join our mailing list to find out more about our activities, sign up at <http://eepurl.com/gk32hD>

Jewish Climate Network [facebook.com/JewishCN/](https://www.facebook.com/JewishCN/)

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