

## A Week of Earth Action: *Divrei Torah* Ideas for April 22 & April 29

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The [People's Climate Movement](#) is organizing a climate march on April 29, in Washington, DC, for "climate, justice, and jobs." The People's Climate Movement is a grassroots movement to combat climate change and organize a just, fair, and rapid transition to a renewably-powered economy. In 2014, the movement organized the largest climate change march in history in NYC. Over 1,000 groups signed on to the march, and 400,000 people attended. Remarkably, 1 in 10 of the endorsing organizations were Jewish.

**But we're going to top it!** During the People's Climate Mobilization on April 29, communities across the country will march -- or hold solidarity events at home during that week. Please join us!

**Our work on climate change matters more than ever.** The presidential administration has threatened to pull the US out of the Paris Climate Accords and cancel the EPA's Clean Power Plan; meanwhile, 2016 was the hottest on record, with much of the US (and Israel) experiencing drought conditions. Sea level is rising swiftly as ice melts in West Antarctica and Greenland. On sunny days, cities like Miami Beach flood at high tide. Yet the transition to renewable energy is gaining momentum -- in many communities, the price of solar or wind is now lower than fossil fuel!



### What Your Community Can Do:

1. Register [Your Community](#) to receive more information and support the People's Climate March Shabbat on April 29. [hazon.org/advocacy](http://hazon.org/advocacy)
2. Give a *D'var Torah* about Judaism and climate change on **Earth Day** (April 22) or the **People's Climate March Shabbat** (April 29). Use the bullets below to start.
3. [March with Jews in DC](#) or march in a [local march](#). A Shabbat-friendly bus will be traveling from NYC to DC. Learn more: [hazon.org/advocacy](http://hazon.org/advocacy).
4. **Organize a Sustainability Event** during Earth Week, from Earth Day (April 22) through the People's Climate March Shabbat on April 29. Invite an environmental speaker, plan a sustainable meal, educate your youth group or preschool, or contact a [local climate justice group](#) for advocacy. Visit [hazon.org/advocacy](http://hazon.org/advocacy) for ideas.

## Divrei Torah Themes for Earth Day (Parshat Shemini)

### *Nadav and Avihu: Acting With Restraint*

- The Torah spends 24 verses describing a fixed order of sacrifice inaugurating the Tabernacle (Leviticus 9:1-24). Contrast that with Nadav and Avihu's creative, impulsive sacrifice described in a single verse. Some commentators suggest that Nadav and Avihu couldn't handle distance from Gd, and rushed into the sanctuary to find Gd, without deliberation or precaution. (Their father is then asked for the ultimate restraint -- abstaining from mourning his sons.)
- Some relationships of love are consuming, like Nadav and Avihu's relationship to Gd, demanding total closeness and immediate benefit. Sustainable relationships allow for a dance of distance and closeness that does not consume its participants. **The symbol of sustainable consumption is the burning bush, which is suffused with the Divine, but isn't consumed; Nadav and Avihu are its antithesis.**
- How can we create a sustainable, non-consuming relationship with the natural world (or Gd)?

### *Nadav and Avihu Play Gd*

- Nadav and Avihu have just finished being consecrated as priests in the sight of an adoring, shouting nation. Now, fired up with their newfound power, they create their own laws of sacrifice, disregarding Gd's. **The Torah reminds us that upsetting divinely ordained order can have disastrous consequences.**
- When we enter the Land and have grown wealthy, the Torah reminds us to remember that our prosperity comes from Gd, and not to say, "My strength and my hand created all this wealth for myself" (Deuteronomy 8:17). Perhaps Nadav and Avihu's failed through a lack of humility.
- How does power -- financial, religious, societal -- affect our approach to the great ills of our time, including climate change? How might we avoid the trap of Nadav and Avihu?

## Divrei Torah Themes for People's Climate March Shabbat (Parshat Tazria-Metzora)

### *Tzaraat: Dwelling Alone in Nature*

- The Torah obligates the *metzora* to "dwell alone," outside the camp, and to call out "impure, impure" to warn others away (Vayikra 13:45-46) until s/he is healed.
- The rise of digital screens, smartphones, and social media allows us to be in constant contact, to never be alone (at least in a virtual sense). On average, American children spend 5-7 hours watching screens per day (NIH Medline Plus). **What can we learn from the *metzora's* "punishment" to help treat our own individual and social ills?**

### *Tzaraat & Climate Change: Moral and Physical Pollution*

- Tzaraat is a physical condition with a moral cause, according to the Sages, including “lashon hara (slander), bloodshed, false oaths, incest, arrogance, stealing, and envy” (*BT Arachin* 16a).
- “*The more carefully you do the math, the more thoroughly you realize that [climate change] is at bottom a moral issue,*” writes environmentalist Bill McKibben.
- **Climate change parallels *tzara’at* -- a physical phenomenon with deep moral causes and implications.** It most significantly impacts the vulnerable in society, and precisely those who did the least to cause it: people living in the developing world and future generations.
- How could we create a “purification process” (spiritually or physically) to adjust our relationship with the earth?

### *Hoarding our Natural & Financial Resources*

- A house that is suspected of showing *tzara’at* must be emptied of its contents before it is examined by a priest. The rabbis suggest a moral explanation: *tzara’at* is caused when the owners of the house refuse to lend a tool, instead claiming that they don’t own it. **Tzaraat then forces the unwilling lenders to publicly display their possessions, a fair consequence for their refusal to share resources with the community.**
- We are the wealthiest nation in the world, and we have the financial resources and technical know-how to manage climate change. How can we offer our resources and lend our tools to help poor countries bearing the brunt of climate change?

## General Jewish Environmental Themes

### *Omer: Freedom to Responsibility*

We are in the period of the Omer, between Passover (the Exodus from Egypt) and Shavuot (receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai). Every year, we count this journey from freedom to responsibility - from the Exodus to Torah. **Practically: our society has freed itself from pre-industrial constraints, and we are free now to use copious amounts of energy. How can we now act responsibly with that power and the danger to the climate it could cause?**

### *The Shema*

**The Shema bears profound ecological meanings.** The first line is an affirmation of the unity and interconnectedness of all things (Deuteronomy 6:4). The second paragraph is a statement that if we live well in relation to our natural environment, our surroundings will treat us well and vice versa. (Deuteronomy 11:14-17). In an era of global climate change, these messages clearly have universal ecological significance.

### *Bal Tashchit (prohibition on wasting)*

**Bal Tashchit denotes wasteful misuse of the world's resources.** The prohibition is found in Deuteronomy (20:19-20), "When in your war against a city you have to besiege it for a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy (*bal tashchit*) its fruit trees...You may eat of them but you must not destroy the fruit trees." Later Jewish thinkers explained that bal tashchit applies to any pointless destruction of resources. How can we apply rabbinic sources on bal tashchit to our society's consumption habits and systemic waste? (Talmud Shabbat 67a, 140)

### *Shmita (see the Hazon Shmita Sourcebook and [online materials](#) for more)*

**Shmita, the Sabbatical year,** required ancient Israelite landowners, once every seven years, to pause their profitable operations. The land lies fallow and ownerless. Shmita acknowledges that the earth -- and the atmosphere -- are not raw material to be exploited for private profit with maximum efficiency. In order for humanity and the earth survive, the Torah mandates setting periodic limits and embracing rhythmic self-restraint. The atmosphere and the oceans are the ultimate "commons," and are rapidly absorbing our pollution and heating up. How can Shmita guide us in addressing this problem?

### *L'ovda ul'shomra*

"The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it" (Genesis 2:15). This *pasuk*, a source text for much of Jewish environmentalism, introduces humanity's relationship to the natural world as one of mutual benefit and responsibility.

