



June 24, 2019

To our Rabbis,

Greetings!

We will be blunt with you. We are in the midst of an emergency. Climate change is happening. Seas and temperatures are rising. We're causing it, and we're headed for disaster – unless we, as a global community, find a way to mitigate and reverse the threat. It is indeed a threat, the most severe of our lifetimes. You, our religious leaders, have an essential role to play in galvanizing and inspiring the Jewish community to join the larger non-Jewish community in acting as God's partners in preserving our planet. There is no better time to do so than when most of your community is gathered for services during the High Holidays.

We write to invite you to use the attached collection of materials on Judaism and the earth as a resource in your planning for the High Holidays.

We ask, in humility coupled with chutzpah, that you consider devoting one of your sermons to this topic. You might also include some original, environmentally-themed prayers in the service and/or include a special reading or study session during *Tashlich*. We have included writings and background information for each of these options in what follows. We are pleased that we can include, with their permission, a passionate and thoughtful call to action from Rabbi Art Green, an excerpt which will appear in his new book this fall; creative liturgical prayers and a *drash* from Rabbi Daniel Nevins; inventive *drashot* from Professor Adriane Leveen and Professor Benjamin Orlove, a climate change researcher at Columbia University; and a surprising reading on *Tashlich* from Hody Nemes, environmental activist and YCT rabbinical student.

At the end of this packet, you will find a list of key biblical teachings relating to the climate crisis, a 2017 fact sheet on climate science from Interfaith Power & Light, a multi-faith environmental organization; and an up-to-date flyer about Jewish Climate Action Network NYC. We have found in our work that it is helpful to offer people concrete steps to address climate change; you are very welcome to print out our flyer and distribute.

Please feel free to reach out to either of us for more information or feedback.

The seas may be rising, but so are we. We hope you'll rise up with us!

Wishing you a productive and restful summer,

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Awakening Religious Environmentalism: The Urgency of Action

Religion and Environmental Responsibility: An Address to Jews and Christians

Rabbi Dr. Art Green, Rector of the Rabbinical School & Irving Brudnick Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Religion at Hebrew College

Excerpted from: *Judaism and the Inner Life: Neo-Hasidic Reflections*, Yale University Press (forthcoming)

Is it coincidence that the first species to have the ability to destroy our biosphere as a fit habitat for all higher forms of life is also the first to be equipped with the moral conscience and perspective that might prevent us from doing so? Religions, despite all their limitations and narrowness of vision, serve humanity as the great vehicle for that moral conscience. Might you say, in classical western theological language, that the rebirth of religion is emerging from a divine call, welling up within us, to repent of our collective abuse of this planet, and of one another, before it is too late? Is God seeking to protect that last shred of moral conscience in humanity, and are we His vessels for doing that? Is religion itself being given the gift of this awareness and power to stir conscience by the One it worships in order to awaken humanity from its dangerous self-serving slumber, as the earth is pillaged?...

The coming together of religious leaders in America, primarily Christian and Jewish, but embracing others as well, around this issue, is evidence that such an awakening is happening within all of our traditions. The Pope's leadership in this cause, expressed in his remarkable document of moral courage entitled *Laudato Si*, to which I will return later, is a clarion call to all people who call themselves religious. It is taking place in Buddhism as well, especially due to the commitment of the Dalai Lama and the growing influence of Buddhists of the western world. And even in such an unexpected place as a rural mountaintop Taoist temple in China. I read from a remarkable interview of the abbot in the New York Times of 7-13-17: "China doesn't lack money; it lacks reverence for the environment... We all live on the earth together – we are not isolated," he said from his remote monastery. "As Taoists, we have to work to influence people in China and overseas to take part in ecological protection." Is there a universal process of *teshuvah*, of return to awareness of the One, or of the holiness of existence, happening here?...

In placing the weekly Sabbath at the center of our devotional lives, we Jews have always lived in awareness of Creation. Our Friday evening ritual calls for three readings of Genesis 2: "Heaven and earth were completed, they and all their hosts." Before we recite the *shema* each morning, we bless God who "renews each day the work of Creation." When we put on our *tallit* in the morning, we call out the verse from Psalm 104, the greatest of the Creation psalms, "He spreads forth light like a garment, stretching out the heavens like a curtain," as though repeating or taking part in the very first act of Creation....

The contemporary religion we articulate will need to be based upon a fully nature-embracing spirituality, one that sees the divine presence as embodied within the physical world. This can be hosted by a great variety of theological views within both of our traditions. But we must move away from the legacy of Platonism that we Westerners all bear, distinguishing between a “true” spiritual world and the “merely” physical. A creation-inflected spirituality means that we celebrate the divine presence within all of God’s creatures, however we spell out the details of that presence. A sense of spirituality is precisely that which brings us closer to an appreciation of nature and a sense of awe before its wonders.

That sense of wonder and its renewal is the most important message that we religious folk – all of us – have to bring to the post-modern world. I am one who believes that religious truth belongs to the language of poetry, not discursive prose....

The great power of religious faith in our world must be seen as a divine gift and a sacred opportunity. In it may lie humanity’s greatest hope for liberation from self-destructive forces that will cause terrible harm in times very soon to come both to our own offspring and those of all the other species that depend upon us for survival. But what we do with this gift *is in our hands*, especially those of our religious leaders. Only in working together to embrace this earth as divine creation will we be able to move forward.

Liturgical Prayers and Creative Readings for the High Holiday Mahzor

Al Chet (על חטא) for Destroying God's Creation

Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat & Festivals

Rabbi Daniel Nevins, Pearl Resnick Dean of the Rabbinical School and the Division of Religious Leadership, The Jewish Theological Seminary

This confession, written as an addition to the classic וידוי / Vidui of Yom Kippur, uses traditional language to record our dismay at the changes to the planet wrought by humanity.

¶ For the Sin of Destroying God's Creation

אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם אֶתָּה בְּרֵאתָ שָׁמַיִם
וְאָרֶץ בְּאַהֲבָה,
יִצְרַת צְמַחַיִם וְחַיּוֹת, וְנִפְחַת נְשָׁמַת
חַיִּים בְּבִנְי אָדָם.
נִבְרָאנוּ בְּקָרֵב עוֹלָם נָקִי וְטָהוֹר,
וְכַעַת הוּא נִהַרְס עַל-יְדֵינוּ.
לֹא עַל צְדָקוֹתֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מִפִּילִים
תַּחֲנוּנֵינוּ לְפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
כִּי אֲשַׁמְנוּ, בְּזַבְזוֹנוֹ, וְגִרְמָנוּ נֶזֶק כְּבִיר:
עַל חֲטָא שְׁמֵלָאנוּ אָרֶץ וַיָּמִים
בְּזָכַל וּבְאַשְׁפָּה,
עַל חֲטָא שֶׁהִשְׁמַדְנוּ לְנֶצַח חַיּוֹת
נִפְלְאוֹת שֶׁהִצַּלְתָּ מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל,
וְעַל חֲטָא שֶׁהִכְרַתְנוּ יְעָרוֹת
עֲצִים הַמְּקִימִים נֶפֶשׁ כָּל-חַי.
אָנָּה ה' פָּקַח עֵינֵינוּ וְנִרְאָה אֶת-
הוֹד יִצִּירְתֶּךָ,
אֲז נִשְׁבַּחְךָ כְּמוֹ שְׁכָתוּב: מִה־רַבּוֹ
מַעֲשֵׂיךָ ה' כָּלֵם בְּחֻכְמָה עֲשִׂיתָ
מְלָאָה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיָנֶךָ.
הִסַּר אֶת-לֵב הָאָבִן מִבְּשָׁרֵנוּ, וְתַן לֵב
בְּשָׂר בְּקִרְבָּנוּ.
תֵּן לָנוּ חֻכְמָה וְאַמֶּץ-לֵב לְשִׁמּוֹר עַל
הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם.

Eternal God, You created the
heavens and earth in love. You fashioned plants and
animals, breathing Your spirit into humanity.
We were created amidst a clean and pure world, but it is now
degraded in our grasp.
Not on our own merits do we beseech You, Adonai our God,
for we have sinned, we have wasted, we have caused vast damage:
For the sin of filling the sea and land with filth and garbage;
for the sin of destroying species that You saved from the flood;
and for the sin of laying bare the forests and habitats that sustain life.
Please, God, open our eyes that we might see the splendor of Your
creation. Then we shall praise You, as it is written: "How great are
Your works, Adonai! You have made them all with wisdom; the earth
is filled with Your creations" (Psalm 104:24).
Remove the heart of stone from our flesh, and give us a feeling heart.
Grant us wisdom and determination to safeguard the earth beneath
the heavens.

— DANIEL NEVINS

Prayer for the Renewal of Creation
Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat & Festivals
Rabbi Daniel Nevins

This tefilah, designed to be inserted in the Shabbat Musaf service, expresses the hope that by ceasing to labor, by being able to appreciate and be grateful for life and its gifts, we will increase our awareness of the need to be responsible caretakers of the planet. It can easily be adapted for the High Holidays.

תְּפִלָּה לְשֵׁלוֹם הָאָרֶץ
רְבוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדְךָ נְפֶשׁ כָּל־חַי וְרוּחַ כָּל־בְּשָׂר
אִישׁ, הַנְּחִילֵנוּ שִׁבְת מְנוּחָה, יוֹם לְשָׁבוֹת בּוֹ מִכָּל־
מְלָאכָה. בְּכָל־תְּחִישָׁה, נִפְיֹר וְנִדַּע אֶת־הוֹד וְיִצִירְתָּךְ.
שִׁבְעֵנוּ מִטּוֹבְךָ שְׁנֵהֵיָה עֲדִים לְגָדֵל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ. חֲזַקְנוּ
לְהִיּוֹת עִמָּךְ שׁוֹתֵפִים נְאֻמָּנִים, לְשִׁמּוֹר עַל עוֹלָמְךָ
בְּעִבוֹר הַדּוֹרוֹת הַבָּאִים. ◀ יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה'
אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ, שִׁתְּבַרְךָ אֶת־עוֹלָמְךָ
בְּיָמֵינוּ כִּימֵי קֶדֶם.



Master of the universe, in whose hand is the breath of all life and the soul of every person, grant us the gift of Shabbat, a day of rest from all our labors. With all of our senses may we perceive the glory of Your works. Fill us with Your goodness, that we may attest to Your great deeds. Strengthen us to become Your faithful partners, preserving the world for the sake of future generations.
► ADONAI our God and God of our ancestors, may it be Your will to renew Your blessing of the world in our day, as You have done from the beginning of time.

The Voice of the Shofar: A Selection of Texts from the Hebrew Bible on Shofar (שופר)

Dr. Adriane Leveen, Co-Chair, Jewish Climate Action Network NYC, & Senior Lecturer in Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion



What is the shofar's symbolism? Dr. Leveen presents six of the key biblical texts about shofar, each of which hints at a different aspect of the shofar's meaning. Each of these aspects can be directly linked to the global fight for climate justice underway in our day.

1. Exodus 19:16, 19

A call to awareness

v. 16 “And on the third day as morning dawned there was thunder [*Kolot*] and lightening and a thick cloud on the Mountain and the voice [*kol*] of the **Shofar** very strong and all the people trembled in the camp.”

v. 19 And the voice [*kol*] of the **Shofar** grew stronger and stronger- Moses spoke and God answered him in a voice [*kol*].”

Comment: Three Hebrew terms in these two important verses are called קול: thunder, shofar, and God's voice! A *drash*: The overwhelming noise of thunder and shofar together shield the Israelites from hearing God's voice in its fullness, retaining the mystery of God's presence. Nonetheless, God has chosen to be present when answering Moses in a voice – קול – and in so doing creates an awareness of divinity within the people.

2. Leviticus 25:9

A call to repentance

And you shall sound the **Shofar** *teruah* in the 7th month, on the tenth day of the month on the day of Yom Kippur – you shall have the **Shofar sound** throughout your land.

3. In Joshua, Judges, and Samuel

A battle cry

The sound of the **Shofar**, like the trumpet of the Romans, was an instrument to signal battle, as exemplified in the famous story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho.

4. Isaiah 18:3

A universal call to attention

All who live in the world
And inhabit the earth
When a flag is raised in the hills, take note!
And when a **shofar** is blown, give heed

5. Isaiah 58:1

A call to action

Famously, on Yom Kippur we read the following:
Cry with a full throat, without restraint;
Like a **shofar** raise your voice
Tell the people of their transgressions
And to the House of Jacob their sins.

Question: what does God ask of us in Isaiah and in other prophets? We should unlock the chains of wickedness, let the oppressed go free, share our bread with the hungry, clothe the naked, and do not ignore our kin [humankind].

6. Zechariah 9:14:

A Sign of Salvation

And YHWH will appear to them (the people of Judah)
And out will come his lightening like a flash
And Adonai my God shall blow the **shofar**
And come in a tempest of winds...

Taken together, these texts on the Shofar serve as a wakeup call to the danger that we face on this planet created and given to us by God. Whether or not we realize it, saving the planet is the battle of our lifetimes. Hearing the shofar can renew our commitment to this urgent work!

Further Reflection – and Action

*Excerpted from Kathy DeGane, “Voices of the Shofar,” Bridges for Peace,
www.bridgesforpeace.com/letter/voice-of-the-shofar*

“A ram’s horn is a completely natural musical instrument—it is not man-made, it’s God-made, and it is one of the oldest musical instruments in history—at least 5,000 years old. The shofar has been in continuous use for 3,000 years in Israel, spanning the fall of Jericho to the present day and sounded in Jewish communities all over the world.

Recent scientific studies confirm that listening to the sound of the shofar actually causes our bodies to react physically. The response to the loud, insistent sound is sometimes called “fight or flight”—the same response we would have at the sound of a siren. Our senses are immediately alerted to danger or stress. They “wake up,” are sharpened, and we are given more energy to actively respond, more clarity in our thinking, and more ability to see things we would not otherwise notice. [We are transformed into a new state of awareness]...

An Alert to Danger: The shofar was sounded by watchmen on the walls of a city to alert the people to imminent danger. One long blast during the watches of the night reassured the inhabitants of the city that all was well. But a series of sharp, staccato blasts raised the alarm that enemies were in sight and to rally to arms. ...The sound of the shofar reminds us that we are watchers on the walls, appointed to alert others...”

That danger is already here. We are indeed watchers on the walls, appointed to alert others to the climate crisis that is upon us. On these Holy days, as this survey of biblical texts on the shofar illustrates, awareness of the dangers to all life and to the planet upon which we live can lead to repentance. Repentance can lead to a cry and call to action.

This year, when your congregants hear the קול of the shofar, will you take the opportunity to invite them to hear that cry and call to action?

Tashlich in the Anthropocene*

Hody Nemes, *Steering Committee, Jewish Climate Action Network NYC; Rabbinical Student, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah*

Tashlich is understood a vehicle for confessing our sins. But according to R. Moshe Isserles, the prominent Renaissance-era Ashkenazi *posek*, Tashlich is a moment for gratitude, too: a time of appreciation and wonder at the equilibrium of Creation, for the balance between sea and dry land.

Environmentalism is always in danger of veering into shame or self-disgust as we take stock of humanity's ecological sins, which are myriad. But many people are repulsed – or overwhelmed – by such language. So before we get to a litany of **על חטא**'s, we should always try to bring in wonder and gratitude – for the planet, our climate, and – in this case – the oceans and dry land we received when we were born.

But alarm is warranted. The Rema couldn't have foreseen it, but today, sea level is increasing every year, thanks to melting glaciers and higher ocean temperatures. We're inadvertently undoing Creation, blurring the azure shoreline where the Creator said to the Sea, in the words of the Rema, “עֲדִיפָה תִּבּוֹא וְלֹא תִסִּיף (וּפֹאֲזֵשִׁית בְּגֵאוֹן גְּלִיךְ); “Stop here – no further! [Here your surging waves will halt]” (Job 38:11).

Sea level rise offers a unique opportunity to confront the consequences of our behavior, which is one of the primary goals of the High Holidays. Rarely do our moral shortcomings cause such visible, physical consequences; most sins cannot be recorded by satellites and ice core data. This one can.

Yet if we act speedily, moving from wonder and gratitude to teshuva, we can slow and ultimately halt sea level rise. The One Who Brought the World into Being has bequeathed to us the power to say to the sea, “Stop here – no further!”

Consider studying this text with your community before Tashlich, or reading it at the water's edge. *You might ask congregants to share one experience of the natural world that caused them wonder this year. Conclude by explaining that the sea is rising; that its advancing waters, and the hundreds of millions of people endangered by them, depend on our behavior.*

*Anthropocene, or “human epoch,” is the proposed name for the earth's most recent geologic time period, based on overwhelming evidence that atmospheric, geologic, and other systems have been alerted by humans at a global scale.

Torat HaOlah, Part Three 56:2

Rabbi Moses Isserles, “*The Rema*,” c. 1520-1572

There is a custom of Israel that has become Torah itself: On Rosh Hashanah, they go to the water and say the verse, “He will again have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; And You will cast all

תורת העולה, חלק ג', סי' נ"ו:ב'
ר' משה איסרלס (רמ"א)

ומנהג של ישראל תורה הוא, במה
שהולכים על מים ואמרים תשליך
במצולת ים הוא התהום, והיא המקום

their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). Behold, the most fundamental natural order demands that water should cover all the land, for dry land is in the center, the lowest level of the planet. The creation of dry land for the survival of humanity and all [creatures] who dwell on it is not happenstance but was done by the One who created the world according to His will so that the world would be populated.

Therefore, we go to the water to see firsthand where the Creator placed the seashore, where God said to the water, "Stop here – no further!" And when we go there we see the wonder wrought by the Fashioner of Creation. So we go on Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgement, to the water, to instill into the souls of each and everyone one of us the idea of the creation of the world, and the understanding that the Exalted Creator is Ruler of the Earth. And regarding this it is said, "You will cast our sins into the depths of the sea." For in truth, one who deeply observes the depths of the sea and recognizes that the world is created/renewed, s/he will find the Exalted Creator and through this come to regret all of their sins, and their sins will be forgiven and cast down into the depths of the Sea. And this matter is clear for the enlightened.

היותר עמוק בים. והנה לפי הטבע של היסודות שהמים יכסו הארץ, והארץ הוא המרכז, והוא מקום הנמוך בכל העולם, והנה התגלות הארץ לצורך בני אדם ולדרים עליה אינו בלא כוונת מכוון והוא אשר חדש העולם כרצונו לתכלית ישוב הארץ,

ולכן אנו הולכים על המים לראות אשר שם חול גבול לים, ואמר עד פה תבא ולא תוסף, וכשאנו הולכים שם אנו רואים גבורתו של יוצר בראשית, ולכן אנו הולכים על המים בראש השנה, שהוא יום הדין, לשום כל אחד על נפשו ענין בריאת העולם, ושהשם יתעלה מלך הארץ ועל זה נאמר תשליך במצולת ים חטאינו, כי באמת המתבונן בענין מצולת ים ומכיר שהעולם מחודש על ידי זה עומד על מציאות השם יתעלה, ומתחרט על ידי זה על כל עונותיו, וחטאיו נמחלים ועל דרך זה נשלכים החטאים במצולת הים, והוא מבואר למשכיל.



Two Short Torah Teachings for the Planet

Dr. Benjamin Orlove, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University; Senior Research Scientist, International Research Institute for Climate and Society; Lead Author, U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report

Dr. Orlove offers insight into two key Torah passages relevant to the climate crisis our of day. Dr. Orlove knows what he's talking about: he's a climate change expert who researches climate change adaptation and glacier retreat throughout the world.

I. Tochecha: The Divine Admonition

The *tochecha* – rebuke, or admonition – offers an apocalyptic vision of a devastated people and a barren land. The abundance of the land and the orderly sequence of the seasons have ended. These conditions are the consequence of neglecting the ordering of time (disregarding the *Shabbatot* for humans and the lands), and of constructing false images which block our ability to see the divine source manifest in creation itself.

Though there is the potential for return, signaled in the final verses, it is the destruction that is most evident.

And this is a destruction we are already witnessing: the heavens like iron, the earth like brass, areas devastated by long droughts. Poor harvests, people fleeing in terror, violence unleashed: these sequences are taking place in vulnerable regions right now.

A call, indeed, to abandon our prideful sense of being the sole masters of the universe, to leave behind the worship of the objects we fashion. A call to return to balance with the world of which we are just one part.

II. The Flood

The vision of the flood in *Bereshit*, once almost folkloric, now seems to us like a new apocalyptic film—or like one of the assessment reports on climate change or biodiversity produced by the U.N. It offers us a chance to look deeply into our tradition's understanding of the history of the universe and the threats to the order of creation that human greed, hatred and selfishness can unleash.

Bereshit 1 tells us the order of creation of living beings in the air, water and on the earth: not including the water-beings that survive, we have birds first, then beasts and cattle, then creepy-crawlies, and then us humans. But then the humans, through corrupted actions, unleash an unnatural rise in sea levels (not so different from what we see today). There's just enough time for an ark to be built. The air-and-land beings enter the ark in a different order than their creation, this time with humans first (as in Gen 2). They perish in a third order, and are blotted out in a fourth order (Gen 7: 21-24). But the ark prevails, and the air-and-land beings exit in the order in which they entered. So we humans, who were created last, most entrusted with partnering with the divine source, are the ones who threaten the air-and-land beings—but the ones who, recognizing our potential to protect and support this order, can save the beings as well. Let us rise to this challenge now in our time, as Noah, the righteous one, did in his.

Remember the Land

From “Behukkotai: Remember the Land” (2019)

Rabbi Daniel Nevins

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On Yom Kippur, the Book of Leviticus plays a prominent role: we traditionally read from it twice – once in the morning, describing the Tabernacle service of Yom Kippur, and once in the afternoon. Rabbi Nevins considers the profound role of the Earth, and specifically the Land of Israel, in Vayikra.

Spring is my favorite season because it draws me outdoors, enticing me to leave the city and enjoy the rivers, fields, and mountains of this glorious earth. Even near the city I often find myself in nature, biking along the Hudson and up the Palisades past waterfalls and nesting eagles. Returning to the land reminds me of the many blessings of our world, filling me with gratitude and awe. It also causes foreboding since the signs of stress on the natural systems that make our lives possible are everywhere evident. While this era of anthropogenic climate change may be new, the concern that human conduct could lead to ruin and exile from the earth is found already in our Torah portion.

“The Land” is a central character in Leviticus, receiving 23 mentions in the final two chapters, and 70 altogether in the second half of this central book of Torah. We think often of Leviticus as centered on the Sanctuary, and that it is, but the Land itself is a living character, offering blessings and curses to the people of Israel. If the people live faithfully, then the Land will receive blessed rains, produce its bounty, and provide security and satiety. But if the people act as if their title to the Land is absolute, if they fail to allow the Land to rest on the sabbatical year and recognize God’s ultimate title, then they will be forced into exile.

As Jacob Milgrom notes, the previous priestly account of pollution of the Land—the flood narrative of Genesis 6—requires ablution, the washing away of sin with water. (Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2336) That solution is unavailable now for two reasons. First, God promised never to flood the earth again. Second, the sin that occupies Leviticus is not really one of pollution but of over-extraction of natural resources. The people have ignored God’s command to observe the sabbatical year; the only resolution is for the people to be pushed off the land so that it can rest and recover. Hence, the dreaded punishment of exile.

Toward the end of the devastating reproach section of our portion, the Torah predicts a future reconciliation when the exiles will humble their hearts, and their sin will be atoned. “Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the Land” (Lev. 26:42). This verse has several unusual features. It reverses the order of the patriarchs; it records Jacob’s name “full” with an extra letter (עֲקֹב, rather the Bible’s usual עֵקֶב); and it leaves out “remember” for the middle man, Isaac.

Each element is interesting, but let us focus on the finale of the verse, where the Land itself becomes something like a fourth patriarch. God announces, “I will remember the Land,” making it not only the destination of return but also the very foundation of the covenant. As Midrash Sifra observes, “the Covenant is linked to the Land” (Behukkotai 2:8). Thinking back to Genesis 17, we recall that the covenant that God establishes with Abraham is all about the Land: “Then I will give

to you and your descendants after you the land where you have dwelt, the Land of Canaan as an eternal possession, and I will be your God”(Gen. 17:8). The Land is not only a place to live, but an intermediary through which to encounter God.

Elsewhere in the Bible, the Land of Israel stands as a symbol of the virtue or lack of virtue of Israel. In a time of physical exile, Jeremiah imagines the Land itself lamenting its abandonment and asking why. Let the wise come and explain, “Why is the Land in ruins, laid waste like a wilderness, with none passing through it?” (Jer. 9:11). A land that is abandoned, in ruins, is evocative of the absent human life that once flourished there. Isaiah depicts the Land pining for its people and rejoicing upon their return (Isa. 49).

The Rabbis imagine the Land of Israel to be something like a tough nanny. On the one hand, she is a disciplinarian, noticing the failure of the people to observe her commandments such as the neglected sabbatical, and calling these failures to God’s attention. On the other hand, she is their caregiver. In Midrash Vayikra Rabbah, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish says that it is like a king who has three sons and a nurse for them. If he wants to know about his sons, he inquires about the nurse. So too does God care about the children—that is, Israel—but inquires only about the Land (Behukkotai 36).

This Midrash views the Land as an instrument of reward and punishment, but perhaps the truth is deeper still. The Land is more like a teacher or a parent, socializing its students to express gratitude, self-control, and respect for others. Like an anxious child who grabs more food than they really need, the people of Israel are inclined to ignore the Sabbatical. This undermines awareness of divine title and cedes self-control, so that fear guides their way, all the way into exile.

German-Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas argued that pre-modern ethics was limited to a range of proximate concern—it was always assumed that earth would rebound from any damage that we could cause. Therefore, responsibility was only for direct damage, not for the cumulative harm caused over the course of generations. (The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age, 5) That indeed seems to be the understanding in Leviticus: After a few years of exile, the neglected sabbaticals will be made up, and the people will be welcome to return. Our fear is that this is no longer true. Our destructive powers have grown too great, and the land may not recover from the harm that we cause.

Enjoyment of the land requires us to tread lightly on it. A walk in the park, a hike in the hills, a dip in the ocean—these simple pleasures restore our relationship to the land, reminding us that we are not its owners, but rather its temporary inhabitants. More than this is required—real reductions in carbon emissions and the willingness to let the land rest. As with the ancient neglect of sabbaticals, our contemporary abuse of our home is having direct and dangerous consequences. Reading this portion alerts us to that danger and motivates us to make the changes required to live in health and joy on all the good land that God has given.

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JEWISH CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK NYC



Who we are:

We are a network of Jews in the New York metropolitan area working to address climate change. We stand upon the teachings, traditions, and prophetic voices of Judaism that compel us to protect all of our sacred Creation.

What we do:

We advocate with elected officials, participate in public activism, and promote sustainable practices that protect the Earth and its inhabitants.

Who we work with:

We work with local and national Jewish, interfaith and other environmental and justice leaders.



Our recent campaigns:

We actively participated in coalitions that achieved the following in 2019:

- ✧ **A transformative NY State law** committing NY to 100% renewable energy and making our state a national leader in legally-mandated emissions cuts. (Campaign led by the NY Renews coalition)
- ✧ **Ground breaking NYC law** mandating dramatic reductions in building emissions. (Campaign organized by ALIGN)
- ✧ **Commitment to Offshore Wind Power for NY State** campaign for a massive offshore wind installation (Led by the Sierra Club)

What can you do?

1. **Like us** on Facebook (“Jewish Climate Action Network NYC”)
2. **Sign up** for our e-newsletter for opportunities to lobby, march, advocate, and educate – register on our Facebook page or email info@JCAN-NYC.org.
3. **Attend** a monthly JCAN NYC meeting, invite a JCAN-NYC rep to speak to your community, or email us at info@JCAN-NYC.org to discuss other ways to work together!

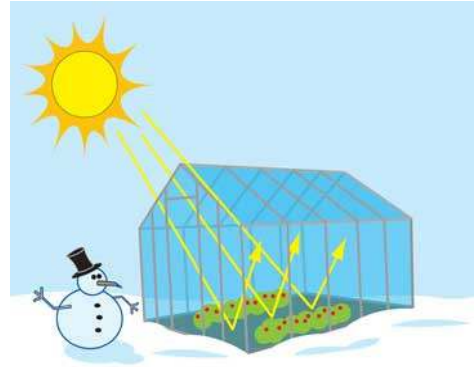
Fast Facts About Global Warming

2017 was the third hottest on record in the United States, with an average temperature of 54.6 degrees Fahrenheit—2.6 degrees Fahrenheit above average.

What causes climate change?

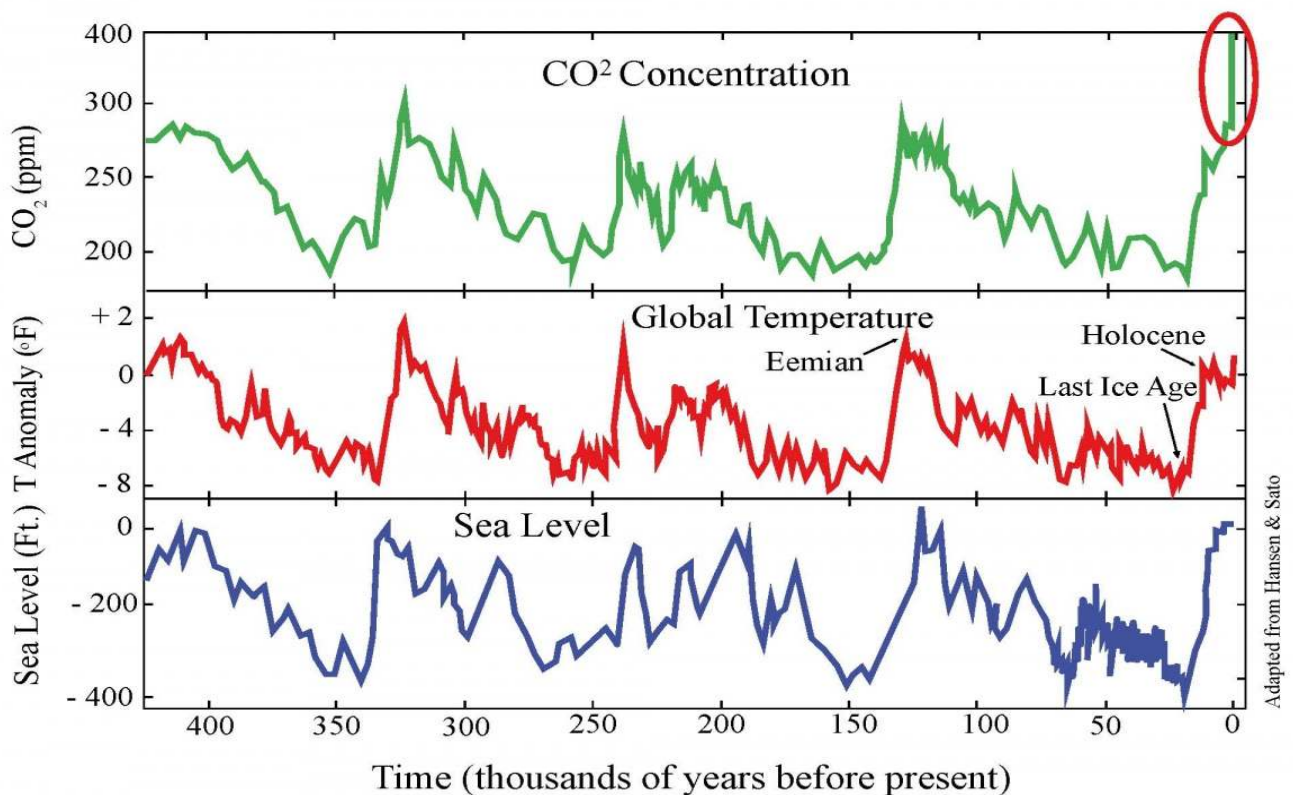
The Greenhouse Effect.

The purpose of a greenhouse is to trap the sun's heat so that plants inside can stay warm. If you have ever gotten into a car on a sunny day, you are familiar with this effect. The atmospheric greenhouse effect keeps our planet warm enough for life, with greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) playing a similar role to the glass in a greenhouse.



Human Impacts. The plot below shows the following things:

- Atmospheric temperature and sea level track CO₂ concentrations
- For the past 400,000 years, atmospheric CO₂ been less than 300 ppm
- In the past 50 years, atmospheric CO₂ has increased to 400 ppm
- Temperatures and sea level are as high as they have ever been
- Implication: it is reasonable to expect rapid warming and sea level rise



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How is climate change already affecting the earth?

16 of the 17 hottest years ever have occurred since 2000. A study by the National Climate Assessment (www.globalchange.gov) reports that the world is warming, global sea level is rising, and extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more severe. These changes have already resulted in a wide range of impacts across every region of the country and many sectors of the economy. Here are a few of the report's sobering highlights:

Climate change is happening now and it's primarily human-induced. The U.S. average temperature has increased by over 2°F, and most of this increase has occurred since 1970. Temperatures are projected to rise another 2°F to 4°F in most areas of the U.S. over the next few decades. The atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, and nitrous oxide have increased to levels unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years.

Extreme weather is becoming more severe and frequent, and includes heat waves, cold snaps, extreme rain and snow precipitation, long periods of drought and flooding, and high winds. The capacity of ecosystems like forests, barrier beaches, and wetlands to buffer the impacts of extreme weather-related events is being overwhelmed. Arctic summer sea ice is receding faster than previously projected and is expected to virtually disappear before mid-century. Extreme heat, sea level rise, and heavy downpours are affecting infrastructure like roads, rail lines, airports, port facilities, energy infrastructure, and military bases.

Food and water supplies are at risk. Climate disruptions to agriculture have been increasing and are projected to become more severe over this century, a trend that threatens to diminish the security of America's food supply. Surface and groundwater supplies in some regions are already stressed, and water quality is diminishing in many areas, in part due to increasing sediment and contaminant concentrations after heavy downpours.

Oceans are at risk. The ocean absorbs about a quarter of human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide annually, thereby changing seawater chemistry and decreasing pH (making seawater more acidic). More acidic waters create repercussions along the marine food chain, such as making it more difficult for shells and coral reefs to form. Recent research indicates that 75% of the world's coral reefs are threatened. Pathogens thrive in warming seas, and this has been linked to significant increases in sea life disease and mortality, which in turn impacts the human populations which depend on them.

Fires in California- 2017



Storms in the Northeast- 2017

