



EARTH REPENTANCE: ACCEPT/REPAIR/CHANGE IN 5780 (תש"פ)

A study guide to accompany Jonathan Safran Foer's
WE ARE THE WEATHER: SAVING THE PLANET BEGINS AT BREAKFAST

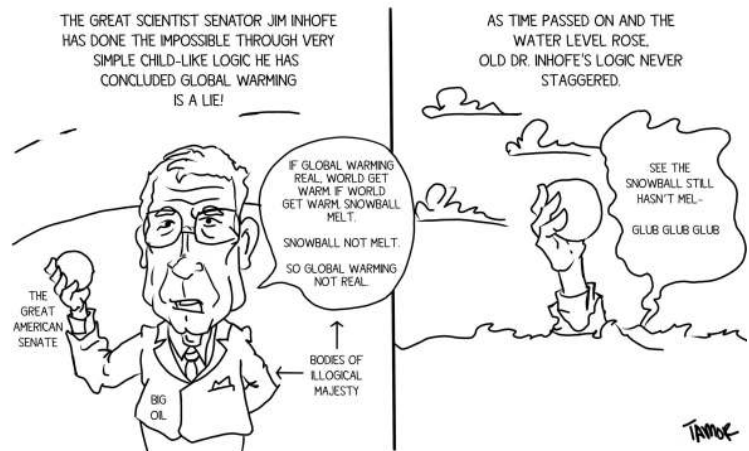
Study guide compiled by Rabbi Mark Cohn
(pages according to pre-publication edition and are shown in parentheses)

Every year we mark the passage of time since Creation by counting according to the rabbinic legend which informs us when God performed the Act of Creation. Creation is renewed each and every day and we are partners with God. We have been partners (and adversaries) ever since the Sixth Day when Humanity was given the Breath of Life by the Source of Life.

Given this year's Hebrew letter equivalent תש"פ of 5780, we might consider scrambling the order of the letters and playing to arrive at the conclusion that, indeed, we are in a deep, influential, vital partnership (שותף) with one another and with God in this on-going endeavor of Creation and determining how the earth and we will weather one another.

The Days of Awe call upon us to actively engage in repentance and renewal. We know from our rabbis that repentance is only complete when, upon reaching the same point of decision, we act differently and do not choose the path of sin, transgression, defilement, impurity, and wrong-doing. The arc of repentance calls upon us to perform the three vital steps: acceptance/acknowledgment, repair, change.

In this study guide, which explores Jonathan Safran Foer's most recent book, *We Are The Weather*, you are invited to see how his words and teachings reflect insights from our ancestors and beyond. With a few wordplays, various quotes from Jewish text, and more, may we have a chance to arrive on the other side of our study prepared to act. After all, the point of Torah study is to lead to action. We learn in order to do. And now is the time: to learn AND most importantly, to DO!



<http://thedailycougar.com/2016/11/24/cartoon-2/>

CRISIS, KRISIS, DECISION - GET GOING!

(27) "Crisis is from Greek krisis meaning decision." We are in a climate crisis that demands decision. I've always blended the Hebrew words for decision and beginning together as they have similar sounds despite one different letter, both of which produce the 't' sound. DECISION (hachlatah - הַחֲלָטָה) & BEGINNING (hatchalah - הַתְּחִלָּה)

What decisions are JSF asking us to consider and begin to live?
What happens if we fail to consistently live out environmentally-sound decisions?

GOT A CRISIS (MASHBEIR ~ מִשְׁבֵּיר)? GET THE PROVIDER (MASHBIR ~ מַשְׁבִּיר)!

The word for crisis in Hebrew is mashbeir (מִשְׁבֵּיר) which comes from the root to break - (lishbor - לִשְׁבֹּר) Our climate is broken as a result of human activity. What statistics surprised you or realizations arose in you while reading this book? If you could change one behavior TODAY, what might that be?

Although seemingly unrelated, perhaps we might learn from another use of the letters shin, bet, reish. In Genesis 42:1, we read the following: “Jacob saw/learned that there was grain in Egypt and Jacob said to his sons: ‘Why are you (standing around) staring at each other?’”

א וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יֹשְׁבֵר בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְבָנָיו לָמָּה תִּתְרָאוּ

Could we not say the same for humanity right now? With answers available - why are we staring at each other? The irony that the grain-provider is JOSEPH, the thrown-into-a-pit brother who became the sold-into-slavery brother only to become the second-in-command over Egypt brother thanks to insightful dream interpretation (see Genesis 41) should not escape us. Note the etymological



proximity of mashbir and mashbeir! He is the grain-provider/mashbir (הַמִּשְׁבִּיר) in a crisis (מִשְׁבֵּר). From the one who was broken comes insight and answers. Out of desperation came novelty. The Pharaoh chose the most unlikely of candidates and wound up saving his kingdom. And what is the name of one of Israel’s department stores? The Mashbir (for all your needs)! Next time you go shopping - consider: what do you really NEED?

THIS IS NOT EITHER/OR IT IS BOTH/AND.

(55) *“Planes patrolling Midwestern skies without boots on the ground in Europe would have been suicidal.”*

(57) THE inconvenient truth: *“Anyone who knows the science and is willing to acknowledge the most inconvenient truth of all, will agree that we are doing far too little, far too slowly, and that our present course leads to our own destruction.”*

One of the most brutal parts of the book, for me, was understanding and admitting that we/I have a problem. How effective am I as I drink my specialty coffee in a single use plastic cup and then get back in my hybrid car that uses a battery harmful for the environment? Can I feel better about myself for sermonizing while about climate disaster without changing my ways? In our pontificating of where we need to take the planet, we are simultaneously bringing the planet down by not radically altering our lifestyles. Without changing our ways, significantly, we are just as bad as the climate deniers. Future generations will be unable to discern a difference between those who spoke without acting/leading and those who denied the impact of climate change and did nothing.

What does it take to cross from belief to action? Or maybe from ignorance/denial to belief? How much action will be enough right now? In 5 years? 10? 20?

ECO-KASHRUT. JUST LIKE IT SOUNDS.

Eco-kashrut is an attempt to take the meta-principles of kashrut (eating that which is suitable, fit, appropriate as defined by the Torah and subsequent rabbinic interpretations) and applying it to questions about how to make sure the the land, the waterways, the fish, the animals of land and sky - let alone the people (!) - are sustained, protected, and safe.

(67) In considering what to eat, JSF talks about *“...the messiness of life.”* First off: What does that mean to you - the “messiness of life”? Secondly: How can we determine what is kosher behavior when it comes to climate change?

(204) *“The decision to fight for what’s right requires us to cut ourselves off from what’s wrong.”*

WHERE ARE YOU? HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

(68) After their having eaten from the Tree, God called out (Genesis 3:9) to Adam and Eve: ayekah/where are you (אֵיכָהּ ?).

Interestingly, when is the next time in the Torah a form of that word comes? When Moses commented to the Israelites, “How (Eicha - אֵיכָהּ) can I myself bear your weight, and your burden, and your strife?” (Deuteronomy 1:12) If the earth could talk - she may ask that exact question. Or perhaps she would ask what God asked Adam. Where are you!? Even though she knows right where we are, she’d want to know: what are we doing!?!? With what words and actions can we respond to the earth? How can we justify our behavior?

God did not call ayekah/where are you (אֵיכָהּ) to Abraham. With Abraham, God simply called him by his name. And Abraham, seemingly, gave an immediate response: hineni/here I am (הִנְנִי). The difference between Adam and Abraham? Experience - on the part of God and the players. What do you see as the differences between Adam and Abraham? The former broke his only rule he had to follow and the latter was being asked to do something of major magnitude for the Covenant to sustain. Adam operated from fear and embarrassment. He was naked and he knew it. He blamed Eve. He was ashamed. But that shame, if it could lead to action, could be beneficial for the future. Abraham acted from confidence and faith. He believed in God and in the Covenant.

What difference do you hear in Adam’s response versus Abraham’s?

Note: the word ayekah (where are you) will have its vowels changed to be the opening word of the Book of Lamentations (Eicha - אֵיכָהּ), written by Jeremiah upon the destruction of the First Temple. If we fail to recognize our wrong-doing, as did Adam, and show up to take on a task, as did Abraham, God alone will write the final book of Lament asking “Eicha - אֵיכָהּ How alone does the planet sit with no jackals or humans left to roam over its surfaces, ...”

EYE-OPENING (OR EYE-POPPING) EVIDENCE

Whereas Adam and Eve had their eyes opened from eating that fruit, we see that God fills the role as eye-opener for us as we call God “pokeiach ivrim” (opens the eyes of the blind - פּוֹקֵיחַ עִוְרִים) How are the statistics revealed in this book eye-opening?

SHMITAH (RELEASE) IS NOT JUST FOR THE 7TH YEAR

(71) “We must either let some eating habits go or let the planet go.” Adam and Eve chose to eat the apple and as a result: they had to leave the garden. If we keep supporting the factory farming industry - we will be forced to leave the Garden and there might not be a garden left at all. For the health of the planet (and you), name three eating habits to avoid and/or release from your life.

(71) - “We live in a culture of historically unprecedented acquisition, which so often asks us and enables us to attain... But we are revealed by what we release.” What does that mean - we are revealed by what we release? Consider the shmitah year, in which every seventh year we are commanded to release the land and debt. How does release allow for a different style society than ours?

(76-7) “There have been five mass extinctions. All but the one that killed the dinosaurs were caused by climate change...the current climate change is the first caused by an animal not a natural event. The sixth mass extinction is the first climate crisis.” Given the etymological connection between crisis and decision, how is climate change a decision for us now?

(108-9) When Jonathan's grandmother looks at him she says, "You are my revenge." Jewish lives are the answer/ revenge to the goals of the Nazis. So too - "...if we address the environmental crisis now, the future life we will have enabled - reclaimed, re-freed - to thrive might look the same." Where and how can you/we stage y/our revenge?

NOAH, NOAH, HE'S OUR MAN! YEAH. FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE.

The story of Noah appears in several places during this book. The story of the man, the flood, the role of God, saving the animals, changes to our diet postdiluvian tie in very well with JSF's book. Let's take a deeper look ...

וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל־יֹצֵר מַחֲשַׁבַת לְבֹו רָק רָע כָּל־הַיּוֹם:
וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֵל־לְבָו. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אִמָּהָה
אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף
הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי נַחַמְתִּי כִי עָשִׂיתָם: וְנַח מֵצָא חוֹן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה:

Genesis 6:5) The LORD saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. 6) And the LORD regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. 7) The LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created—men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them." 8) But Noah found favor with the LORD.

What does it mean that Noah existed!? What did it take Noah to find favor in God's eyes? Man's wickedness was great but not without salvation. What are our ancestors trying to show/teach us through this age-old tale?

אֱלֹהֵי תוֹלְדוֹת נֹחַ נָח אִישׁ צְדִיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלַּךְ־נֹחַ:
וַיּוֹלֵד נֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם וְאֶת־יָפֶת: וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנָי
הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס: וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה
כִּי־הִשְׁחִית כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֶת־דְּרָכֹו עַל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַץ כָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּא
לְפָנָי כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מִשְׁחִיתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ: עֲשֵׂה לְךָ
תֵּבַת עֲצֵי־גִבּוֹר קַנִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וְקִבְרָתָהּ אֶתָּה מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר:

9) This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God. 10) Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 11) The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness. 12) When God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth, 13) God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth. 14) Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch.

(128) "Humanity has a tendency to underestimate its own power to create and destroy."

(157) "Noah's ark didn't have a sail, and neither does ours. Knowing that no one and nothing will help us makes the effort easier." **Noah** and **Moses** both wound up in a rudderless vessel without a sail.

In Hebrew: teivah (הַתֵּבָה) translated as ark and basket, respectively. Why do you suppose the same Hebrew word is employed for an item that is surely massively different in terms of size?

RASHI ON NOAH

v.9 **IN HIS AGE** — Some of our Rabbis explain it (this word) to his credit: he was righteous even in his generation; it follows that had he lived in a generation of righteous people he would have been even more righteous owing to the force of good example. Others, however, explain it to his discredit: in comparison with his own generation he was accounted righteous, but had he lived in the generation of Abraham he would have been accounted as of no importance (see: Sanhedrin 108a).

v. 14 **MAKE AN ARK** — There are numerous ways by which God could have saved Noah; why, then, did he burden him with this construction of the Ark? So that the men of the generation of the Flood might see him employed on it for 120 years and might ask him, "What do you need this for"? and so that he might answer them, "The Holy One, blessed be He, is about to bring a flood upon the world" — perhaps they might repent (see: Sanhedrin 108b).

(192) *“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time. ... righteousness and blame are contextual.”* JSF makes explains that Normandy in 1944 is not the same as a grocery store in 2019. How do you understand the difference between decisions made in 1819, 1919, and 2019 vis a vis the environment? How might a behavior in one age be remarkably different in another? What lifestyle changes do we need to alter which once were permissible?

(194) *“No one who isn’t us is going to destroy Earth, and no one who isn’t us is going to save it. The most hopeless conditions can inspire the most hopeful actions. We have found ways to restore life on Earth in the event of a total collapse because we have found ways to cause a total collapse of life on Earth. We are the flood, and we are the ark.”*

(199) *“the most contagious standards are the ones we model.” “we are stuck in traffic because we are the traffic.” “And although it may be a neo-liberal myth that individual decisions have ultimate power, it is a defeatist myth that individual decisions have no power at all.”*

Rashi points out that Noah had a real chance to save himself (and the animals) as well as the others around him. But it was upon those individuals around him to repent. In other words - everyone else could have built arks! God sought not the destruction of everyone - but only of those who failed to see the writing on the walls! Who is building an ark around us today such that we can follow their model?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said of Noah: “Hassidim ... called Noah a tzaddik im peltz, ‘a righteous man in a fur coat.’ There are two ways of keeping warm on a cold night. You can wear a fur coat or light a fire. Wear a fur coat and you warm only yourself. Light a fire and you warm others. We are supposed to light a fire. Noah was a good man who was not a leader. Was he, after the Flood, haunted by guilt? Did he think of the lives he might have saved if only he had spoken out, whether to his contemporaries or to God? We cannot be sure. The text is suggestive but not conclusive. It seems, though, that the Torah sets a high standard for the moral life. It is not enough to be righteous if that means turning our backs on a society that is guilty of wrongdoing. We must take a stand. We must protest. We must register dissent even if the probability of changing minds is small. That is because the moral life is a life we share with others. We are, in some sense, responsible for the society of which we are a part. It is not enough to be good. We must encourage others to be good. There are times when each of us must lead. (<https://rabbisacks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CC-5774-Noah-Righteousness-is-not-Leadership.pdf>)



christianfunnypictures.com



The undocumented first use of this well-known phrase.

JSF SUGGESTS THAT WE MAINTAIN AN ANTEDILUVIAN DIET BEFORE DINNER

(171) *“... the average world citizen needs to shift to a plant-based diet in order to prevent catastrophic, irreversible environmental damage. The average U.S. and U.K. citizen must consume 90% less beef and 60% less dairy.”*

Why did we become meat-eating post Noah? According to rabbinic sources gleaned by aish.com in an article about “Meat after the Flood,” there are six primary reasons:

- Animals survived because of Noah’s efforts and therefore Noah and his descendants earned the right to consume them.
- Man was weaker after the Flood and the flora alone would not support his life. He needed meat to survive.

- Post-Flood there literally was nothing other than meat to eat.
- Man reached a low level of morality by the time of the Flood. In an effort to show man the difference between man and beast, animals were allowed to help man appreciate his humanity.
- Eating meat could only be done, according to the Talmud, by a Torah scholar and not an ignoramus. "Only when the consumption will truly be an elevation for the meat is such behavior appropriate."
- Before the Flood, the earth was a more spiritually charged place and links from heaven to earth more readily apparent and available. Man lived longer on a plant-rich diet.

TWO RANDOM QUOTES FOR CONSIDERATION

(160) "...our planet is a farm." RESPOND AND REACT to the author's words!!

(166) "Three million children under the age of five die of malnutrition every year. One and a half million children died in the Holocaust." Hearing those statistics, are we fulfilling the commandments from Deuteronomy 25 of Remembering the evil that was done to us and never forgetting?

CHOOSE LIFE! (YES, THERE IS A CHOICE.)

(205) "I hope we will have taught them - not only with our words but with our choices - the difference between running toward death, running away from death, and running toward life."

(208) "We are killing ourselves because choosing death is more convenient than choosing life."

Deuteronomy 30:19) I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. So choose life, so that you and your descendants may live!
 20) and that you may love the LORD your God, listening to God's voice and clinging to God. For God is your life and the length of your days in the land that was sworn to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give to them.

יֵט הָעֵדוּתִי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים
 וְהַמּוֹת נִתְּתִי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָה וּבַחֲרֹתַי בְּחַיִּים
 לְמַעַן תַּחְיֶה אִתָּה וְזָרַעְךָ: כִּי לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 לְשִׁמְעַע בְּקִלּוֹ וּלְדַבְּרָהּ בּוֹ כִּי הוּא חַיִּיךָ וְאַרְךְ יָמֶיךָ לְשִׁבְתָּ
 עַל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְיָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק
 וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְתֵת לָהֶם:

AND IN CONCLUSION ...

(221) In the context of sitting in a plane, preparing to take off, as he sits afraid of dying, JSF offers a prayer to a God in whom he does not believe. The prayer is actually a hope and quite the opposite of a suicide note. "I am affected by my prayer," he writes. Consider va'ani t'filati l'cha (וְאֲנִי תְפִלַּתִּי לָךְ) - I am my prayer to you (Psalm 69:14) How can we live a life that reflects our deepest prayers?

(175) "...the price of hope is action." The National Anthem of Israel is HaTikvah ~ הַתִּקְוָה (The Hope). We are a people that has every reason to leave hope and to embrace despair fully. Confronted with a chance to attend a Purim party a second year in a row with Rava, his friend and colleague, Rabbi Zeira declined saying "Miracles don't happen each and every hour" Why such a response? The previous year Rava stabbed him and he died but was saved by a miracle after Rava prayed to God for mercy for his friend. Nonetheless, Rabbi Zeira didn't want to undergo that experience and declined attending a Purim festival with his friend. We don't rely upon a miracle. We don't laugh when a guy named Noah starts building an ark. And we don't choose death and curse when life and blessing are given as options as well. So ... knowing what we know now, what's for breakfast? lunch? DINNER!?