

## **COP 26 Credo**

As I left the green zone, where dozens of NGOs were gathered at COP, a swan arced out of the sky and crash-landed in a group of police who, as it waddled away with injured wings, carefully monitored its unusual protest. It was strangely moving, as if it embodied this wounded world, fallen within our power to heal or destroy.

That is the choice before the United Nations Climate Conference and the world. As Prince Charles, Greta Thunberg and countless others said: enough words; we need action. COP26 has to cross the 't's, dot the 'i's, and establish the rule book for monitoring our changes. These must be international, national, local, communal, individual. They must be systemic and comprehensive, engaging all sectors of society, governmental, financial, educational, agricultural, spiritual.

The hour cannot be more urgent: net zero by 2050 is critical, but what we do in the next decade will be decisive. The world's children are hostage to what we do now.

Three Jewish teachings help articulate the great challenge we face: a parable, a verse and a method.

*The parable:* the Talmud tells of passengers in a boat who're horrified when one of them starts drilling a hole beneath his seat. 'Stop,' they cry, 'Or we'll all drown.' 'But it's my seat,' he replies.

Presumably we identify with the crowd shouting 'stop'. But perhaps we're the ones making the hole? Lots of us are. Worse, there are many, including major leaders, who signal stop with one hand while continuing to drill with the other. Meanwhile people in the back of the boat are already drowning. We can't mend the ship of our world without rigorous honesty about what we're doing to it, and unless we heed the voices crying 'halt'.

*The verse:* 'Justice, justice shall you pursue.' The rabbis, to whom the Bible contained no superfluous repetitions, read this as saying that justice must be sought by just means. Climate justice is at the core of our crisis. The world's poorest peoples cannot be left to pay for the heedlessness of the richest.

Yet there must be justice in how climate justice is pursued. I spoke with young people from Central America and Africa, fighting to preserve rainforests, water sources, biodiversity and community. Few of them could get to COP because of difficulties in obtaining accredited vaccinations, and travel and accommodation costs. This was largely avoidable. Their voices must be heard. 'Recognition justice' means working in partnership with those most deeply affected by global warming. 'Top down' is essential in our global crisis, but we won't resolve it unless we give value to different perspectives, ways of life and wisdom. The global south, often our victim, must also be our teacher.

*The method:* rabbinic Judaism is relentlessly questioning: What's that mean? How's it measured? By whom? Enthused by the agreement of a hundred countries, including Brazil and the Congo, to end deforestation by 2030, I discussed it with a veteran campaigner. It'll mean nothing, he said, without a clear and measurable pathway from where we are today to where we must be then. Timetable, monitoring, finance and enforcement: these are the decisive factors. The rabbis of the Talmud would have agreed.

All these challenges were compelling expressed at an inspiring interfaith dialogue by Reverend James Bhagwan of the Pacific Conference of Churches. He described the destruction of livelihoods, the existential threat to island peoples. He made us understand that their fate today will be ours tomorrow unless we change. Then he turned to the Bible: 'I have just two questions for you, 'Are you my neighbour?' and 'Are you my keeper?'

There are reasons for hoping we'll get the answers right. There's a deepening moral and spiritual awareness among hundreds of millions of the interdependence of all humanity and our shared dependence on nature. We know we must restore it so that it can restore us. Though with many and frightening exceptions, world leaders and decision-makers are grasping this.

But will they, and we, act wisely, quickly, thoroughly and effectively enough? Will we all take up our responsibilities and do our utmost to make sure?

The fate of an injured world is in our hands.