

Jewish environmentalism....

Shoftim 5782/2022

The story of Creation and Noach, come to teach us that our world is given to mankind to use, a gift for the generations, however, it is not enough that we received these gifts, according to Midrash, Hashem felt that we needed to receive a warning, a proceed with caution note¹.

Our Parasha adds onto this message of warning, In the midst of dealing with a host of laws regarding how to live alongside our fellow men and women, whether in times of peace or times of war, pauses, and takes a moment to provide us with a commandment explicitly dealing with the environment, the commandment of baal tashchit².

At a time when we are in the midst of thinking about our relationships with our fellows, thinking about the positives and negatives of our relationships, the rights and the wrongs, as we make our way to Rosh Hashanah, let us take a moment to pause and to reflect on our relationship with the environment around us, what do we give and what do we take, the positives and the negatives, the rights and the wrongs as we make our way to the day on which the world was created.

Jewish thought take note of the human pressures onto the environment and gives us clear warnings as to the result of these destructive forces. The Talmud puts this in context regarding tearing clothing during periods of mourning³. And the Rambam explains that it extends across all wastage and destruction⁴.

According to Sefer Ha-hinnukh, adherence to the commandment of not wasting, allows us to cleave to goodness – mind, body and soul joining together for good – holistic, modern mindfulness at its very best!⁵

How should we engage with the world that is befitting this discussion and the serious nature of this commandment, how should we heed these warnings, and follow these statutes, to ensure that our future generations will live in this world, and enjoy its beauty and abundance like we have had the privilege to do.

Our community should commit itself to several projects that heighten awareness for our environment, or actively engage with the reduction of our carbon footprint.

Our community should strategically plan infrastructure decisions that will help us reduce our adverse effects on the environment.

And we should take a look into our homes. While going off the grid, with Solar Electricity might be possible for some, for the most part most of us will not go that far. However, there are ways in which we can reduce our carbon footprint, and observe the commandment of baal tashchit, against wastefulness. Paper plates and disposable cutlery, when having guests or larger meals, while a time saver, can and should be replaced by using real dishes and cutlery – yes it might take a little longer to load the dish washer or wash up but the impact and potential savings are easily observed. We have the chaggim coming up, and some of us will break out the succah decorations or visit the Christmas store to stock up on tinsel and shiny plastic ornaments that will grace the walls of your humble abode, perhaps this year break out the crayons to make some posters or cut up some old magazines for paper chain. Yes it will probably rain on the first night, but at least you will know that you and our kids had some fun, and the world is a little greener.

A New Page of Talmud – Companion Article

Elul is the time to repair our social world, a time to say sorry and ask for forgiveness to ensure that we are judged favourably by our creator. It should also be a time where we take a moment to repair our physical world. In fact Rabbi Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi compares trees to human beings⁶.

Let us return to Kohelet Rabah,

“Take care that you do not spoil or destroy My world, for if you do, there is no one to come after you and repair it”

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**