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Green Courses of Action

by Jason Thompson and Samantha M. Feld

Hadassah's Environmental Philosophy

At the core of Hadassah's work is a deep caring for and commitment to the environment. The source of this commitment is rooted in Hadassah's adherence to practical Zionism. Practical Zionism emphasizes the achievement of Zionist goals not through political or diplomatic processes, but through practical means, including the great thought that went into the infrastructure of the Land of Israel.

Although the organization is best known for its hospitals in Jerusalem, as Hadassah grew, it increasingly focused on environmental protection as a means of fulfilling practical Zionism. In 1926, Hadassah partnered with the Jewish National Fund and, in its 82-year-long partnership, it has not only planted trees, but also built over 150 dams and reservoirs, developed over 250,000 acres of land, and created more than 400 parks.

Beyond Zionism, beyond activism, Hadassah views environmental protection as a Jewish imperative. *Bal tashhit*, or do not destroy, and *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, are two religious mandates obligating Jews to take action by conserving natural resources and alleviating environmental degradation. With its practical Zionist philosophy, activism in the United States, and an overarching commitment to Jewish values, Hadassah, rooted in the soil, continues on a mission to ensure a safer, healthier planet for the Jewish people and the world.

Hadassah's Environmental Philosophy Realized in Israel

One way Hadassah keeps up with today's growing concerns is through Hadassah College's Environmental Health Sciences program, which caters to those professionals interested in creating a healthier environment. The course of study incorporates a sound science base with an ethical mission to focus on the connection between environment and health.

Today's urban and high-tech lives have positive and negative effects, both physically and psychologically, on all members of society. Hadassah College's Environmental Health Sciences interdisciplinary program incorporates biology, chemistry, public health, and engineering aspects, with an emphasis on the environment's effects on human

health. The program supplements its theoretical components with the assessment and control of potentially dangerous environmental factors.

The uniqueness of this program lies in the practical experience that students receive, which is embedded within all aspects of the curriculum. The Environmental Health Sciences curriculum is designed to equip graduates with the tools necessary for identification, assessment, prevention, and control of environmental factors potentially harmful to human health, quality of life, and the stability and sustainability of ecosystems. In addition, graduates obtain the necessary skills to plan, implement, update, and enforce related programs.

Some of Hadassah College's current students are heavily involved in the green non-governmental organization (NGO) *Megama Yeruka*, or Green Course. Hadassah College students participate on a volunteer basis, along with students from other universities.

Using the skills and education acquired from the Environmental Science Program courses, Hadassah College students are able to advance Green Course's mission of educating the future leadership of Israel and instilling in them an awareness of environmental concerns. Through the empowerment and training of volunteers on campuses throughout the country, the participants prepare the student population to consider environmental issues and expand their educational perspectives. In developing a consciousness about their surrounding environment and communities, the participants seek to amplify their overall notion of "community" and, consequently, their commitment to it.

During the last few years, Green Course has developed substantially, both in terms of numbers of volunteers and in the number of chapters across Israel. Green Course has now established recognized chapters in all of the leading academic institutions across Israel, including Tel Hai College, The Western Galilee College, The Technion, Haifa University, Tel-Aviv University, the Kibbutzim College of Education (new), Bar Ilan University, Weizman Institute, The Hebrew University on Mount Scopus (Jerusalem), and Givat Ram (Jerusalem), Hadassah College, Ben Gurion University, and The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies.

Specifically, students are engaged in a Green Course mission called *Greening Campuses across Israel*. Campus projects currently include cooperative organic farming and compost; promoting campus recycling of paper, batteries, bottles and cans; working to form a nationwide cooperative to purchase solar panels more cheaply and obtain economic returns more quickly; bringing environmentally-flavored lectures to campus; diving and seafloor clean-up in Eilat; creating online "Green Maps" of environmentally-friendly resources; ecological surveys; petitioning and demonstrating against building a new Coal Power Plant in Ashkelon; and organizing environmental films.

Also, the Hadassah College chapter of Green Course, as a collective, opposed new plans for Hanevi'im Street, in the center of Jerusalem. Hadassah College is located on that street and was established over 35 years ago to meet Israel's changing

environmental needs. Students from other universities joined Hadassah College students to protest against new plans that would cause more air pollution, mainly because of transportation in the center of Jerusalem.

Hadassah also works vigorously to educate and engage youth about ecological issues. In 2000, *Merkaz Hamagshimim*-Hadassah, the center for Hadassah's Young Judaea Youth Zionist movement in Israel, created the environmental activism group *Atid Yarok*, which successfully lobbied the municipality of Jerusalem to establish recycling bins across the city. The group is responsible for establishing a reusable shopping bag program at Jerusalem businesses and an online *Talmud* discussion forum that specifically examines environmental issues through the text, among other projects it has sponsored.

Hadassah's Environmental Philosophy Realized in America

While Hadassah's environmental work is rooted in practical Zionism, its efforts in protecting the environment extend far beyond the borders of Israel. Hadassah's 300,000 members in the U.S. tirelessly advocate for the conservation of global natural resources and decreased U.S. dependence on foreign oil. From lobbying members of Congress and state legislators, to leading voter education campaigns, to partnering with environmental coalitions, Hadassah members are a powerful force in advancing the environmental agenda.

Hadassah also is working in the U.S. to unlock the power of its 300,000-strong membership. For example, in March 2007, the Nassau Region of Hadassah hosted an Education Day focusing on the environment. They launched a new concept for their members - a year of study devoted to a single topic. With the guidance of Hadassah's National American Affairs Department, "Global Warming: Too Hot Not To Handle," was born. Part 1 -- titled "It Takes a Region to Change a Light Bulb!" -- focused on the fight against global warming.

At their H-Month (Hadassah Month, which is March, to celebrate Hadassah's birthday) celebration they demonstrated how "It Takes a Region to Change a Light Bulb!" by symbolically changing the first light bulb in their campaign to raise environmental awareness. With that gesture, the Nassau Region called on their membership to follow suit and become more energy efficient.

For more information on Advocacy in Hadassah, please visit www.hadassah.org/advocacy. For more information on *Megama Yaruka* (Green Course), please visit <http://www.green.org.il/eng/>. For information on the Nassau Region of Hadassah's environmental programs, please email nassauregion@hadassah.org or call 516-766-2725.

Jason Thompson is the National Jewish Zionist Education Project Manager at Hadassah in New York City. Samantha M. Feld was a summer intern in Hadassah's National Advocacy Department.
jthompson@Hadassah.org