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Green Menorah Covenant Coalition: Personal, Congregational, and Public-Policy Changes to Avert Global Scorching

by Arthur Waskow

At our best and most successful, we Jewish educators teach not in a vacuum, but as part of a team of passionately Jewish Jews joining to make *Torah* live into our own and the next generations. In any time of social crisis, that means working with rabbis, cantors, communal activists, parents, and others to alert children, teens, and adults about ways of drawing on Jewish wisdom to address the emergency through prayer, learning, and advocacy.

At this moment of our history, we share a crisis — the global climate crisis — with the rest of the human race and, indeed, with the web of life-forms on our planet. Are there Jewish ways of dealing with this crisis — Jewish practices, Jewish texts, Jewish political *seichel* (know-how), and Jewish prayer able to make a difference in this crisis — to help move the world away from catastrophe and toward a new and joyful prosperity that is sustainable and shared?

At such a moment, we educators have not only the obligation, but also the pleasure — not only the *mitzvah* but also the *m'chayyeh* (obligation) — to step forward along with others. What makes this a *m'chayyeh* is that when we address issues of real and deep concern in the everyday lives of our students through the lens of *Torah*, they are likely to respond with excitement, with a desire to learn, and with a passion that makes teaching a joy instead of a chore.

To save our planet, crops, water supply, and coastlines from the ravages of climate crisis and global scorching, The Shalom Center urges these seven directions of PERSONAL and POLICY change at all governmental levels, in corporate and labor-union decisions, and in household / congregational action.

1. Making carbon pay the real costs of its effect on climate:

- *Personal change:* Households set 5% of annual coal, oil, and gasoline costs as *tzedakah* ("charitable" contributions) to support sustainable-energy activism.
- *Public policy:* Requiring energy producers to pay for the carbon emissions their products will cause, through a carbon tax, carbon caps, or a combination.

2. Paying for low-carbon energy sources:

- *For households:* Buying energy-conserving appliances, joining wind-energy plans, etc.

- *Public policy*: Ending subsidies to such carbon-producing sources of energy as coal, oil, and corn-based ethanol; constantly increasing subsidies for such non-carbon-emitting sources of energy as wind, solar, switch-grass.

3. Buildings:

- *For households and congregations*: Greening our own new homes and congregations, and retro-greening our present buildings.
- *Public policy*: Enacting strong building-code regulations for new buildings and for retro-greening old ones.

4. Transportation:

- *For households and congregations*: Car-pooling, walking, or biking to congregations, jobs, etc.
- *Public policy*: Ending subsidies to conventional autos, highways, and airplanes; strictly limiting emissions from autos and airplanes; raising subsidies to bikes, rail, walking, and to holding long-distance meetings by teleconference.

5. Land use:

- *Personal choice*: Urban-style high-density living (whether in actual cities or in suburbs).
- *Public Policy*: Subsidize and invest in urban recreation, workplaces, etc., vs. sprawl and low-density housing.

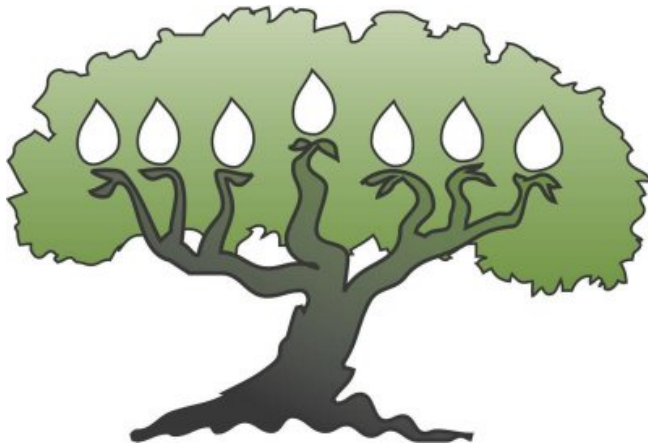
6. Wisdom-creation:

- *Jewish life*: Infusing festivals, life-cycle markers (especially intergenerational markers such as *Bar/Mat Mitzvah* and confirmation; see related story on *Between the Generations: Becoming Elijah*), prayer, and *Torah*-study with concern for the earth and climate.
- *Public policy*: Subsidizing scientific climate-crisis analysis; climate-centered educational projects throughout school years from pre-K through graduate school; support for art, literature, music, dance, film, games, etc., that address climate crisis.

7. Shabbat and restful time:

- *Individual and congregational practice*: Strongly encouraging — even more than before — setting aside restful time and making minimal use of carbon-emitting energy for the time of *Shabbat* itself, as a wise and sacred Jewish practice.
- *Public policy*: Requiring paid leave and holiday time for parental care and neighborhood-centered celebration.

Healing the Earth: The Green Menorah Covenant



The Green *Menorah* is the symbol of a covenant among Jewish communities and congregations to renew the miracle of *Hanukkah* in our own generation: using one day's oil to meet eight days' needs and doing our part so that by 2020, US oil consumption is cut by seven-eighths.

Just as the *Menorah* at the Holy Temple was rooted in the image of a tree, its branches, and buds, so we need to renew the sense that our earth calls on

us to light the Planetary *Menorah* by reducing our use of oil.

We invite you to join in this covenant to heal our planet and our human race from the climate crisis of global scorching.

To work for the policy changes mentioned above, write GreenMenorah@shalomctr.org or Shalom Center, 6711 Lincoln Drive, Philadelphia PA 19119.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow has been one of the creators and leaders of Jewish renewal since writing the original Freedom Seder in 1969. In 1983, he founded and has since been director of The Shalom Center (www.shalomctr.org). In 2007, Newsweek named him one of America's fifty most influential rabbis. He pioneered in the shaping of Eco-Judaism, both through his books (Down-to-Earth Judaism; editor, Torah of the Earth (2 vols); co-editor, Trees, Earth, & Torah: A Tu B'Shvat Anthology) and The Shalom Center's religiously rooted social action (e.g., the 1996 Tu B'Shvat Seder to protect the redwood forest, the 1998 Hoshana Rabbah celebration to protect the Hudson River, and the present Green Menorah Covenant campaign). He taught at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College from 1982-1989 and has taught as a Visiting Professor at the Hebrew Union College -Jewish Institute of Religion and in the departments of religion at Swarthmore, Vassar, Temple University, and Drew University. He is a member of the panel of regular writers on religion for "On Faith," the Washington Post-Newsweek interactive blog. Awaskow@shalomctr.org