



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“GREEN: The New Color of Caring”

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Hundreds of millions of Africans, and tens of millions of Latin Americans who now have access to a regular supply of water might face the issue of water shortages in less than twenty years. By 2050, more than one billion people in Asia could face water shortages as well. By 2080, water shortages may threaten over two billion people depending upon the level of green house gases that cars and industries spew into the air.

Hard to imagine, isn't it? Let me read more...

Global warming is when the average temperature on earth rises. When we use energy and burn fossil fuels we are letting greenhouse gasses into the air in an unnatural way. When they are let into the atmosphere naturally, these gasses are helpful- they keep us warm enough to live on earth by trapping heat in the atmosphere. When unnatural and natural productions of these gasses add up, we are left with global warming.

If global warming continues at the rate it is at now, I will be 43 years old and possibly married with children by the time Northern Europe's small glaciers, along with many of the continent's large glaciers, and ice caps will be on their way to disappearing, if they are not gone already.

Isn't it sad that nowadays many people only respond to fear and trends when it comes to considering our environment? Without “going green” being in style many of us don't try to solve the climate crisis. And without scare tactics about the effects of global warming, many of us cannot imagine what is happening, and what will happen if we do not all come together to change the environment. Therefore, without being fearful of what can happen to the earth, many people do not take it upon themselves to change the future by making good choices for our environment which we call going green.

Some businesses are genuinely going green, and some are not. It is hard to tell who, but businesses which are going green care about the environment and the lives of present and future generations. Some businesses claims of helping to slow down global warming are fraudulent. When claims are fraudulent, I feel as though they can be making the problem of global warming worse. Fraudulent claims of businesses going green may make people feel that an individual being environmentally friendly will not make a difference since supposedly big businesses are already taking care of the climate crisis. Thus, these individuals won't take responsibility towards the environmental cause. If they looked into the global warming crisis, I am sure they would think otherwise.

Isn't it sad how bad things will have to get for us to realize that there is an environmental crisis among us? In January and February of this year, it was unusually warm for a New York winter. I kept thinking I was happy about this weather, but then I remembered what it meant. Changes in the climate are affecting everyone's lives slowly but surely. This reminds me of a poster I have seen on the West Side Highway: “Is it me, or is it getting warm in here?”

According to a recent report put out by the National Center for Atmospheric Research, “We are experiencing substantial, eco system, social, and cultural disruption from recent climate extremes.” This could help explain why we have more tornadoes, hurricanes, and wildfires than ever before. As humans, we rely on the planet for our survival. However, we are only one of Earth’s many inhabitants. Plants and animals are experiencing destruction because of humans and they cannot do anything to save themselves.

In recent years, a growing number of Jews have been developing a deeper connection to Judaism and the Jewish community through environmental activism. They are part of a larger movement of faith-based environmentalists. According to Marc Jacobs, director of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), a national coordination body of the Jewish environmental movement, “Judaism teaches us that above and beyond everything, we have a responsibility to protect life, not only when we know for sure it’s at risk, but when it may be at risk.” Marc Jacobs heads a coalition of organizations that care about the environment, and have discovered a link between their own spiritual and environmental roots and their being Jewish.

TEVA (which means nature in Hebrew) is an organization that focuses on teaching people to appreciate, love and care for the environment through hands on activities. They work with people on connecting with the environment spiritually, to create a bond with nature to then care for and take responsibility for the wellbeing of the earth. In their own words, “TEVA learning center exists to renew the ecological wisdom inherent in Judaism.” All their activities are designed to promote awareness, interconnectedness, and responsibility.

COEJL and TEVA are great examples of groups that connect environmentalism to Jewish teachings and values. They base their ideology and suggestions on ways to go green on ideas like pikuah nefesh, saving a life, and Tikkun Olam, repairing the world. They are very realistic thinkers and give suggestions based not only on Judaism, but on the fact that everyone can learn and go green differently.

COEJL has fought for laws to address the effects of pollution on public health, global climate change, and the destruction of wildlife habitat. They have done this on behalf of 29 different national Jewish organizations.

TEVA is a religious organization. They use the Torah’s laws of life to direct their thoughts and teachings involving eco-Judaism. One quote they find important is, “do not spoil and destroy My world, for if you do spoil it, there is no one after you to repair it.” This is based on the book of Genesis, that claims that God created and owns the universe and everything we use today. As a humanistic Jew, I think this quote should say Our world instead of My world because we all live here together and share the responsibility to care for it.

According to Sarah Chandler, Education Director of West End Synagogue, in NY, “...ecology and religion are completely intertwined.” However, as a humanist, I believe environmental preservation is important for practical reasons, regardless of one’s spiritual orientation.

In my research concerning global warming, I decided it was important that I learn about the varied perspectives on environmentalism and global warming from people who are outside the Jewish community. As I researched, I found that some Christian and Muslim followers share similar concerns as many Jews do about the issue of global warming. They are just as willing to “go green.”

Many churches have worked towards being more environment friendly by making their buildings more energy efficient. For example, members of the Christ Church in California installed photovoltaic panels. These panels use energy from the sun to generate heat and light that is usually generated by an electric power plant. Right after they pay for their photovoltaic panels- out go their electricity bills forever!

According to Muslim teachings, Mohammed was a strong advocate of environmental protection. Mohammed's life and deeds show that he had an incredible respect for maintaining a strong balance between humans and nature. According to the Quran, the Muslim Holy Book, "To God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth, for God encompasses everything." Mohammed believes that God is the basis of everything. Therefore, abusing one of his creations, such as a natural resource, is a sin.

Gary Gardner, the Director of Research at World Watch, an environmental policy organization, believes that a close collaboration between religious groups and environmentalists, "could change the world... These groups have different and complementary strengths." I strongly support Gary Gardner's way of thinking. We do not have time to segregate people who have the same goals and values when it comes to saving the environment, going green.

The modern environmental movement took shape in the 1960s with the widespread recognition that industrial society had polluted the air and water, poisoned the landscape and driven many species to extinction. One of the inspiring voices in the movement was marine biologist Rachel Carson.

When pesticides harmful to the environment were overused and misused after World War II, Rachel Carson was appalled and reordered her priorities. She started to warn the public about long-term effects of using pesticides in ways that were not good for the environment. Her award-winning book Silent Spring, published in 1962, demanded a change in how people viewed our environment. This was the first major book to bring attention to environmentalism.

When Carson began warning the public about agricultural practices, the chemical industry and people working for the government accused Carson of being an alarmist. Despite this accusation, Carson continued to speak her mind about the issues she knew were important to protect the earth and all its creatures. When Carson testified before Congress in 1963, she voiced the need for new policies to protect the environment. It took many years of political muscle to force our leaders to make the kind of large scale changes that were needed.

Now, 40 years later, many people are still unaware of and disinterested in the harms of global warming. Laws that protect the environment are being abused and minimally enforced.

An Inconvenient Truth is an Oscar winning documentary by former vice president, (and should have been current president) Al Gore. It is about the effects and history of global warming. Like Rachel Carson, Al Gore informs viewers about the problems global warming is causing that we do not necessarily see. He makes sure that people understand that global warming is not a myth. It is something happening right now.

Unfortunately, some people cannot handle the inconvenient truths Al Gore speaks of. These people can't imagine such a terror called global warming will affect them in ways Gore has revealed. Many times these people attack Gore and label him as an alarmist, like Rachel Carson, even though his charts, graphs, and statistics are clearly plausible. The people who label these amazing environmental activists as alarmists remind me of ostriches. The ostrich affect is when ostriches ignore their problems by sticking their heads into the sand. Of course, this does not solve anything. We need to learn from the

ostrich affect- hiding from the issues will not solve them. Just like the theme song of the Inconvenient Truth tells us, "...it's time to wake up now."

It is easy to get distracted by day to day problems that seem to be the only ones that will affect us, but global warming will just get worse if we do not give going green our full attention. Unless we start planning ahead, present and future generations will cease to exist.

If however we go green, we may have times in which we would want to focus our time on the other issues. But, if we help stop global warming now, at least we, our children, our grandchildren, and every other living creature in existence will not have to live in a world where disasters occur and kill regularly. Twenty years from now is when scientists predict that many homes and towns will be wrecked, and many more health issues will cause serious problems unless we as responsible citizens make a change.

I have been a member of the City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism for five years. Although the congregation teaches about many important aspects of Judaism, eco-Judaism and environmentalism in a general sense does not come up much in the Kid school curriculum. I have a challenge for the City Congregation. I challenge you to only use recycled paper for all you do: bar and bat mitzvah booklets, handouts, Kehilah Circle, for classrooms and office work. I also challenge you to talk about eco-Judaism for all ages.

I have taken the first step. The invites to the City Congregation members were made of recycled paper, although they were pink. Also, the inside of the booklets for today's service are made of recycled paper.

The next tips are for everyone:

-Make sure your family understand that it is important to follow certain habits that regard the environment.

-Switch your lights from incandescent bulbs, to compact florescent. They can cost about two times what incandescent bulbs cost, but they last ten times longer. Florescent bulbs are a better deal for you economically and environmentally. If every home in the US changed only one light bulb to a florescent light bulb, the U.S. would save more than \$500 million in energy costs and it would be equivalent to taking 800,000 cars off the road. My family has taken the step to change every light bulb possible in our house to fluorescent.

-If it is unnecessary to use a car, please walk or take public transportation. If you do this, we can avoid feeding the atmosphere any excess carbon emissions.

-Find ways to have fun outside and not using electronics and lastly; walk up the stairs to your house to save energy you would have used by taking the elevator.

Now, I realize this was a long speech and you probably did not hear all of it. But, I want all of you to listen now, and be left with this simple message. Global warming is a serious issue that can easily be resolved; all we need is commitment. There are many politicians and people with more authority than anyone here that will not try to solve the climate crisis. But, if you only learn one thing from this paper, it should be that each individual really can make a difference.