

## Rabbi's Message January 2022

The Book of Ecclesiastes (1:4) opines that “One generation goes and another generation comes; but the Earth remains forever.” While that certainly makes good sense, as temperature gauges rise higher and higher, as more and more children wheeze from environmentally induced asthma, as increasing numbers of countries inch closer and closer to armed hostilities over depleting water resources, as entire towns wash away from the once-in-a-century storms that now come every year or two, how confident can we really be any more of the veracity of the biblical assurance that the Earth will remain forever? As much as we want to believe it, something tells us to be skeptical perhaps of such an unconditional statement. As it turns out, we are not alone in our reticence. The truth is that even back in the Early Middle Ages, the rabbis of our tradition were already expressing the concerns that so many of us feel today:

*When God created Adam, God led the human around all the trees in the Garden of Eden and said, “See how beautiful and praiseworthy all of My works are? All that I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy my world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you.”*

-- Midrash Kohelet

The fact of the matter is that while humanity certainly can't create the world, we certainly *are* capable of destroying it if we're not careful.

Recognizing that none of us can possibly have the one and only answer to how we can best preserve the planet, all the same, there is at least one thing upon which I imagine we *do* all agree: trees are awesome! Trees are beautiful, they smell nice, they bear scrumptious fruit, they offer the ideal setting to hang a hammock, and they provide the perfect carving board for people to proclaim undying love. But there's so much more. From a strictly scientific perspective, some of the most important reasons to respect trees are that, according to The National Wildlife Federation (culled from <https://www.nwf.org/Trees-for-Wildlife/About/Trees-Make-a-Difference>):

### **1. Trees improve air quality.**

Trees are sometimes called the lungs of the Earth because they absorb pollutants through their leaves, trapping (or “sequestering”), and filtering contaminants in the air. Like all green plants, trees also produce oxygen through photosynthesis.

## **2. Trees improve water quality, and reduce flooding and erosion.**

A tree's leafy canopy catches precipitation before it reaches the ground, allowing some of it to gently drip and the rest to evaporate. Tree roots hold soil in place, reducing erosion. In these ways, trees lessen the force of storms and reduce the amount of runoff into sewers, streams, and rivers, improving water quality. One hundred mature trees can intercept about 100,000 gallons of rainfall per year.

## **3. Trees temper climate.**

Trees lower air temperatures and humidity; they can also influence wind speed. Evaporation of water from trees, or transpiration, has a cooling effect. Cities develop "heat islands" because dark roofs and pavement absorb solar energy and radiate it back. Trees in parking lots have been shown to reduce asphalt temperatures by 36 degrees Fahrenheit and car interiors by up to 47 degrees Fahrenheit.

## **4. Trees conserve energy.**

Three or more large trees strategically placed on sunny sides of a house shade it from the hot summer sun, reducing air-conditioning costs by as much as 30 percent. Deciduous trees are best for this use because they lose their leaves in winter, exposing the house to the warming winter sun, which lowers the energy needed to heat the house. Coniferous trees, because they retain their needles year-round, serve to reduce wind when placed on the north and northwest sides of a building, resulting in significantly lower winter heating costs.

## **5. Trees create habitat for plants and animals.**

Wherever trees are established, wildlife and other plants are sure to follow, ensuring a healthier ecosystem. Trees provide shelter and food for a variety of birds and small animals.

## **6. Trees reduce noise pollution and can serve as screens.**

A belt of trees 100 feet wide and 50 feet tall can reduce highway noise by up to 10 decibels, reducing the sound volume by half. Densely planted trees can also block unsightly views.

## **7. Trees help reverse the Greenhouse Effect**

One tree can sequester (or take in) more than one ton of carbon dioxide in its lifetime. Planting trees and avoiding deforestation are key measures in reducing the human impact on global climate change.

In a nutshell, trees matter. They matter because we enjoy them, but they matter even more because we need them. Trees are indeed important. So important that Jewish tradition even devotes an entire day of sacred worship to their celebration.

Tu B'Shevat, the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Shevat, which this year begins on the evening of Sunday, January 16 and concludes at nightfall on Monday, is observed as the birthday of all trees. And so I invite you to join us on Friday evening, January 14, as we celebrate an early birthday during our annual Tu B'Shevat Shabbat service. But this year's observance will be even more special than usual, because not only will we celebrate Tu B'Shevat, but so too will we welcome our friends from Mt. Pisgah AME Church, as we do every year, for the first half of our weekend of honoring the memory of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Also as usual, Rev. Diana M. O. Bracy will offer the sermon

at our Shabbat service, while I will offer the sermon during Mt. Pisgah's Sunday morning worship. Dial-in information will be sent out prior to the service, as Mt. Pisgah is gathering by phone in light of COVID-19. I do hope you will join us for both halves of our solidarity weekend.

**ONE FINAL NOTE:** I am excited, in honor of Tu B'Shevat, to announce that Matt Polsky, who is not only one of our newest members but also a Senior Fellow for Sustainability Innovation and Multidisciplinary Thought at Farleigh Dickinson University's Institute for Sustainable Enterprise, has agreed to chair our brand new JCNWJ Environmental Concerns Committee. Recognizing our sacred Jewish obligation to protect the natural world in which we live, this committee will devise and implement a project of significance to help our temple family become the responsible stewards of God's Creation that we aspire to be.

**We are seeking committee members to be part of the effort and hope you will consider volunteering to do so. If you are interested, or even if you just *think* you *might* be interested, please let me know by email at [RabbiDubin@jcnwj.org](mailto:RabbiDubin@jcnwj.org).**

*L'Shalom,*  
Rabbi Dubin