



Climate Justice

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Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai Said: Three things are of equal importance, and these are them: earth, humankind, and rain. Rabbi Levi Bar Hiyya said: And these three are from three letters, to teach you that if there's no earth there's no rain, and if there's no rain there's no earth, and without either of them there's no humankind. *Genesis Rabbah 13:3*

1. What does this text tell us about our dependence/interdependence on the environment?
2. What is our role in maintaining the equilibrium between the earth, rain and humanity?

...Jewish tradition...designates the period from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur for reflection and return. We acknowledge our misdoings of the past year and do teshuva. We apologize, make amends and aim for a more correct course. Achieving forgiveness is a complicated process, certainly when it comes to the climate. We tend to think about rifts between people, or about the need for spiritual repair between an individual and God, but what about forgiveness for our sins against our planet?

Despite the popular adage, “forgive and forget,” Jewish tradition emphasizes the opposite, the importance of keeping history in memory. We need to keep our climate sins in the forefront of our minds so as not to repeat them in the future. Viruses, heat, and pollution increase economic disparity between the haves and have-nots. We live in a connected world. The question “Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?” has never been more germane. A virus originating in China spread across the globe. Gases generated from fossil fuel use in locales as distant as Shanghai, Des Moines, and Capetown continue to melt glaciers at the poles and cause record breaking temperatures...As Jews and citizens of the world, we must take stock of the present situation and look to the future...*Excerpted from “Forgive, Don’t Forget: A Climate Meditation for the High Holy Days” by Dr. Michelle Friedman, Director, Department of Pastoral Counseling at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and Steering Committee Member, Jewish Climate Action Network-NYC*

1. What does this text tell us about our connection to and responsibility for the earth?
2. How have we wronged our environment?
3. How do we do teshuva – make amends? Is it possible?

Look at God's work - for who can straighten what God has twisted? (Ecclesiastes 7:13). When the Blessed Holy One created the first human[s] God took them and led them round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to them: “Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And all

that I have created, it was for you that I created it. Pay attention that you do not corrupt and destroy My world: if you corrupt it, there is no one to repair it after you. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13:1*

1. Have we taken care of God's gift to us? Have we "paid attention" to how our actions affect the world around us?
2. How have we understood our responsibility to care for the earth? How has that changed in recent years?
3. What can we do as individuals to be more mindful of our impact on the earth?

Light is a symbol of resilience and hope in most traditions, especially in dark times when the days get shorter and the nights get longer and colder. Remember the miracle of Hanukkah? The oil lasting 8 nights when it was only supposed to last for one? Well, the Talmud says, miracles are nice but unreliable (lo som'chim al ha'nes!) We can't pray for a Hail Mary from God (so to speak) to keep our environment resilient for longer than we have resources. We need to dig deep into our ancestral memory to remember what it felt like to have the discipline to kindle the lamps daily, as the Torah describes in many places—the Eternal Flame, or Ner Tamid. Keeping the light shining is part of what it means to be Jewish. Once upon a time the job of our priests was to do the lighting for us... but we're the kingdom of priests now. The sustaining of light eternally, connecting us with resilient, bright, beautiful, God-infused light, is on us. *Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann, Mishkan Chicago*

1. Have we been waiting for a miracle? Why do we think it has been so difficult to realize that our resources are limited?
2. What can we do as a Jewish community to "keep the light shining?"