

**“Eco-Kosher as a Greenprint for a
Holy, Sustainable Life:
A Fresh Look at Lox, Bagels and Cream Cheese”
by Terry Gips
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Shabbat Shalom everyone. I hope you enjoyed the delicious eco-kosher, organic, vegan breakfast prepared by Joni Abramson and Beryl Brin. I especially would like to thank Joni for all the work she did in dutifully working out all the details and getting all the food so this event would be fully in keeping with the today’s study topic.

I also would like to acknowledge the other members of the Mayim Rabim Adult Education committee for their work with this and the other outstanding programs they have been offering.

And finally, I’d like to thank each of you for getting up so early on a Sabbath morning to be part of this discussion. I have been looking forward to having a community discussion about eco-kosher for a long time so I really appreciate this opportunity. And the timing seems quite right as we’re soon to celebrate Tu Bishvat, the Jewish New Year of the Trees, our pre-eminent environmental holy day.

After much discussion, Joni and I arrived at the following title: “Eco-Kosher as a Greenprint for a Holy, Sustainable Life: A Fresh Look at Lox, Bagels and Cream Cheese.” We hoped it would be somewhat provocative and encourage us to re-look at our most basic food and life choices in the context of what the Torah teaches us.

My thought was that in our hour together we’d use an interactive process to examine the relatively new concept of eco-kosher, including where it evolved from and how it relates to the ancient concepts of kashrut and holiness. We’ll discuss how we can apply eco-kosher to our day-to-day lives at home, work and the synagogue—from food choices, recycling, and printing to commuting, lighting, and labor. We’ll also explore whether it’s possible to have a safer, healthier, less expensive and improved quality of life while bringing about Tikkun Olam, the healing of the world.

I come before you today not as a Rabbi, but as a committed Jew, economist and ecologist. I wasn’t always. Although I was raised by Jewish parents in largely Jewish Highland Park, Illinois and went to Solel Synagogue, a progressive reform congregation

headed by one of this century's great Jewish thinkers and leaders, Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, Judaism really just meant social justice for me. As Rabbi Wolf would remind us, "Never Again" means Never Again for any people anywhere on the earth."

I should mention that Rabbi Wolf was a Freedom Rider in the South, Secretary to Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the first Rabbis in the US calling for the creation of a Palestinian homeland more than 40 years ago, co-founder of the Jewish Reform camp movement (Ocomowoc in Wisconsin), and creator of the nation's first Holocaust Remembrance program. And you can even meet him and study with him at Temple Israel for a Shabbaton this President's Day weekend, February 15-17.

Since my childhood I've been on a wandering spiritual path and only reconnected to Judaism upon my coming to the Twin Cities 20 years ago with guidance from Rabbi Yonassan Gershom, Kathy and Rabbi Irv Wise at Hillel, and Jackie and Leon Olenick, as well as Ellen Bernstein of Shomrei Adamah ("Guardians of the Earth"), Rabbi Arthur Waskow, and Rabbi Jonathon Wolf (son of Rabbi Wolf, who was actually confirmed with myself and Rabbi Harrari's wife, Laura Schwartz Harrari). They helped me discover how "green" and environmentally responsible Judaism is--it's just that I had never gotten it before.

And I wasn't always an economist and ecologist. I wanted to be a train engineer or firefighter. And later, a social worker like my Mom. But somehow along the way, when I began the Sacramento Community Garden Program, I fell in love with the Earth. I became an ecologist to learn about the Earth and an economist to help save us from ourselves.

It is ironic that ecology and economics, which so often are in conflict, share the same common root, "eco," which comes from the Greek for "household." Thus, ecology and economics relate to the proper function of the household, both of our own personal home and our larger home, the Earth.

This relates directly to the theme of my talk on "Eco-Kosher" because we are combining the ancient ideas of care for our household and the earth with the equally ancient concept of "kosher" or kashrut.

They are a powerful combination and form the basis of an exciting and challenging new discussion in Judaism that has significant ramifications for how we eat, live and pray. I'd like to explore this with you and examine its relevance to our lives today.

I feel a certain urgency to discuss our relationship to the Earth because as Jews we have been divorced from the land and, consequently, from the environment. This is a subtle phenomenon that few of us have probably thought much about.

Despite our previous deep connections to the land, the passage of legislation and decrees in many parts of the world forced us off the land and into other occupations, from banking to trade. We ultimately completed our own transformation from one of the world's great agricultural people to the world's best urbanized people. We learned to survive in crowded urban ghettos. Though we have now been freed of the ghettos and many of us have migrated into suburbia's world of lush, green chemlawns, we are just learning to connect with the environment.

What I'll share is based on a number of sources but particularly on a Sabbath talk I gave at Beth El Synagogue in 1994 when I was the week-end scholar-in-residence for the Arthur Stillman Lectures.

The Torah and Kashrut

I'd like to begin by exploring the concept of Kosher. Would anyone be willing to share what it means to you?

Kosher or Kasher in Hebrew, means fit or proper for use. And Kashrut is the system of Dietary Laws that guide our cooking, eating and use.

Where is the first reference to Kashrut?

The first reference to what later in the Torah becomes the laws of Kashrut can be found in Exodus (22:30): "And ye shall be **holy** people unto Me; therefore ye shall not eat any flesh that is torn of the beasts of the field."

What do you believe the purpose of Kashrut is?

According to Orthodox and other Rabbis, it establishes the clear purpose and goal of the Kosher laws as holiness, not health.¹ Most of us think of Kashrut as an evolved ancient health measure that may at one time have been useful but is no more. But as you can see in this and other passages, as well as a range of teachings, its purpose is to promote holiness.

In Deuteronomy (14:21) it says: "Ye shall not eat anything that dieth of itself...for thou art a **holy** people unto the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk."

¹ Dresner, Samuel H.; Siegel, Seymour; and Pollock, David M. *The Jewish Dietary Laws*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly of America and the United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education, 1982).

In Leviticus (11:44-45), after we are told which animals, fowl and fish are permitted and which are forbidden, the reason for this long series of laws is at last given: "I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be **holy**; for I am holy...For I am the Lord that brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God; ye shall therefore be **holy**."

Each of these passages stresses the importance of kadosh or holy. And this concept is to be incorporated into all aspects of our everyday lives as Jews, not made separate as in most other religions.

Does this surprise you?

What does being holy mean to you? I'd appreciate it if you could pair up with someone next to you and share for a minute each what holiness means to you. Then will come back together and hear some of your thoughts.

Martin Buber clearly enunciated the significance of integrating holiness into all aspects of our lives: "Judaism teaches us to overcome the fundamental separation between the holy and the profane. This separation has formed a part of the foundation of every religion. Everywhere the holy is removed and set apart from the fullness of things, properties and actions which belong to the universal, so that the holy becomes a self-contained holiness outside of which the profane must pitch its tent."²

Rabbi Samuel Dresner emphasizes that we are to hallow the everyday every day so that holiness encompasses our total being. We are to appreciate G-d and all of G-d's gifts, even those that seem most trivial. As Rabbi Dresner points out, "And what is more common, more ordinary, more seemingly trivial than the process of eating? It is precisely here that Judaism would have us begin--with the everyday."³

It is more significant to learn how to prepare and eat our food than to reflect on a dogma and more important to say ha-motzi over a piece of bread than to memorize a creed. We are taught the importance of doing, with a belief that proper thinking often derives from proper doing.

So, how do we become holy? We become holy by making holy, by hallowing, including that which is not yet holy, the profane, everyday. That is the purpose of mitzvot. By observing the mitzvot we are able to hallow and be hallowed.

² Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws*, p. 15.

³ Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws*, p. 18.

Thus, it is argued that the mitzvah of Kashrut was given to us in order to help us become holy. By hallowing the act of eating, we become holy.

While Kosher means fit or proper for use, its opposite is Treif (Yiddish) or Trefah (Hebrew). The word literally means, "torn by a wild beast." Thus, something which is treif is not suitable for use and is forbidden.

Dresner points out that Kashrut teaches us reverence for life and that the eating of meat was itself a compromise. Adam, the first person, was not permitted to eat meat. As an inhabitant of the Garden of Eden, which represented the perfect, ideal society, he is a vegetarian who eats only fruits and vegetables. Again, this comes from a widely respected, mainstream Orthodox Rabbi who "wrote the book" on Kashrut.

Dresner goes on to say that Adam was not satisfied to live in paradise and rebelled against G-d. Thus, his descendents wanted the flesh of living creatures, which required that life had to be taken and an animal put to death.⁴ But as Dresner points out, "Human consumption of meat, which means the taking of an animal life, has constantly posed a religious problem to Judaism, even when it has accepted the necessity of it."⁵ Thus, the permission to eat meat is seen as a compromise, a divine concession to human weakness and human need.

While we are permitted to eat meat, we must learn to have reverence for life we take. It is part of the process of hallowing which Kashrut proclaims. The laws for Sh'chitah, the manner of slaughter, are followed in the Talmud and probably go back to Biblical times. Most Shochet, or people who perform Sh'chitah, claim that it is the most humane method of slaughtering animals. Others believe that while it may have been, there are more humane methods today.

The Shochet must be both a learned and pious person and pass an exam on his knowledge of the Sh'chitah. He must read a blessing before executing his duties. The knife must be absolutely sharp with no nicks so that in one cut across the throat the arteries to the head can be severed, rendering the animal unconscious of pain. The Shochet must also examine the animal's internal organs to make certain that the animal was not diseased.

Because of the time limits, I will not focus on the removal of the blood, the range of animals that can and cannot be consumed and requirements regarding eating.

⁴ Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws*, p. 23.

⁵ Dresner, *The Jewish Dietary Laws*, p. 24.

The Current Practice of Kashrut

There are obviously several days worth of material to discuss about our current practice of Kashrut. I thought I'd just touch on three.

First, more and more Jews and Jewish establishments are becoming vegetarian because of increasing concerns about the treatment of animals, as well as protecting one's health and the environment, ethics and the expense and related difficulties in homes, restaurants and synagogues of separating meat and dairy, including separate cookware, utensils, plates and washing facilities. Quite simply, being vegetarian makes it much easier to practice Kashrut.

I grew up as a big meat eater at every meal. I won't tell you which non-kosher meat I had for breakfast every morning except to say one day when I was a few years old I came down to breakfast and saw little pigs running around my plate. I used to get the flu once a year plus several colds. For my 21st birthday my present to myself was becoming a vegetarian, never realizing all the benefits I would receive, especially total health and vitality. For the past 30 years I have never been sick, even though I travel all over the world.

Second, there also are increasing concerns about how the animals are slaughtered. The assembly line method used in American kosher slaughterhouses often involves shackling animals and hoisting them off the ground before the shochet come to kill them. American law requires that the animal not be touching a pool of blood. The hoisting puts the animal in a great deal of pain, often dislocating its legs and resulting in injury to workers who are kicked as well. Such practices are clearly indefensible because of cruelty.

Is this holy? Is it healthy?

In countries such as England a more humane restraining device or crate is used. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has expended considerable sums to make it available to meat packers in the U.S. Despite support for this effort by national representative Jewish bodies, the new device has not been widely adopted. I believe it is time for all Jews to insist that this procedure be used everywhere.

Finally, it would be nice if we could drink kosher organic wine or grape juice, that is juice from grapes where no pesticides or synthetic fertilizers have been used. This is important to protect the farmer and farm workers, as well as water, fish, and wildlife, as well as us.

There's plenty of kosher organic grape juice in Israel (such as at Kibbutz Sde Elliahu) but it's been limited in the US. Kedem has limited supplies of it and it's costly.

Although there are lots of organic grapes, the problem is that there are tremendous expenses in having rabbinical supervision of the process. I have several Jewish friends who run organic juice operations who would like to produce kosher organic juice, but can't afford the supervision.

Eco-Kosher

So, what is eco-kosher?

What does it mean to you? Is it a cheap way of keeping kosher or what?

Most often, it's answered by the ancient Jewish practice of asking another question like, "Are grapes that have been grown by exploiting farmworkers and spraying hazardous pesticides 'kosher' to eat at the Synagogue's next wedding reception?" Or, "Is newsprint made by chopping down an ancient and irreplaceable forest 'kosher' to use for a Jewish newspaper?" These things may clearly be "kosher" according to the traditional Jewish law code, but they may be troubling to us, according to the teachings of Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi.

I'd answer that eco-kosher is a relatively new and evolving concept combining common sense and compassion with a range of ancient Jewish teachings, including kashrut, caring for the earth (Bal taschit), respecting animals (Tza'ar ba'alei chayim), protecting one's own body (Sh'mirat haguf), not oppressing workers and customers (Oshek), the sharing of food, money and work-time with the poor (Tzedakah) and the Sabbath and Jubilee years of rest for the land and from deliberate economic use of it (Schmitah and yovel). These teachings are incorporated into a set of simple, daily practices to properly respect the earth, ourselves and all other life. For more information see Arthur Waskow's *Down to Earth Judaism: Food, Money, Sex and the Rest of Life* (NY: William Morrow and Company, 1995).

I address some of these core teachings in the appendix (below).

Eco-Kashrut as a Response to Contemporary Challenges

With the increasing realization of the desecration of our planet, many Jews have gone back to their roots to search for answers and teachings. They have built upon an ancient and clear train of tradition of Jews who took on the obligations to create a holy life, such as the Nazirites, Essenes and ancient Hasidim. In fact, the Essenes broke off from other Jews because they felt holiness could not be pursued due to the low levels of purity that were being kept. And of course, the Cohain or Levi had an inherited holiness.

In many ways, each generation tends to build on previous ones. The result has been the creation of the concept of eco-kosher in the last thirty or so years by Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, Dr. Arthur Green and Dr. Arthur Waskow, all formerly connected to the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia.

Eco-kosher has become a way of fusing many of Judaism's central concerns and roots into a symbiosis. It has become an exciting movement in Judaism that is attracting a great deal of interest among both practicing and alienated Jews, with the former seeing the opportunities for deepening their spiritual and environmental commitment and the latter seeing a more contemporary and progressive Judaism.

Does that make sense about its roots?

Incorporating Eco-Kosher Into Our Lives Today

So let's get to the bottom line: Is it OK to eat our lox, bagels and cream cheese? It's getting to the point that people complain there's something wrong about eating everything, even movie popcorn. So we throw up our hands and choose to eat everything.

I think there's a more moderate, common sense approach. We can try to buy organic food that doesn't poison farmers, farm workers, the environment, ourselves or our children. And we can be sensitive about not needlessly killing or depleting the world's natural resources. We can also try not to buy products where people have been harmed or exploited.

Lox

Given these simple guidelines, I'd say that lox, which is salmon, might not be considered eco-kosher by some people because of the killing of a life and by others because of the depletion of our salmon supply, or perhaps worse, the creation of salmon factory farms utilizing a range of pesticides, overly rich fish feeds that interfere with water quality and engineered hybrid salmon that frequently escape and overtake wild salmon stocks throughout the world. Others have well-founded health concerns regarding the high levels of mercury, pesticides and other hazardous man-made residues that are found in the salmon. And some would ask, if it's forbidden under Kashrut to kill and eat wild animals, why is it permitted to kill and eat wild salmon?

Does anyone have any questions or thoughts on this?

Bagels

How about bagels? If it's a common egg bagel, it's made from eggs, wheat and water. More than 90% of all eggs come from massive factory farms where several hens are jammed into a tiny cage with dimensions the size of record album.

Their food is brought in by conveyor belt and their eggs and manure are removed the same way. They never see the light of day as all lighting is timed and artificial to increase their egg laying. Their beaks are cut off to stop them from cannibalizing each other and they suffer from a range of diseases requiring numerous medications because they cannot exercise their normal behaviors. They “live” like this for 18 months until they are slaughtered and become Campbell's chicken soup.

Is this humane? Would you say, “Um, um good. Um, um good. Campbell’s chicken soup is um, um good”?

But how about if we avoid egg bagels unless we know that the hens are treated humanely?

Much of the wheat for our bagels is grown with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and there are an increasing number of genetically modified varieties.

Would that be kosher?

It is possible to use delicious organically grown wheat, but we have to ask our bakers to use it. Today we had kosher, organic bagels from French Meadow Bakery and Café, which I’m pleased to say is owned by two dear friends, Lynn Gordon and Steve Shapiro (son of Rabbi Max Shapiro of Temple Israel). I’m pleased to say that French Meadow is a certified kosher bakery whose delicious, award-winning breads are all organic and kosher and do not contain any eggs or dairy. They have proven it's possible to put eco-kosher into practice and have it taste great. [Today, organic bagels are available from Common Roots www.commonrootscafe.com and Rise Bagels, www.risebagel.com]

Does all of that make sense?

Cream Cheese

So, how about the cream cheese? I could go on for a day or more about the challenges with dairy foods, such as cream cheese, cheese, milk, yogurt, and ice cream. But I’ll spare you all the gory details because you can read my book, *The Humane Consumer and Producer Guide* (available from the Alliance for Sustainability) or any of John Robbins’ books, such as *Diet for a New America* or his newest, *The Food Revolution*.

I should say that cream cheese and other dairy products are great... for a heart attack, stroke, arthritis, high blood pressure, prostate cancer, breast cancer, and arthritis. And something that the American Dairy Council forgets to tell women, they're also good for getting osteoporosis, primarily because of the overly high protein levels that deplete calcium from the body. They also help many people get sick and kids bounce off the walls of classrooms because more than 20% of our population is lactose intolerant and generally don't understand their allergic reaction.

Cream cheese and other dairy products ably accomplish all of this by assuring your body gets high levels of cholesterol, pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics.

It's probably better that we keep the barn door closed on the fact that a large percentage of our dairy products come from factory farm operations where the cows are held in indoor stanchions allowing little movement. Or that the only way to keep getting high milk production (and contribute to our country's milk surplus and low prices requiring taxpayer subsidies) is to use bovine growth hormone and a range of antibiotics to address the range of udder and leg problems. It's just a small detail that the calves are separated shortly after birth from their mothers to break the bonding and nursing cycle and that most cows live to just be four years old before they become hamburger meat, requiring a type of slaughter you probably don't want to read about in my book.

Then there are a few environmental questions. Like all the water, energy, pesticides, and fertilizers used to produce, transport and raise the feed and animals, not to mention the antibiotics and other medications needed by factory farm agriculture.

And as we all know, what goes in must come out. The result is that the Minnesota River and waterways across the country are totally polluted from livestock manure. So much is being produced that there's no place to put it all, except in large manure ponds that stink, leach into ground water and contribute to acid rain and global climate change.

And that doesn't address the very high levels of pesticides and other persistent organic pollutants that bioconcentrate in the fat cells of animals and get released in their milk. We know that these pesticides are then accumulated in women's body fat in their breasts. It is estimated that approximately half the lifetime pesticide accumulation in a woman's body is released during the first nursings of a newborn child. This is felt to be a contributing factor in the 40% increase in certain types of childhood cancers and a 1% a year increase in breast cancer among women.

So, do you think milk does a body good? And, does it do a lot of good for the Earth? Is it Kosher?

I should say that there is organic cream cheese and milk available from Organic Valley or North Farm Co-op in Wisconsin. It would be less environmentally destructive but still have the same health challenges.

So, do you have any questions or comments about lox, bagels and cream cheese...or other food?

Other Aspects of Eco-Kosher: 3 Rs and 1 C

Of course, it's just as important to examine what we consume as how we consume it. We can begin with something we've all heard a lot: "The 3 Rs"--reduce, reuse and recycle—plus the one "C", composting. These can be applied to the three areas that the Union of Concerned Scientists have addressed as being our most environmentally destructive: Energy use in our homes and institutions, transportation and food choices.

Reduce

What are some of the things we might be able to do here at Mayim Rabim or home to reduce?

We can reduce our use of energy by turning lights off, using LED lighting, reducing cooling/heating, and purchasing alternative energy (such as solar or wind), rather than having to depend on coal or nuclear power from Prairie Island that generates so much toxic waste. We also can get to work or services by walking, public transportation or bicycle.

I'm now in my fourth winter of year round biking everywhere within three miles of my home (including coming to Mayim Rabim), resulting in my saving money, staying healthy with great exercise and reducing traffic congestion and pollutants, including global climate change gasses from cars. And for windy days and big hills, there's my new, comfortable, attractive and easily rechargeable electric bike, which some of you have tried out and allows you to have fun and go up to 20 miles at 12 mph on roads or bike paths with parking always available right in front of your destination. Such a deal.

Junk Mail

How many of you are fed up with junk mail?

Another way to reduce is with junk mail, both in terms of how much we get (isn't a weekly Victoria Secret Catalog a little much? On more than one level?), and how much we're enticed to buy.

Did you know that each year 90 million trees are leveled in the US to provide the paper for the mostly unwanted mailings? Or that approximately 340,000 garbage trucks are needed to haul away mailings that don't quite make it to the recycling bins? And that doesn't even count all the fossil fuels required to power them. Now, of course, I'm not talking about any mailings from Mayim Rabim.

Reuse

So, how might we address the second R, "Reuse"?

We can also reuse materials and save resources by limiting or ending our use of single use, throw-away products made from virgin paper or plastic, such as table cloths, bags, food containers, towels, plates, cups and silverware. It always bothers me to go to a Sabbath celebration in which all everything seems to be disposed of, filling up huge garbage containers during a time we're not supposed to negatively impact Creation.

Of course, what we don't realize is that the paper products required chlorine to bleach them white, which contributes to serious pollution and health problems, while the plastic products are incinerated, releasing even worse pollutants than during their manufacture.

Maybe we can take better care of the things we have and not always buy so many new ones. And maybe we don't need to use hazardous cleaning products, lawn pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals.

Recycling

How might we address the third and most practiced R, "Recycling" here and at home?

This seems like a no-brainer doesn't it? Did you know that only half the aluminum cans in the US are recycled and that it takes 20 times as much energy to make a new aluminum can than it does to recycle one? But more than energy, aluminum takes huge amounts of precious water and tremendously destructive mining resulting in health and environmental problems from significant air and water pollution, frequently in poor, developing countries.

So, is it holy to throw out an aluminum can?

While it's important to close the resource loop by recycling, it's also important to create a demand for products made from that recycled material, referred to as post-consumer because it's from our home or consumer recycling collection. It's important that we ask for and buy products made from recycled materials, such as copy paper, envelopes,

cards and even toilet paper with at least 30% post-consumer content, and preferably 100%. And we should make sure it wasn't bleached with chlorine or was at least processed chlorine-free and that non-toxic, vegetable-based inks are used for printing.

Composting

And then, in addition to the 3 R's is the usually forgotten C, composting. Most of us don't realize it but 30% of all our solid waste is material that could have been composted, such as leaves, garden clippings, and kitchen food scraps. In Minneapolis, this kind of compostable organic material is now being incinerated, despite the health and environmental problems at some point in the future. Such organic material can and should be composted, whether in outdoor bins or indoors with the help of worms.

The 3 Rs and one C are things we can do at home, at work, in our schools and even in our synagogue. We need to realize that our dollars are votes...votes for the kind of food system, products and planet we want. We can use our dollars to vote for a sustainable future.

Socially Responsible Investing

We also can look at where we invest our money to make sure that we are supporting companies and organizations that treat people well and are concerned about the environment. There is a large and growing movement called socially responsible investing which is able to make sound investment decisions that can get the same and sometimes even better returns by investing in companies that are investing in the future.

In fact, I have had the privilege of serving on the Board of the CERES Coalition, which developed the CERES Principles for corporate environmental responsibility.

For More Information

If you'd like to learn more about any of this, please come visit the Alliance for Sustainability website, www.afors.org. We have a free membership and weekly e-Newsletter. We also have a range of volunteer, intern and research opportunities.

To further understanding, we also do education about the Natural Step, a powerful approach to sustainability that was developed in Sweden and is being successfully used by a range of businesses, schools, government agencies, cities, hospitals, religious institutions, and nonprofits. It brings diverse people together to have a shared understanding, vision and action plan for sustainability.

COEJL

Another educational opportunity is through the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life or COEJL, the umbrella national Jewish environmental group, of which I was a founding Board member. There are great materials on our website, www.coejl.org.

Questions and Comments

Now, I'd like to see if you have any questions or comments before we go into small groups.

Small Groups

Using what I shared about Eco-kosher as a background, I'd like each of the previous pairs of people to join together with one other pair and discuss these three things:

1. What's one thing you learned of value?
2. What does all of this mean for you and how you and Mayim Rabim might do some things differently?
3. Do you have any suggestions?

Let's take just five minutes in each group and then come back and share some of the ideas.

Thoughts from the Small Groups for the Whole Group

Conclusion

Finally, is our hope for being holy and bringing about Tikkun Olam, the healing of the world, just a dream? Well, once upon a time our ancestors once dared to dream a seemingly impossible dream: to return to the Promised Land. We somehow succeeded against all odds, with just a little divine help.

President John Kennedy once dared to share an equally impossible dream: to land a human being on the moon. Many scoffed but Kennedy was able to inspire people to join together to make the dream become a reality.

Now it is time for us to return home and accomplish another dream: the creation of a sustainable future for the Earth. This dream can and must be achieved if humans are to continue living on Spaceship Earth.

It is told:

Once, on the evening after the Day of Atonement, the moon was hidden behind the clouds and the Baal Shem could not, therefore, go out to say the Blessing for the New Moon. This weighed heavily on his spirit.

In vain, he concentrated his longing for the light of the wandering moon; whenever he sent someone out, he was told that the clouds had grown even thicker. Finally he gave up hope.

In the meantime, the Hasidim who knew nothing of the Baal Shem's sorrow, had gathered in the front room of the house and begun to dance, for this was their way of celebrating with joy and atonement for the year.

When their holy delight mounted high, they invaded the Baal Shem's chamber, still dancing. Overwhelmed by their own frenzy of happiness they took him by the hands, as he sat there sunk in gloom, and drew him into the round.

At this moment, someone looked outside. The night had suddenly grown light; in greater radiance than ever before, the crescent moon shone in a flawless sky.⁶

Our dream can become a reality. Shabbat Shalom.

⁶ Colorado Jewish Reconstructionist Federation. Shabbat Morning Service, p. 33.

Appendix

Jewish Teachings About the Environment and Social Justice by Terry Gips

Kashrut is only one part of the fabric of Jewish life. We have a range of ancient Jewish teachings about the environment, social justice and humaneness that serve as the basis for eco-kashrut.

Teachings on Ecological Soundness

According to Jewish teaching, God brought Adam to the Garden of Eden and clearly warned him to accept full ecological responsibility: "Do not corrupt and desolate My world; For if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you."⁷

While the commandment in Genesis 1:28 providing humans with dominion over the fish, fowl, cattle, and all the earth often has been misused as a pretext for exploitation, Jewish oral law has never permitted such an interpretation.⁸ To the contrary, ecological concerns are heavily emphasized through injunctions against cutting down trees in Deuteronomy 20:19 and other Torah restrictions.

Together, they form the basis of the Jewish law of "Bal tashchit" ("do not destroy"), an ancient and sweeping series of Jewish environmental regulations forbidding everything from over-grazing and destruction of cultivated plant varieties to the waste of resources and the pollution of the air and water.⁹

Jewish law also contains a positive set of environmental regulations "yishuv ha-aretz" and "yishuv ha-olam," or "settling the land" in a manner balancing the environment and human survival.¹⁰ There are many other requirements for ecological soundness, including God's commandment to Moses at Mt. Sinai that, "the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land,"¹¹ with no sowing, pruning, reaping or gathering.

While there are many interpretations of these and other teachings, Jonathan Helfand has concluded that Jewish laws:

Do not offer unquestioning protection to the natural environment; nor do they offer an immutable schedule of priorities to guide the actions of humans. They do, however, enunciate an important legal and moral principle: the environment, like man, has certain unalienable rights, and these rights are endowed to it by the Creator--and, as a result, they may not be summarily dismissed or violated. It is the obligation of society to respect and protect these right

⁷ Ehrenfeld, David and Bentley, Philip J. "Nature in the Jewish Tradition: The Source of Stewardship," undated draft manuscript, p. 20.

⁸ Ehrenfeld and Bentley, *Op.Cit.*, P. 7.

⁹ Freudenstein, Eric G. "Ecology and the Jewish Tradition," in *Judaism and Human Rights*, M. Konvitz, ed. New York: Norton, 1972, pp. 265-74. Also, Helfand, Jonathan I. "Ecology and the Jewish Tradition: A Postscript," *Judaism*, 20(3), 1971, pp.330-35.

¹⁰ Helfand, *Op.Cit.*

¹¹ *The Holy Bible, Op.Cit.*, Leviticus 25:4, p. 125.

with the same procedures, institutions, and legislative initiatives that are employed to guarantee and protect the rights of humans.¹²

The Hasids sum up the importance quite simply:

Planting is so important that if a sapling were in your hand, and you were told that the Messiah had come, first plant the sapling, then go out to greet the Messiah.¹³

Teachings on Social Justice

Social justice is explicitly part of Jewish teachings. God's commandment of a Sabbath for the land every seventh year (Exodus 23:10-11) not only prescribes for healing the land, "in the seventh year you shall let it lie fallow," but also requires the owner to let the land "provide food for the poor of your people." The prescription goes even further and calls for the remission or cancellation of all debts at the end of every seventh year (Deuteronomy 15:1-2). In other words, "It is a basic human right to have regularly a fresh chance to succeed, without being forever weighed down by the past."¹⁴

At the same time, Deuteronomy 15:7-11 requires tithing and other acts so that the disadvantaged not be neglected in the time between the Sabbaths. The purpose of these provisions might be understood as "the redistribution of accumulated wealth, so that more widespread sharing and greater human equality would result."¹⁵

The concept of the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:8-10) specifies that after seven Sabbaths, humans should "hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof,...and ye shall return every man unto his possession."¹⁶ The Torah acknowledges the notion of ancestral land and requires that anyone who had to sell or give up their land for any reason can take the land back without cost. Leviticus 25:23-31 specifically forbids taking land permanently from those who originally owned and worked it and permits them to take it back sooner than fifty years through proper payment.

According to eminent Jewish scholars, the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years together "represent a unique Israelite attempt to combat the social evils that had infected Israelite society and to return to the idyllic period of the desert union when social equality and fraternal concern had prevailed."¹⁷

A similar balance of control can be found in Isaiah 5:8, which forbids the concentration of large blocks of land in a few hands. The Talmud tells the following story:

Two men were fighting over a piece of land. Each claimed ownership and bolstered his claim with apparent proof. To resolve their differences, they agreed to put the case before the rabbi.

¹² Helfand, Jonathan. "The Earth is the Lord's: Judaism and Environmental Ethics," in Religion and the Environmental Crisis, ed. Eugene C. Hargrove, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986, p. 47-48.

¹³ Avot deRabbi Natan B, Ch. 31 in Fisher, Adam. Seder Tu B'Shevat: The Festival of Trees, p. 39.

¹⁴ Gendler, Everett. "The U.S. Bicentennial and the Biblical Jubilee: The Right We Must Reclaim," CCAR Journal (Central Conference of American Rabbis), Summer 1975, p. 85-86.

¹⁵ Gendler, Op.Cit., p. 86.

¹⁶ The Holy Bible, p. 125.

¹⁷ "Sabbatical Year and Jubilee," Encyclopaedia Judaica. Jerusalem: MacMillan Company, 1977, p. 578.

The rabbi listened but could not come to a decision because both seemed to be right. Finally the rabbi said, "Since I cannot decide to whom this land belongs, let us ask the land." He put his ear to the ground, and after a moment straightened up. "Gentlemen, the land says that it belongs to neither of you--but that you belong to it."¹⁸

Social justice also was spelled out in the case of God's gift of "manna," the miracle "bread from heaven" that sustained the Israelites in the desert for forty years (Exodus 16:4-35). God commanded that each person gather only as much as they needed to eat and no more. The manna could not be accumulated and the supply controlled because the manna deteriorated within a day. And because everyone's needs were met, no markets could be created for profit. As Gandhi said, "The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not for anybody's greed."

Teachings on Humaneness

Humane treatment of animals is required by Jewish law. According to Jewish tradition, the prohibition against inhumane conduct against animals is one of the seven commandments given to the sons of Noah, and therefore is binding on all humanity.¹⁹

Animals are to share the Sabbath rest with humans, and although no work is permitted on the Sabbath, exceptions are made if the purpose is to relieve the suffering of an animal. In fact, kindness to animals is one of the few virtues that the Jewish tradition specifically associates with the promise of heavenly reward.²⁰

In Ecclesiastes it is written:

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth the beasts. Even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath, so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast.²¹

In fact, the Torah not only calls for the respect of all living things, but requires humans to learn from all other life. God spoke to Job and commanded:

But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall teach thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee.²²

¹⁸ Bernstein, Ellen. The Trees' Birthday--A Celebration of Nature. Philadelphia: Turtle River Press, 1987, p. 5a.

¹⁹ Steinberg, Milton. Basic Judaism. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947, p. 100.

²⁰ Ehrenfeld & Bentley, Op.Cit., p. 15.

²¹ The Holy Bible, Ecclesiastes 3:19, p. 614.

²² The Holy Bible, Job 12:7-8, p. 504.