



August 21, 2020
1 Elul 5780

To our Rabbis,

Greetings as we approach Rosh Hashanah 5781!

As we celebrate the birth of humanity and all of Creation, we ask you, our religious leaders, to again call upon the Jewish community to see ourselves as God's partners in response to the continuing threat of a climate emergency. But this year we do so in a radically changed world. We write in the midst of a pandemic, great economic uncertainty and the urgent call to condemn systemic racism, sharing with our communities, neighbors and families a collective suffering, at times bordering on despair. *We recognize the deep interconnections between Covid 19, racism, and the climate crisis, a knowledge that inspired a poignant and powerful spiritual reflection by Hody Nemes that opens this year's collection.* But the cycle of the year also calls us to hope and renewal. There is no greater need for comfort than now, but also no better opportunity to inspire, educate and take action as you gather your community, in whatever form that gathering may take, during this most unusual High Holiday season.

To that end, we have attached a collection of Jewish sources and climate resources that we hope you will find helpful in your High Holidays preparations. New this year, in addition to Hody's reflection, are suggestions for seamlessly weaving climate content into a virtual zoom discussion and a wonderful video put together and distributed by Hazon on blowing the Shofar!

We are also pleased to include, with their permission, reprints of a passionate and thoughtful call to action from Rabbi Art Green; creative liturgical prayers from Rabbi Daniel Nevins; a reading for the *Shofar* service from Dr. Adriane Leveen and a reading on *Tashlich*.

At the end of this packet, we are thrilled to also offer you a list of biblical teachings relevant to the climate crisis, a flyer about Jewish Climate Action Network NYC, an action request from Jewish Earth Alliance, an idea for planting trees during Elul from JTREE, and important information about the work of Hazon and Dayenu. We celebrate the many opportunities each of these groups can offer for meaningful action to address climate change; you are very welcome to print and distribute any of the information found in these pages. Useful actions during Elul to protect our planet are a most fitting way to celebrate *Yom Harat Olam*, the birthday of our beloved world.

Please feel free to reach out to us for more information or feedback.

May 5781 be a year of healing and rebuilding

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A Spiritual Reflection on the First of Elul, 5780

Hody Nemes, *Jewish Climate Action Network NYC Steering Committee*

5780 is the year of breath denied.

George Floyd ל"א was murdered while saying, "I can't breathe," which has become the heartrending rallying cry of the movement for racial justice. Floyd's terrible death came as thousands of Covid-stricken patients struggled to breathe, many attached to ventilators that tried to breathe for them.

Climate Change Continues

In the background of this national tragedy, the murmuring Greek chorus of a planet on fire continued its rhythmic chant of destruction, even as our attention turned to other urgent issues.

- Siberia is on fire: in June, temperatures hit a record 100° Fahrenheit – *north of the Arctic Circle*.
- Unprecedented clouds of locusts swept across the Africa and South Asia, devouring farmers' crops.
- Excessive heat warnings and advisories covered 50 million Americans at one point in July.
- Temperatures soared in California: Death Valley, California hit 130° F, breaking the world temperature record. A rare "fire tornado" was sighted as 800,000 acres (and counting) burn in California.
- Heat seized the Middle East, from Eilat (111 degrees) to Baghdad (a record-breaking 125 degrees), where people fainted in the street from the heat.
- A May [climate study](#) found that unlivable hot zones, which now cover 1% of Earth's land (e.g, the Sahara) will encompass a fifth of the land by 2070 – a possibly fatal threat to billions of people.

Climate change, too, is a crisis of breath. In many places, people are so hot that even breathing is a labor. *The air itself is changing* as we burn fossil fuels; we inhale about 50% more carbon dioxide with each breath than our ancestors did, because we're spewing 152 million tons of greenhouse gas pollution into our atmosphere every day, as if it were an open sewer. Our lungs are struggling: asthma rates are rising as the world warms, and as pollutants emitted from fossil fuels damage our lungs.

These burdens fall disproportionately on the poor and on people of color. Blacks and Latinos are twice as likely to die from the coronavirus as whites. And African-Americans are 75 percent more likely than others to live near facilities releasing hazardous pollution, like oil and gas refineries. Poor air quality, in turn, may worsen the effects of Covid: a horrible cycle of inequality, breath denied, and death. Even before Covid, air pollution claimed an astonishing 7 million lives each year, according to the WHO.

A Biblical Understanding of Breath

How can we go on this way, choking?

On Rosh Hashanah, we recall this event:

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפְח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:
*The Holy One formed the adam of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
and the adam became a living soul.*

In this verse, many commentators see the odd synthesis that is humanity: a mammal made of earthly building blocks (“formed of the dust of the ground”), frail and mortal like all life... *and* a semi-divine being sustained by God’s breath, capable of transcendence (“[God] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”).

Breath is something we usually take for granted. You are breathing unconsciously as you read this. Neil Armstrong was breathing, unconsciously, as he walked upon the moon; Harriet Tubman, as she smuggled slaves North; Shakespeare, as he wrote Hamlet; Yohanan ben Zakai, as he escaped a dying Jerusalem. With breath unimpeded, we are capable of dizzying human achievement, truly “living souls,” *neshamot chaim*.

But if you impede our breath? We become mere animals, physical stuff, עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה (“dust of the earth”), brought precipitously back in to our bodies. Stop it completely, and we die.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, founder of the *mussar* movement, deemed this physical frailty to be a remarkable asset. Commenting on this verse in Genesis, he says we are spirit, נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים, yes; but also “dust of the ground,” creatures of the “lower realms.” *God made Adam a frail mammal*, says R. Salanter, “*in order that he should know and feel the pain and misery of others, share in their suffering and their longings, understanding the needs of other people, their lives and their wants, their desires and yearnings*” (quoted in *Shearit Menachem*). It is our very earthliness that makes us capable of empathy, says R. Salanter. Thus, when we struggle to breathe, we are reminded of our common humanity.

Climate change, Covid, systemic racism: all are crises down here in the lower realms, among the dust of the earth – crises of physical pain and misery, systemic violence, even atmospheric physics. The fires of climate change are choking our lungs, the virus is taking our air, and the burden is falling upon communities of color and the poor.

The year 5780 has reminded us starkly of our collective frailty; for many, it has also awakened a wellspring of empathy, reminding us of our interdependence, the suffering of our neighbors – be it the massive marches for racial justice, the countless ways people have cared for others during this pandemic, the firefighters battling infernos in the West. We have been reminded that we’re all just trying to breathe.

May the year 5781 be a year of healing – and breath restored.

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Awakening Religious Environmentalism: The Urgency of Action

Religion and Environmental Responsibility: An Address to Jews and Christians

Rabbi Dr. Art Green, Rector of the Rabbinical School & Irving Brudnick Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Religion at Hebrew College

Excerpted from: *Judaism and the Inner Life: Neo-Hasidic Reflections*, Yale University Press, 2019

Is it coincidence that the first species to have the ability to destroy our biosphere as a fit habitat for all higher forms of life is also the first to be equipped with the moral conscience and perspective that might prevent us from doing so? Religions, despite all their limitations and narrowness of vision, serve humanity as the great vehicle for that moral conscience. Might you say, in classical western theological language, that the rebirth of religion is emerging from a divine call, welling up within us, to repent of our collective abuse of this planet, and of one another, before it is too late? Is God seeking to protect that last shred of moral conscience in humanity, and are we His vessels for doing that? Is religion itself being given the gift of this awareness and power to stir conscience by the One it worships in order to awaken humanity from its dangerous self-serving slumber, as the earth is pillaged?...

The coming together of religious leaders in America, primarily Christian and Jewish, but embracing others as well, around this issue, is evidence that such an awakening is happening within all of our traditions. The Pope's leadership in this cause, expressed in his remarkable document of moral courage entitled *Laudato Si*, to which I will return later, is a clarion call to all people who call themselves religious. It is taking place in Buddhism as well, especially due to the commitment of the Dalai Lama and the growing influence of Buddhists of the western world. And even in such an unexpected place as a rural mountaintop Taoist temple in China. I read from a remarkable interview of the abbot in the New York Times of 7-13-17: "China doesn't lack money; it lacks reverence for the environment... We all live on the earth together – we are not isolated," he said from his remote monastery. "As Taoists, we have to work to influence people in China and overseas to take part in ecological protection." Is there a universal process of *teshuvah*, of return to awareness of the One, or of the holiness of existence, happening here?...

In placing the weekly Sabbath at the center of our devotional lives, we Jews have always lived in awareness of Creation. Our Friday evening ritual calls for three readings of Genesis 2: "Heaven and earth were completed, they and all their hosts." Before we recite the *shema*' each morning, we bless God who "renews each day the work of Creation." When we put on our *tallit* in the morning, we call out the verse from Psalm 104, the greatest of the Creation psalms, "He spreads forth light like a garment, stretching out the heavens like a curtain," as though repeating or taking part in the very first act of Creation....

The contemporary religion we articulate will need to be based upon a fully nature-embracing spirituality, one that sees the divine presence as embodied within the physical world. This can be hosted by a great variety of theological views within both of our traditions. But we

must move away from the legacy of Platonism that we Westerners all bear, distinguishing between a “true” spiritual world and the “merely” physical. A creation-inflected spirituality means that we celebrate the divine presence within all of God’s creatures, however we spell out the details of that presence. A sense of spirituality is precisely that which brings us closer to an appreciation of nature and a sense of awe before its wonders.

That sense of wonder and its renewal is the most important message that we religious folk – all of us – have to bring to the post-modern world. I am one who believes that religious truth belongs to the language of poetry, not discursive prose....

The great power of religious faith in our world must be seen as a divine gift and a sacred opportunity. In it may lie humanity’s greatest hope for liberation from self-destructive forces that will cause terrible harm in times very soon to come both to our own offspring and those of all the other species that depend upon us for survival. But what we do with this gift *is in our hands*, especially those of our religious leaders. Only in working together to embrace this earth as divine creation will we be able to move forward.

Liturgical Prayers and Creative Readings for the High Holiday Mahzor

Climate Teshuva: A Virtual Lesson Plan

Dr. Adriane Leveen, *Co-Chair, Jewish Climate Action Network NYC, & Senior Lecturer in Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*

The following Zoom activity can be used during the month of Elul leading up to Rosh Hashanah or during the 10 days of reflections between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Goal: To accomplish a personal accounting as a concerned citizen of this planet in 2020.

How am I personally responding to the climate crisis, arguably the greatest threat to life and well-being facing humanity today?

A. Opening:

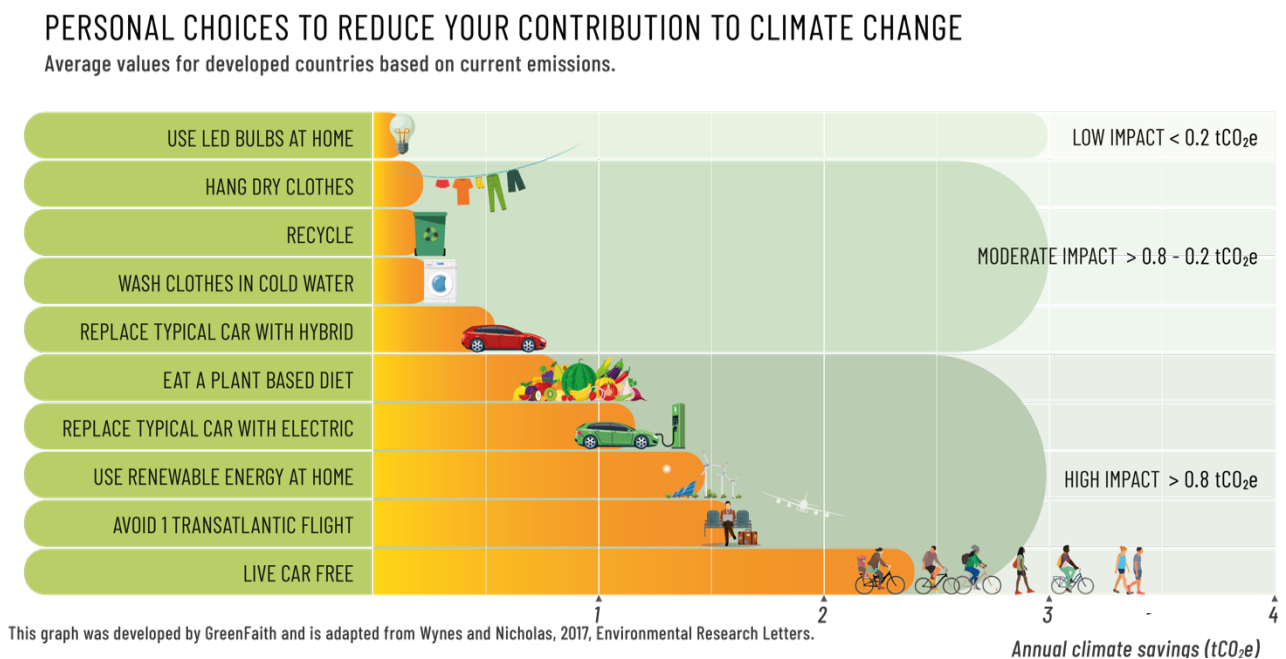
- A facilitator greets everyone. Consider an opening niggun or meditation. Begin by asking each person to briefly state their name and explain why they signed up for a session on self and climate.
- It's a good idea to ask everyone to mute unless speaking.

B. Describe the traditional *AI Chet* prayer and its connection to *Yom Kippur*.

For instance: “The *Vidui*, which means “confession,” is a prayer recited just before Yom Kippur, and repeated many times throughout the holiday. During the *Vidui*, worshipers gently beat themselves on the chest for each transgression listed. This action serves as a symbolic punishment for our hearts, which are ultimately responsible for leading us to sins of greed, lust and anger.” For further background, try [My Jewish Learning](#) or [Sefaria’s Vidui resources](#).

C. As facilitator, explain today’s goal: *the creation of personal additions to the AI Chet prayer based on a personal audit of actions taken – or not – in response to the climate crisis. What have each of us done to act more sustainably and to reduce our carbon footprint? What actions would we like to take in this High Holiday season?*

Give some behavioral examples we each might take to make a difference! This graph, created by the eco-faith group GreenFaith, shows which activities most reduce your carbon footprint:



Food is an easy and highly impactful area of change. Possibilities include:

- Eat more meat-free meals
- Buy organic and local whenever possible
- Reduce your food waste
- Compost!

For more ideas, see: livingthechange.net

Now: elicit further idea for behavior changes from the group.

D. Turn to the beautiful *Al Chet* by Rabbi Daniel Nevins (below, p. 6). *Read aloud. Ask for reactions.*

E. Please create your own list of five positive actions you personally will take in response to the climate crisis. Try your hand at putting each action into a vow or prayer for the coming year. Write down these actions and bring them to services.

This can be done in breakout rooms of 3-4 people who can discuss and compose individual positive actions. In this break out group, folks can also share their compositions with one another.

OR: Simply do it as a general group. Ask each individual to take the next 8-10 minutes and list actions that they are willing or prepared to learn more about and /or to implement in their daily lives.

Share with one another.

Al Chet (על חטא) for Destroying God's Creation
Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat & Festivals

Rabbi Daniel Nevins, Pearl Resnick Dean of the Rabbinical School and the Division of Religious Leadership, The Jewish Theological Seminary

This confession, written as an addition to the classic ודוי / Vidui of Yom Kippur, uses traditional language to record our dismay at the changes to the planet wrought by humanity.

¶ ***For the Sin of Destroying God's Creation***

אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם אֲתָהּ בְּרֵאתָ שָׁמַיִם
וְאֶרֶץ בְּאַהֲבָה,
יִצְרַתְּ צְמָחִים וְחַיּוֹת, וְנִפְחַתְּ נְשֵׁמַת
חַיִּים בְּבִנְיַי אָדָם.
נִבְרָאנוּ בְּקֶרֶב עוֹלָם נָקִי וְטָהוֹר,
וְכַעַת הוּא נְהַרְס עַל־יְדֵינוּ.
לֹא עַל צְדִקוֹתֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מִפְּעִילִים
תַּחֲנוּנֵינוּ לְפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
כִּי אֲשַׁמְנוּ, בְּזַבְזָנוּ, וְגִרְמָנוּ נֹזֵק כְּבִיר:
עַל חֲטָא שְׁמַלְאָנוּ אֶרֶץ וַיָּמִים
בְּזָבַל וּבְאַשְׁפָּה,
עַל חֲטָא שֶׁהִשְׁמַדְנוּ לְנִצָּח חַיּוֹת
נִפְלְאוֹת שֶׁהִצַּלְתָּ מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל,
וְעַל חֲטָא שֶׁהִכְרַתְנוּ יְעָרוֹת
עֲצִים הַמְקִימִים נֶפֶשׁ כָּל־חַי.
אֲנָא ה' פָּקַח עֵינֵינוּ וְנִרְאֵה אֶת־
הוֹד יִצִּירְתֶּךָ,
אֲז נִשְׁבַּחְךָ כְּמוֹ שִׁכְתוּב: מִה־רִבּוֹ
מִעֲשֵׂיךָ ה' כֹּלֵם בְּחֻכְמָה עֲשִׂיתָ
מְלָאָה הָאֶרֶץ קִנְיָנֶךָ.
הִסַּר אֶת־לֵב הָאָבֶן מִבְּשָׂרֵנוּ, וְתֵן לֵב
בְּשָׂר בְּקֶרְבָּנוּ.
תֵּן לָנוּ חֻכְמָה וְאַמְצָן־לֵב לְשִׁמּוֹר עַל
הָאֶרֶץ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם.

Eternal God, You created the
heavens and earth in love. You fashioned plants and
animals, breathing Your spirit into humanity.
We were created amidst a clean and pure world, but it is now
degraded in our grasp.
Not on our own merits do we beseech You, Adonai our God,
for we have sinned, we have wasted, we have caused vast damage:
For the sin of filling the sea and land with filth and garbage;
for the sin of destroying species that You saved from the flood;
and for the sin of laying bare the forests and habitats that sustain life.
Please, God, open our eyes that we might see the splendor of Your
creation. Then we shall praise You, as it is written: "How great are
Your works, Adonai! You have made them all with wisdom; the earth
is filled with Your creations" (Psalm 104:24).
Remove the heart of stone from our flesh, and give us a feeling heart.
Grant us wisdom and determination to safeguard the earth beneath
the heavens.

—DANIEL NEVINS

Prayer for the Renewal of Creation
Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat & Festivals
Rabbi Daniel Nevins

This tefilah, designed to be inserted in the Shabbat Musaf service, expresses the hope that by ceasing to labor, by being able to appreciate and be grateful for life and its gifts, we will recognize our responsibility to be caretakers of the planet. It can easily be adapted for the High Holidays.

תְּפִלָּה לְשֵׁלוֹם הָאָרֶץ
רְבוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדְךָ נְפֶשׁ כָּל־חַי וְרוּחַ כָּל־בְּשׂוֹר
אִישׁ, הַנְּחִילֵנוּ שִׁבְת מְנוּחָה, יוֹם לְשָׁבוֹת בּוֹ מִכָּל־
מְלָאכָה. בְּכָל־תְּחִישָׁה, נִפְיֹר וְנִדַּע אֶת־הוֹד וְיִצִּירְתָּךְ.
שִׁבְעֵנוּ מִטּוֹבְךָ שְׁנֵהֵיָה עֲדִים לְגֹדֵל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ. חֲזַקְנוּ
לְהִיּוֹת עִמָּךְ שׁוֹתֵפִים נְאֻמָּנִים, לְשִׁמּוֹר עַל עוֹלָמְךָ
בְּעִבוֹר הַדּוֹרוֹת הַבָּאִים. ◀ יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה'
אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ, שִׁתְּבַרְךָ אֶת־עוֹלָמְךָ
בְּיָמֵינוּ כִּימֵי קֶדֶם.



Master of the universe, in whose hand is the breath of all life and the soul of every person, grant us the gift of Shabbat, a day of rest from all our labors. With all of our senses may we perceive the glory of Your works. Fill us with Your goodness, that we may attest to Your great deeds. Strengthen us to become Your faithful partners, preserving the world for the sake of future generations.
▶ ADONAI our God and God of our ancestors, may it be Your will to renew Your blessing of the world in our day, as You have done from the beginning of time.

The Voice of the Shofar: A Selection of Texts from the Hebrew Bible on Shofar (שופר)

Dr. Adriane Leveen, Co-Chair, Jewish Climate Action Network NYC, & Senior Lecturer in Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion



What is the shofar's symbolism? Dr. Leveen presents six of the key biblical texts about shofar, each of which hints at a different aspect of the shofar's meaning. Each of these aspects can be directly linked to the global fight for climate justice underway in our day.

1. Exodus 19:16, 19

A call to awareness

v. 16 “And on the third day as morning dawned there was thunder [*Kolot*] and lightening and a thick cloud on the Mountain and the voice [*kol*] of the **Shofar** very strong and all the people trembled in the camp.”

v. 19 And the voice [*kol*] of the **Shofar** grew stronger and stronger- Moses spoke and God answered him in a voice [*kol*].”

Comment: Three Hebrew terms in these two important verses are called קול: thunder, shofar, and God's voice! A *drash*: The overwhelming noise of thunder and shofar together shield the Israelites from hearing God's voice in its fullness, retaining the mystery of God's presence. Nonetheless, God has chosen to be present when answering Moses in a voice – קול – and in so doing creates an awareness of divinity within the people.

2. Leviticus 25:9

A call to repentance

And you shall sound the **Shofar** *teruah* in the 7th month, on the tenth day of the month on the day of Yom Kippur – you shall have the **Shofar sound** throughout your land.

3. In Joshua, Judges, and Samuel

A battle cry

The sound of the **Shofar**, like the trumpet of the Romans, was an instrument to signal battle, as exemplified in the famous story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho.

4. Isaiah 18:3

A universal call to attention

All who live in the world
And inhabit the earth
When a flag is raised in the hills, take note!
And when a **shofar** is blown, give heed

5. Isaiah 58:1

A call to action

Famously, on Yom Kippur we read the following:
Cry with a full throat, without restraint;
Like a **shofar** raise your voice
Tell the people of their transgressions
And to the House of Jacob their sins.

Question: what does God ask of us in Isaiah and in other prophets? We should unlock the chains of wickedness, let the oppressed go free, share our bread with the hungry, clothe the naked, and do not ignore our kin [humankind].

6. Zechariah 9:14:

A Sign of Salvation

And YHWH will appear to them (the people of Judah)
And out will come his lightening like a flash
And Adonai my God shall blow the **shofar**
And come in a tempest of winds...

Taken together, these texts on the Shofar serve as a wakeup call to the danger that we face on this planet created and given to us by God. Whether or not we realize it, saving the planet is the battle of our lifetimes. Hearing the shofar can renew our commitment to this urgent work!

Further Reflection – and Action

*Excerpted from Kathy DeGane, “Voices of the Shofar,” Bridges for Peace,
www.bridgesforpeace.com/letter/voice-of-the-shofar*

“A ram’s horn is a completely natural musical instrument—it is not man-made, it’s God-made, and it is one of the oldest musical instruments in history—at least 5,000 years old. The shofar has been in continuous use for 3,000 years in Israel, spanning the fall of Jericho to the present day and sounded in Jewish communities all over the world.

Recent scientific studies confirm that listening to the sound of the shofar actually causes our bodies to react physically. The response to the loud, insistent sound is sometimes called “fight or flight”—the same response we would have at the sound of a siren. Our senses are immediately alerted to danger or stress. They “wake up,” are sharpened, and we are given more energy to actively respond, more clarity in our thinking, and more ability to see things we would not otherwise notice. [We are transformed into a new state of awareness]...

An Alert to Danger: The shofar was sounded by watchmen on the walls of a city to alert the people to imminent danger. One long blast during the watches of the night reassured the inhabitants of the city that all was well. But a series of sharp, staccato blasts raised the alarm that enemies were in sight and to rally to arms. ...The sound of the shofar reminds us that we are watchers on the walls, appointed to alert others...”

That danger is already here. We are indeed watchers on the walls, appointed to alert others to the climate crisis that is upon us. On these Holy days, as this survey of biblical texts on the shofar illustrates, awareness of the dangers to all life and to the planet upon which we live can lead to repentance. Repentance can lead to a cry and call to action.

This year, when your congregants hear the קול of the shofar, will you take the opportunity to invite them to hear that cry and call to action?

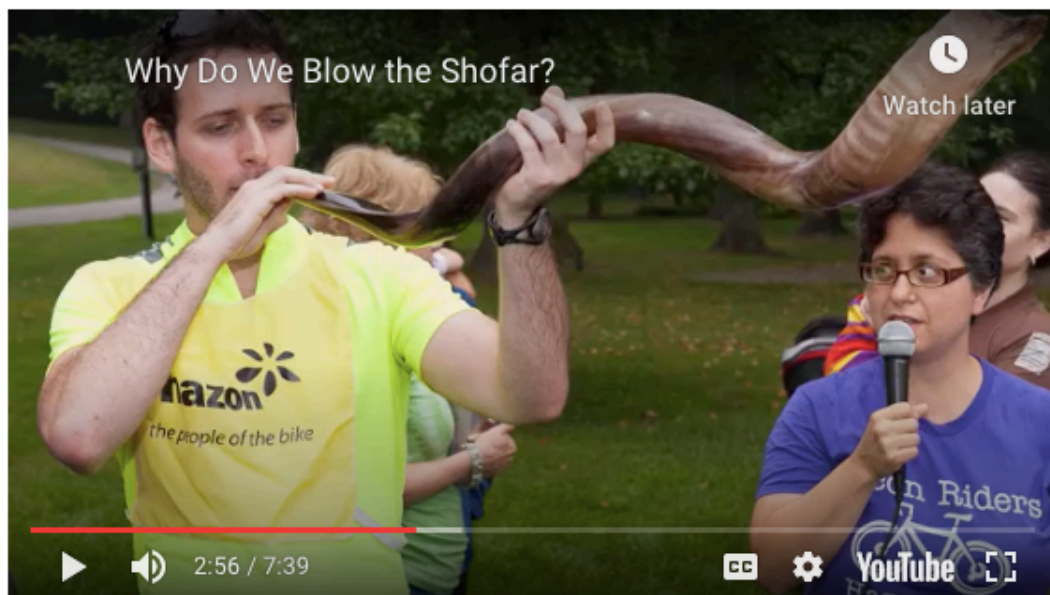
Digital Guides to Shofar for 2020

With many shuls and temples closed this year, some Jews are learning how to blow the shofar for the first time. This helpful [primer](#) from the Reform movement will teach you the basics.



www.bit.do/howtoshofar

Dive into the deeper meanings (environmental, and otherwise) of shofar in this excellent [video](#) created by Hazon.



www.bit.do/shofarot

Tashlich in the Anthropocene*

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Tashlich is understood a vehicle for confessing our sins. But according to R. Moshe Isserles, the prominent Renaissance-era Ashkenazi *posek*, Tashlich is a moment for gratitude, too: a time of appreciation and wonder at the equilibrium of Creation, for the balance between sea and dry land.

Environmentalism is always in danger of veering into shame or self-disgust as we take stock of humanity's ecological sins, which are myriad. But many people are repulsed – or overwhelmed – by such language. So before we get to a litany of **על חטא**'s, we should always try to bring in wonder and gratitude – for the planet, our climate, and – in this case – the oceans and dry land we received when we were born.

But alarm is warranted. The Rema couldn't have foreseen it, but today, sea level is increasing every year, thanks to melting glaciers and higher ocean temperatures. We're inadvertently undoing Creation, blurring the azure shoreline where the Creator said to the Sea, in the words of the Rema, “עֲדִיפָה תִּבּוֹא וְלֹא תִסִּיף (וּפֹאֲזִשִׁית בְּגֵאוֹן גְּלִידָה); “Stop here – no further! [Here your surging waves will halt]” (Job 38:11).

Sea level rise offers a unique opportunity to confront the consequences of our behavior, which is one of the primary goals of the High Holidays. Rarely do our moral shortcomings cause such visible, physical consequences; most sins cannot be recorded by satellites and ice core data. This one can.

Yet if we act speedily, moving from wonder and gratitude to teshuva, we can slow and ultimately halt sea level rise. The One Who Brought the World into Being has bequeathed to us the power to say to the sea, “Stop here – no further!”

Consider studying this text with your community to prepare for Rosh Hashanah, in a virtual gathering. Or, if you're meeting in person for Tashlich itself, read it at the water's edge.

You might ask congregants to share one experience of the natural world that caused them wonder this year. Conclude by explaining that the sea is rising; that its advancing waters, and the hundreds of millions of people endangered by them, depend on our behavior.

*Anthropocene, or “human epoch,” is the proposed name for the earth's most recent geologic time period, based on overwhelming evidence that atmospheric, geologic, and other systems have been alerted by humans at a global scale.

Torat HaOlah, Part Three 56:2

Rabbi Moses Isserles, “The Rema,” c. 1520-1572

There is a custom of Israel that has become Torah itself: On Rosh Hashanah, they go to the water and

תורת העולה, חלק ג', סי' נ"ו:ב'
ר' משה איסרלס (רמ"א)

ומנהג של ישראל תורה הוא, במה
שהולכים על מים ואמרים תשליך

say the verse, "He will again have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; And You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). Behold, the most fundamental natural order demands that water should cover all the land, for dry land is in the center, the lowest level of the planet. The creation of dry land for the survival of humanity and all [creatures] who dwell on it is not happenstance but was done by the One who created the world according to His will so that the world would be populated.

Therefore, we go to the water to see firsthand where the Creator placed the seashore, where God said to the water, "Stop here – no further!" And when we go there we see the wonder wrought by the Fashioner of Creation. So we go on Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgement, to the water, to instill into the souls of each and everyone one of us the idea of the creation of the world, and the understanding that the Exalted Creator is Ruler of the Earth. And regarding this it is said, "You will cast our sins into the depths of the sea." For in truth, one who deeply observes the depths of the sea and recognizes that the world is created/renewed, s/he will find the Exalted Creator and through this come to regret all of their sins, and their sins will be forgiven and cast down into the depths of the Sea. And this matter is clear for the enlightened.

במצולת ים הוא התהום, והיא המקום
היותר עמוק בים. והנה לפי הטבע של
היסודות שהמים יכסו הארץ, והארץ
הוא המרכז, והוא מקום הנמוך בכל
העולם, והנה התגלות הארץ לצורך בני
אדם ולדרים עליה אינו בלא כוונת
מכוון והוא אשר חדש העולם כרצונו
לתכלית ישוב הארץ,

ולכן אנו הולכים על המים לראות אשר
שם חול גבול לים, ואמר עד פה תבא
ולא תוסף, וכשאנו הולכים שם אנו
רואים גבורתו של יוצר בראשית, ולכן
אנו הולכים על המים בראש השנה,
שהוא יום הדין, לשום כל אחד על
נפשו ענין בריאת העולם, ושהשם
יתעלה מלך הארץ ועל זה נאמר
תשליך במצולת ים חטאינו, כי באמת
המתבונן בענין מצולת ים ומכיר
שהעולם מחודש על ידי זה עומד על
מציאות השם יתעלה, ומתחרט על ידי
זה על כל עונותיו, וחטאיו נמחלים ועל
דרך זה נשלכים החטאים במצולת הים,
והוא מבואר למשכיל.



Remember the Land

From "Behukkotai: Remember the Land" (2019)

Rabbi Daniel Nevins

*Pearl Resnick Dean of the Rabbinical School and the Division of Religious Leadership,
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On Yom Kippur, the Book of Leviticus plays a prominent role: we traditionally read from it twice – once in the morning, describing the Tabernacle service of Yom Kippur, and once in the afternoon. Rabbi Nevins considers the profound role of the Earth, and specifically the Land of Israel, in Vayikera.

Spring is my favorite season because it draws me outdoors, enticing me to leave the city and enjoy the rivers, fields, and mountains of this glorious earth. Even near the city I often find myself in nature, biking along the Hudson and up the Palisades past waterfalls and nesting eagles. Returning to the land reminds me of the many blessings of our world, filling me with gratitude and awe. It also causes foreboding since the signs of stress on the natural systems that make our lives possible are everywhere evident. While this era of anthropogenic climate change may be new, the concern that human conduct could lead to ruin and exile from the earth is found already in our Torah portion.

“The Land” is a central character in Leviticus, receiving 23 mentions in the final two chapters, and 70 altogether in the second half of this central book of Torah. We think often of Leviticus as centered on the Sanctuary, and that it is, but the Land itself is a living character, offering blessings and curses to the people of Israel. If the people live faithfully, then the Land will receive blessed rains, produce its bounty, and provide security and satiety. But if the people act as if their title to the Land is absolute, if they fail to allow the Land to rest on the sabbatical year and recognize God’s ultimate title, then they will be forced into exile.

As Jacob Milgrom notes, the previous priestly account of pollution of the Land—the flood narrative of Genesis 6—requires ablution, the washing away of sin with water. (Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2336) That solution is unavailable now for two reasons. First, God promised never to flood the earth again. Second, the sin that occupies Leviticus is not really one of pollution but of over-extraction of natural resources. The people have ignored God’s command to observe the sabbatical year; the only resolution is for the people to be pushed off the land so that it can rest and recover. Hence, the dreaded punishment of exile.

Toward the end of the devastating reproach section of our portion, the Torah predicts a future reconciliation when the exiles will humble their hearts, and their sin will be atoned. “Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the Land” (Lev. 26:42). This verse has several unusual features. It reverses the order of the patriarchs; it records Jacob’s name “full” with an extra letter (עֲקוֹב, rather the Bible’s usual עֵקֶב); and it leaves out “remember” for the middle man, Isaac.

Each element is interesting, but let us focus on the finale of the verse, where the Land itself becomes something like a fourth patriarch. God announces, “I will remember the Land,” making it not only the destination of return but also the very foundation of the covenant. As Midrash Sifra observes, “the Covenant is linked to the Land” (Behukkotai 2:8). Thinking back to Genesis 17, we recall that the covenant that God establishes with Abraham is all about the Land: “Then I will give to you and your descendants after you the land where you have dwelt, the Land of Canaan as an

eternal possession, and I will be your God”(Gen. 17:8). The Land is not only a place to live, but an intermediary through which to encounter God.

Elsewhere in the Bible, the Land of Israel stands as a symbol of the virtue or lack of virtue of Israel. In a time of physical exile, Jeremiah imagines the Land itself lamenting its abandonment and asking why. Let the wise come and explain, “Why is the Land in ruins, laid waste like a wilderness, with none passing through it?” (Jer. 9:11). A land that is abandoned, in ruins, is evocative of the absent human life that once flourished there. Isaiah depicts the Land pining for its people and rejoicing upon their return (Isa. 49).

The Rabbis imagine the Land of Israel to be something like a tough nanny. On the one hand, she is a disciplinarian, noticing the failure of the people to observe her commandments such as the neglected sabbatical, and calling these failures to God’s attention. On the other hand, she is their caregiver. In Midrash Vayikra Rabbah, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish says that it is like a king who has three sons and a nurse for them. If he wants to know about his sons, he inquires about the nurse. So too does God care about the children—that is, Israel—but inquires only about the Land (Behukkotai 36).

This Midrash views the Land as an instrument of reward and punishment, but perhaps the truth is deeper still. The Land is more like a teacher or a parent, socializing its students to express gratitude, self-control, and respect for others. Like an anxious child who grabs more food than they really need, the people of Israel are inclined to ignore the Sabbatical. This undermines awareness of divine title and cedes self-control, so that fear guides their way, all the way into exile.

German-Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas argued that pre-modern ethics was limited to a range of proximate concern—it was always assumed that earth would rebound from any damage that we could cause. Therefore, responsibility was only for direct damage, not for the cumulative harm caused over the course of generations. (The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age, 5) That indeed seems to be the understanding in Leviticus: After a few years of exile, the neglected sabbaticals will be made up, and the people will be welcome to return. Our fear is that this is no longer true. Our destructive powers have grown too great, and the land may not recover from the harm that we cause.

Enjoyment of the land requires us to tread lightly on it. A walk in the park, a hike in the hills, a dip in the ocean—these simple pleasures restore our relationship to the land, reminding us that we are not its owners, but rather its temporary inhabitants. More than this is required—real reductions in carbon emissions and the willingness to let the land rest. As with the ancient neglect of sabbaticals, our contemporary abuse of our home is having direct and dangerous consequences. Reading this portion alerts us to that danger and motivates us to make the changes required to live in health and joy on all the good land that God has given.

The publication and distribution of the JTS Commentary are made possible by a generous grant from Rita Dee (z”l) and Harold Hassenfeld (z”l).



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Questions? Check our website at JewishEarthAlliance.org, email us at contact@JewishEarthAlliance.org, or call Mirele Goldsmith at (917)679-2121.



Take Action with our Jewish Climate Allies



Hazon is the largest faith-based environmental organization in the U.S. and is building a movement that strengthens Jewish life and contributes to a more environmentally sustainable world for all. As the Jewish lab for sustainability, Hazon effects change through immersive experiences and inspires individuals and communities to make specific commitments to change with a particular focus on food systems.

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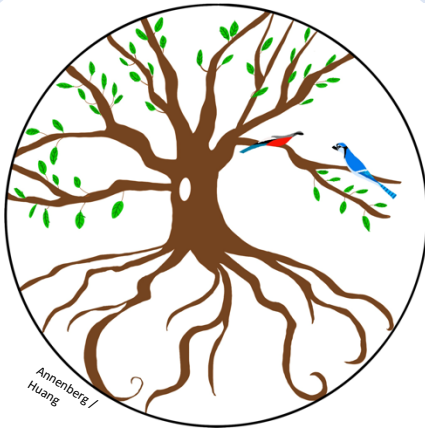
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4. Holding polluters accountable.

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To celebrate with your family, friends, and community during Elul and the High Holidays, plant some trees! Instead of sending a greeting card, give a gift of hope and new life for our planet as we enter the High Holiday season through [JTree USA](https://www.jtree.org).

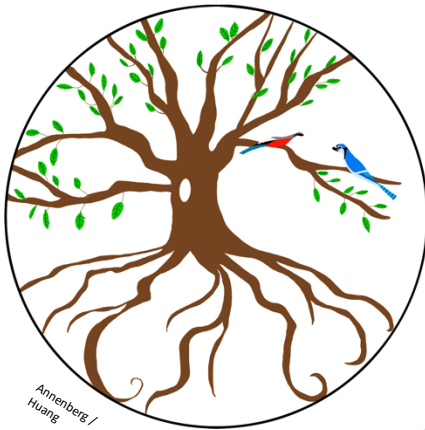
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difficult periods in our lives. *Tree-planting is one of the easiest methods currently available for pulling massive amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.*

“As my forebears planted for me, so do I plant for my children” (Ta’anit 23a).

Join us at the start of a New Year in planting for our children with JTree.

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JEWISH CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK NYC



Who we are:

We are a network of Jews in the New York metropolitan area working to address climate change. We stand upon the teachings, traditions, and prophetic voices of Judaism that compel us to protect all of our sacred Creation.

What we do:

We advocate with elected officials, participate in public activism, and promote sustainable practices that protect the Earth and its inhabitants.

Who we work with:

We work with local and national Jewish, interfaith and other environmental and justice leaders.



Our recent campaigns:

We actively participated in coalitions organizing the following campaigns:

- ✧ **A transformative NY State law** committing NY to 100% renewable energy and making our state a national leader in legally-mandated emissions cuts. (Campaign led by the NY Renews coalition)
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3. **Attend** a monthly JCAN NYC meeting, invite a JCAN-NYC rep to speak to your community, or email us at info@JCAN-NYC.org to discuss other ways to work together! Visit www.jcan-nyc.org.