



## TU B'SHEVAT SOCIAL ACTION HOLIDAY GUIDE





**Table of Contents**

Introduction..... 3

Judaism and the Environment..... 4

    Natural Resources ..... 5

    Health Issues ..... 6

    Endangered Species..... 7

Program Ideas..... 9

    Natural Resources and the Environment..... 9

    Health Issues..... 18

    Endangered Species..... 20

Appendix A: Texts, Prayers and Poems on Judaism and the Environment..... 22

Appendix B: Stories for Tu B'Shevat..... 26

Appendix C: Resources..... 28

Acknowledgments..... 31

## INTRODUCTION

*Far underground, the roots of trees are beginning to suck at earth's replenished breasts. Their branches are beginning to grope toward the gathering light. There is barely any change to see; there is barely any change to hear. However, the turn of the year has come. The still and quiet months are over; the seed is quickening, life is reasserting itself. In this hushed moment, we celebrate the new year of the trees; and the reawakening of the Tree of Life. (Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy, p.105)*

Tu B'Shevat, also known as Chamishah Asar B'shevat (the fifteenth day of the month of Shevat) has a long and varied background in Judaism. Jewish literature of the first several centuries of the Common Era informs us that Tu B'Shevat was the New Year for trees. It was the date on which trees in Israel were determined to be mature enough for their fruit to be harvested. This date was also the New Year for the annual tithing (*ma'aser* in Hebrew), which refers to one-tenth of one's produce set aside as a religious offering. Tu B'Shevat was the date designated because by then the early winter rains had largely subsided and the period of "budding" was just commencing. Tu B'Shevat is a celebration of renewal.

Tu B'Shevat is considered a minor festival without many prescribed observances. It is customary to eat fruits grown in Israel, especially the fruit of the carob tree (*bokser*). In the Ashkenazi communities in Europe, it was customary to eat fifteen different kinds of fruit on the fifteenth of Shevat, and special preference was given to the kinds of fruit grown in the Land of Israel.

The Sephardi Jews gave the New Year of Trees a greater significance. By the Sixteenth Century, the custom of eating fruit and reciting Psalms on Tu B'Shevat had been expanded by the mystics, and it became a central celebration of the kabbalists of Safed in Northern Israel. For the kabbalists, trees were a symbol of human beings, as Scripture says, "For a human is like the tree of the field" (Deut.20:19). In connection with their general concern for *tikkun olam* (restoring wholeness to the broken world)—the kabbalists regarded eating a variety of fruits on Tu B'Shevat as a way of improving our spiritual selves. More specifically, they believed that eating fruit was a way of expiating the first sin—eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. Similarly, trees were symbolic of the "Tree of Life," which is a visual representation of the flow of divine energy that carries goodness and blessing into the world. To encourage this flow and to affect *tikkun olam*, the kabbalists created a Tu B'Shevat seder, loosely modeled after the Passover seder. [See page 9.]

Today, the most commonly associated theme ascribed to Tu B'Shevat is the environment and environmental issues. It is considered a festival of nature, full of wonder, joy, acknowledgment and thankfulness for God's creation as we anticipate the renewal of the natural world. Linking these ideas and *tikkun olam*, during this festival we consider our obligation to care for God's world, of which we are the custodians, and our responsibility for sharing the fruits of God's earth with all. Since the rebirth of the modern State of

Israel, there has been a focus on the reforestation of the Land of Israel during Tu B'Shevat.

The goal of this guide is to give individuals and congregations a resource that helps them integrate and incorporate social action programming related to the environment within their Tu B'Shevat holiday practices. Three distinct aspects of the environment are examined: natural resources, health issues and endangered species. For each theme, there are suggested activities for individuals and families, as well as program ideas for congregations, youth groups and religious schools. These ideas can be adapted and changed to fit the needs of individuals, families or congregations.

For general information on celebrating festivals and holidays, visit the Union for Reform Judaism's holiday website at [www.urj.org/holidays](http://www.urj.org/holidays). There are also additional environmental programs highlighted in other Social Action Holiday Guides available at [www.rac.org/holidayguides](http://www.rac.org/holidayguides), particularly Chanukah, Sukkot, Shavuot, Pesach, and the *Yamim Noraim* (The High Holy Days).

## **JUDAISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

During Tu B'Shevat, we focus our attention towards the environment and environmental issues. Explaining the intricate connection between Judaism and the environment, Arthur Waskow, founder and director of the Shalom Center, states that, "perhaps the most profound Jewish statement about the relationship between human beings and the earth is bound up in two words of Hebrew—*Adam* and *Adamah*. The first means "human being"; the second, "earth." The two words are connected to teach us that human beings and the earth are intertwined" (Waskow, *Torah of the Earth*, p.vii). Neither the earth nor human beings run independent of each other; both are directly linked and have drastic and lasting effects on one another.

Perhaps the most commonly associated object ascribed to the environment is trees, which in many ways come to represent all of nature. Trees are special in and of themselves, but they are even more significant in the context of the ecosystems of which they are a part. Ecologically speaking, trees are at the heart of the environment. They shade the streams, keeping temperatures constant, and provide food for fishes and other aquatic creatures. They bind and build the soil. Without trees, the land is subjected to the eroding forces of wind and water; the soil blows away leaving a dry and wasted land and it runs off into streams, causing turbid, murky water, which limits plant productivity.

Trees hold a special place in the Jewish imagination. The Torah is described as a "tree of life" to those who hold it dear. The two trees in the center of the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, figure prominently in humanity's birth story. Trees find their way into the greatest biblical love poem, the Song of Songs, that lovely evocation of a spring in which humanity at last learns how to live in loving, playful peace with all of earth as well as with each other. And in the Psalms it is written, "the righteous bloom like a date-palm; they thrive like a cedar in Lebanon;

planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God” (Psalm 92:13-15).

As Ellen Bernstein, founder of *Shomrei Adamah/Keepers of the Earth*, notes, trees are the symbol of life and sustenance. In the rabbinic imagination, paradise was associated with trees: “The rabbis said that God created Paradise on the third day of Creation, the same day that God made trees and green growing things. They said that there were eighty myriads of trees in every corner of Paradise and that the Tree of Life had fifteen thousand tastes and it stood in the middle of the Garden of Eden. The rabbinic Paradise was the picture of biological diversity” (Bernstein, *Land, Community and Sprawl, Torah of the Earth*, p. 224). In our tradition, trees are evocative of the diversity of life, of the exuberance of life, of the dignity of life. “In their verticality, with roots reaching into the depths of the soil and branches stretching towards the sky, trees symbolize the connection of heaven and of earth” (Ibid.).

However, it is not just the trees that evoke a power in the Jewish imagination, but also the land itself. The Bible tells us, “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and dates, a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing” (Genesis 8:11).

Land is a central and basic theme of biblical faith. The land is a blessing that God promises our ancestors time after time in return for their faith and adherence to the covenant. God could give no greater gift, nor provide a greater challenge—the people were being asked to live consciously on the land in community; to live an ethical life. (Ibid.) Bernstein notes that the land was never actually the Israelites’ to own, because the land belonged to God. The land was not to be sold in perpetuity. The people were not given ownership; rather they were afforded the right to inhabit the land and use it for proper purposes, to live a way of life guided by the covenant. The land was, in a sense, alive and the people were expected to treat it sensitively (Ibid., p. 225). It is, therefore, our job as stewards of the earth and of God’s Creation to care for and be active in preservation and maintenance of the land and bounty which God provided.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resources are defined as: “naturally occurring substances that are considered valuable in their relatively unmodified (natural) form” (Wikipedia). Natural resources are all the natural commodities and features of the earth’s physical environment that are exploited by human population. They are all the elements used to provide our needs: energy, oil and fuel, forests, water, air, climate and soil. Oftentimes we take for granted the earth and our natural environment. In our modern day, this has proven to be disastrous and quite dangerous. Many of our natural resources are made up of non-renewable resources, which, once used, may not be replenished. Resources such as fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) and those minerals which cannot be recycled are categorized as non-renewable resources. Due to the heavy demands of people, these

resources are being depleted and may not be replenished. However, we also use many renewable resources, which can be re-constituted back to the earth and are thus “sustainable.” This means they are assets that can be successfully and constantly recovered, re-used or recycled, or which by careful management, including re-planting, replenishment or good husbandry, can be maintained indefinitely for future use and consumption.

The Talmudic sages seemed to understand these ideas when they stated: “It is forbidden to live in a town which has no garden or greenery” (Jerusalem Talmud, *Kiddushin 4:12*). This statement illustrates the importance of the natural world and how vitally imperative it is to live in partnership with, and surrounded by, nature. A world without natural resources and greenery is a world that is unable to sustain itself.

Many fundamental Torah and Rabbinic principles make concrete the Biblical statement, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants” (Psalms 24:1). One such tenet is the Biblical commandment of *bal taschit*, meaning “do not destroy.” This is a Biblical dictum forbidding the destruction of fruit bearing trees during seige or warfare; it has come to include the mandate that we not waste. We have a moral responsibility to protect that which is God’s and play an active and participatory role in sustaining and preserving the earth. That means, we have to make a concerted effort not to wantonly destroy or waste that which was created, for example, the natural environment and all that encompasses it.

“Rabbi Eleazar, son of Rabbi Simeon observed, ‘Why does Scripture at times put the earth before heaven and at other times heaven before earth? To teach that the two are of equal value’” (*Genesis Rabbah 1:15*). If, as this midrash teaches us, the earth is just as important as heaven, then the measure of our concern for our natural world should equal our pursuits of holiness and God’s sheltering presence. We should consider what we can do to repair the environment and prevent further harm and destruction as equally important as our ritual and spiritual observances.

## HEALTH ISSUES

The relationship between the environment and the health of living organisms is inseparable. Water, air, land, and soil are critical to the survival of all living creatures. On the other hand, pollution, global warming, and pesticides, to name a few, are threats to the health of all life on earth.

Hazardous wastes are by-products of industries—some get reused or recycled, some get expensively treated or placed in special landfills, some are illegally dumped, and some are legally deposited into our air and water, which has dramatic and drastic affects on our health. There are two basic ways to lower the amount of hazardous waste that is generated: lower our consumption levels of environmentally damaging goods or spend more money on research, prevention, treatment, and enforcement (Vorspan and Saperstein, Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice, p. 118). Pesticides, for example, are

potentially hazardous products that are widely accepted for use on our crops. While certain pesticides are relatively safe and effective, others injure or kill birds, animals and sometimes humans. “Frighteningly, only a small percentage of the pesticides used on the food we eat have been thoroughly tested for their effects on human and environmental health” (Ibid, p. 118).

Our relationship to nature is not that different from our relationship to our own physical health. Both our bodies and the land are reflections of *k’dushah*, “holiness.” The Bible teaches us: “You shall be holy for I am the Lord, your God, am holy...” (Leviticus 19:2). Everything that God creates and sustains is the embodiment of the Divine, including ourselves. Therefore, we have an obligation to treat God’s creation as holy vessels. This means respecting, protecting and preserving the world and its inhabitants.

## **ENDANGERED SPECIES**

Not only does the way we treat the environment affect human health, but it also has drastic affects on other living creatures that require sustenance and safe habitats to survive. Our environment is continually changing, causing habitats to be altered and modified. Natural changes tend to occur at a gradual pace, usually causing only a slight impact on individual species. However, when changes occur at a fast pace, there is little or no time for individual species to adapt and adjust to new circumstances, which can create disastrous results. Rapid loss of habitat, predominantly caused by human beings, is the primary cause of species endangerment. Nearly every region of the earth has been affected negatively by human activity, particularly during this past century. The loss of microbes in soils that formerly supported tropical forests, the extinction of fish and various aquatic species in polluted waterways, and changes in global climate brought about by the release of greenhouse gases are all results of human activity.

It is difficult to identify or predict human effects on individual species and habitats, especially during a human lifetime. But it is quite apparent that human activity has greatly contributed to species endangerment. For example, although tropical forests may look as though they are lush, they are actually highly susceptible to destruction. This is because the soils in which they grow are lacking in nutrients. It may take centuries to re-grow a forest that was cut down by humans or destroyed by fire, and many of the world's severely threatened animals and plants live in these forests. If the current rate of deforestation continues, huge quantities of plant and animal species will disappear.

In addition to the indirect impact of human behavior on the animal world, Judaism decrees moral treatment of animals over which we exercise direct control. There are moral and legal rules concerning the treatment of animals, which are based on the principle that animals are part of God’s creation towards which humanity bears responsibility. Scripture makes it clear that not only is cruelty to animals forbidden, but also that compassion and mercy are demanded towards them.

Jewish tradition teaches us to care for “the Earth and all its inhabitants” -- to preserve that which God created. After the Great Flood described in Genesis, God declares that the Covenant established is between God and all the creatures on the planet. (Genesis 9:9). In the midrash we learn: “Even things that you may regard as completely superfluous to the creation of the world, such as fleas, gnats and flies, even they are included in the creation of the world and the Holy One carries out the Divine purpose through everything – even a snake, a scorpion, a gnat or a frog” (Midrash, Genesis Rabbah 10:7).

In later rabbinic literature, the laws regarding treatment of animals are referred to as *tzaar baalei chayim*, prevention of cruelty to animals. Under Jewish law, animals have some of the rights humans do. Animals rest on Shabbat, just as humans do. We are forbidden to muzzle an ox while it is working in the field, just as we must allow human workers to eat from the produce they are harvesting. We are permitted to violate Shabbat to some extent to rescue an animal in pain or at risk of death, just as we are prescribed to do for humans under the ordinance of *pikuach nefesh*, the obligation to save a life in jeopardy. Our Rabbis also further dictated in Talmudic times that a person may not purchase an animal unless they have made provisions to feed them, and a person must feed their animals before they feed themselves.

It has become customary to recite Psalms on Tu B’Shevat, among them Psalm 104. This Psalm speaks of God's concern and care extended to all creatures, and illustrates that God created the entire earth as a unity, in ecological balance: "You make springs gush forth in torrents;; they make their way between the hills, giving drink to all the wild beasts; the wild asses slake their thirst. The birds of the sky dwell beside them and sing among the foliage. You water the mountains from Your lofts; the earth is sated from the fruit of Your work. You make the grass grow for the cattle, and herbage for man's labor, that he may get food out of the earth, wine that cheers the hearts of men, oil that makes the face shine, and bread that sustains man's life" (Psalms 104:10-16).

## **PROGRAM IDEAS\***

### **NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Our role as custodians and stewards of God's earth is to protect and preserve the ecology and environment as best we can. One of the most well known Talmudic sayings is that of Rabbi Yochannan ben Zakkai who said: "If you are planting a tree and you see the Messiah coming...finish planting the tree and then go and greet the Messiah" (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 31b). If we were to take this message literally, then planting a tree, preserving nature, guaranteeing the future of life on Earth, is in fact one of the most sacred thing we can do. Listed below is a list of programs that individuals and congregations can do to foster positive environmental stewardship.

#### **Tu B'Shevat Seder**

Hold a Tu B'Shevat Seder for your religious school, youth group or adults in the congregation and/or host one for friends and family. In the 17th century, Jewish mystics developed the Tu B'Shevat seder, borrowing imagery from the Passover seder, to create a new ritual for the New Year for Trees. Today, these creative rituals typically include drinking four cups of wine, mixing red and white to represent the changing of the seasons. The seder also includes eating a variety of fruits indigenous to Israel, interspersed with readings about trees and fruits from a range of Jewish literature. Use the texts and readings in Appendix A to create your own seder, or adapt an existing one.

To see a sample Tu B'shevat seder for early childhood programming go to:

[http://urj.org/kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item\\_id=1250&destination=ShowItem](http://urj.org/kd/Items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=1250&destination=ShowItem).

A collection of Tu B'Shevat seders also is available from the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Fisher, Adam, *Seder Tu Bishevat: The Festival Of Trees*, CCAR Press: New York, 1989).

#### **"Adopting" and Beautifying Natural Areas**

Adopting natural areas, such as parks, streams and roadsides, are projects that all ages can be involved in to enhance the beauty and environmental quality of natural "green" spaces. An organization can informally adopt an area by simply pledging to clean it regularly and advocating to the local government for its needs. In some areas, more formal adoption programs are available. Cleaning up a natural area near your synagogue can make a big difference—not only to the ecological health of the area itself, but to the self-esteem of the neighborhood around the area. Helping restore these areas gives local children a safe place to play and provides positive alternatives to street life. There is a wonderful passage from the Talmud, which illustrates the Jewish perspective on caring for public land:

---

\* Many of these program ideas can be found in the Coalition for Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) publication *To Till and To Tend*, as well as on line at [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org) and [www.rac.org/programbank](http://www.rac.org/programbank).

It once happened that a farmer was removing stones from his field onto public ground. A pious man found him doing so and said to him, “Fool, why do you remove stones from a ground which is not yours to ground which is yours?” The man laughed at him. Some time later, the man had to sell his field and when walking on that public ground he stumbled over those stones. He then said, “How correctly did the pious man say to me, why do you remove stones from ground which is not yours to ground which is yours?” (*Tosefta Bava Kama 10:2, Bava Kama 50b*)

Rashi interprets this passage to mean that the property that you own may not be yours tomorrow, whereas the public domain will always be available for your use. He therefore stresses the need for public areas to be maintained as paramount to an individual’s personal property.

### **Adopt a Park**

Check to see what local, county, or statewide governmental body in your area is in charge of your local parks. When groups “adopt” parks, they can, in addition to general clean-up, become involved in planting trees, building or renovating playgrounds, and even providing activities in the park. In some areas, parks may need volunteer security to help ensure that they remain safe play areas for young children.

### **Restore a Park Project**

Temple Emanu-El in Tucson, Arizona has created a social action initiative whereby members clean and restore a park in the Tucson metropolitan area one day each spring. For further details visit: <http://www.templeemanueltucson.org/social.html>.

### **Congregational “Buffalo Hunt”**

Have you ever wondered what happens when a herd of buffalo congregate together? The result is a tremendous amount of garbage and refuse. The aim of this program is to educate people about the affects of waste and garbage on the environment. The goal is that congregants, children and parents can learn what they can do to preserve and clean up their surroundings by “rounding up” as many pieces of garbage and dispose of it in receptacles. This is a fantastic way for individuals, adults and children to play an active role in cleaning our public parks and/or synagogues, while experiencing first hand the responsibility we have to care and maintain the environment and to preserve it.

### **Adopt a Roadside**

Many communities now take sponsors to adopt major surface streets and highways. Usually, this involves calling the local office of your state’s Department of Transportation, or its equivalent in your area. Typically, sponsorship commits your organization to donate a certain amount of money and/or to volunteer for a clean-up operation three to six times a year. In many areas, your sponsorship will be proclaimed in a road sign, which can help people make the connection between your organization and environmental concerns. Temple Beth Or ([www.templebethor.org](http://www.templebethor.org)) in Everett, Washington, has adopted a highway. The synagogue’s social action committee arranges work parties to pick up litter along a one-mile stretch of state

highway. The group of volunteers meets twice a year and follows safety guidelines provided by the Department of Transportation.

### **Adopt a Stream, Lake or Wetland**

In some areas, the state Department of Environmental Conservation or its equivalent sponsors the adoption of streams, lakes and wetlands. In addition to the types of clean-up operations described above, adopting a stream, lake or wetland can involve assisting surveys of water and air temperatures, water and soil pH, and wildlife. You may be asked to help build or enhance habitats or nesting shelters. Your group can also get involved in advocacy with regard to development plans alongside the area you have adopted. Often, because of the scenic value of such areas, there may be pressure to develop land, which, if not carefully monitored, may cause environmental degradation.

### **Recycling and Waste Reduction Programs**

Recycling programs can involve people of all ages both within the congregation and by individuals in their own homes. The synagogue's efforts can become a model to encourage congregants to recycle at home. In a growing number of locations, there are already government-sponsored recycling programs, and even in such cases, the synagogue can play a useful role in promoting recycling. In areas without such programs, the synagogue's role can be even more critical. By reducing consumption, we can follow the law of *bal tashchit* (the Biblical ordinance of "do not destroy"), save money and resources, and limit further depletion of creation. For a helpful and useful list of tips we can do to reduce, reuse, and recycle, please visit: [http://www.coejl.org/learn/for\\_rrr.php](http://www.coejl.org/learn/for_rrr.php).

### **Educating and Encouraging Congregants to Recycle**

Congregations can support and encourage members to undertake recycling and reduce waste individually by disseminating to all congregants information about what items from their homes they may recycle, along with a list of collection services and/or locations that will accept different materials. Congregants would then be responsible for bringing their own materials to the recycling locations. Congregants could be organized to carry the synagogue's recyclables to the appropriate locations. If there are city or county-wide recycling programs already in existence, this information could serve to publicize those recycling efforts and to encourage greater participation by congregants.

### **Synagogue Recycling**

When a synagogue creates its own recycling program, it engages the leadership in planning facility use and assessing the proper budgetary and staffing needs, as well as the members who spend time within the building. By learning how to make such initiatives doable, members are likely to be inspired to follow suit within their own homes. For information about "greening" your synagogue, go to <http://urj.org/small/resources/> and click on the **Greening of the Small Synagogue** for details on how you can make your synagogue more environmentally friendly.

Tips for starting a recycling program:

- Decide how extensive the recycling program ought to be. Although many different items can be recycled, starting with office paper, newsprint, aluminum and glass are often the easiest items to collect at the beginning. Depending on your local market for recyclables, you may then be able to expand into items such as plastic containers, batteries and other items.
- Identify government agencies or commercial recycling businesses in your area that pick-up recyclable material. Check the Yellow Pages or call the waste disposal department of your local government to find further information.
- Once you have identified possible recycling partners, contact them to work out pick-up arrangements. In most cases, in exchange for the materials themselves, they will pick-up the recyclables at little to no cost and may even let you use their large bins. (Note: If your synagogue has a trash pick-up contract based on the estimated tonnage, the contract should be re-negotiated once the recycling program is under way. The money the synagogue saves from reducing its garbage costs can be used to offset any costs of recycling.)
- If there is no citywide or county-wide program in effect, congregants could also drop-off their recyclables into the synagogue bins, thus providing an additional benefit of membership.
- If the company doing the pick-up does not lend you the bins, purchase or have donated large lidded trash receptacles into which the synagogue and congregants can place their items to be recycled. A parking lot is usually the best location for these containers. Decorating and maintaining these containers can be an excellent youth group or religious school project.
- Inside the synagogue, place extra wastebaskets for recyclables in offices and classrooms. Remember: in your synagogue, community center, school, or home, the easier you make it to recycle, the more successful the program will be.
- Publicize the recycling project in your synagogue bulletin or newsletter. Preschool, religious school and day school students can also learn about the project in their classrooms.
- If there is no citywide recycling program in your town, use the success of the synagogue's effort to advocate for the establishment of such a program.
- Engage the youth in the congregation in the recycling efforts. For example, have the children in your school or youth group survey all the congregants in the synagogue as to whether or not they recycle and approximately how much they recycle of different products each week. The students can then calculate how many trees and how much energy is being saved, as well as how much pollution is being prevented, by the recycling efforts of the synagogue community. Voluntary goals of increased recycling could be set for each New Year.

### **Reducing Waste**

In addition to recycling, there are many ways individuals and congregations can reduce waste and minimize their impact on the environment. For a list of 15 everyday tree and water conservation tips, visit, <http://www.coejl.org/tubshvat/15actions/>.

Suggestions include:

- Purchase recycled paper and other recycled products. By purchasing such products, you not only help the environment, but you also ensure that there will be a steady market for recycled materials—lowering your costs and promoting environmentally sound business enterprises.
- Reduce or avoid use of items such as Styrofoam, which cannot be recycled.
- Reduce use of paper products and disposable plastic silverware. Instead, use regular reusable plates, cups, and utensils. Have office staff and volunteers bring mugs or cups to the synagogue to be used instead of disposable ones.
- Whenever possible, reduce or combine synagogue mailings, which allow the synagogue to save money as it reduces waste.

**Some Recycling Facts from Earth Day, Inc.:**

- **Most forms of recycling save energy, thus reducing air pollution and global warming.**
- **Recycling aluminum uses 95% less energy than producing aluminum from raw materials.**
- **Through recycling, it is possible to reduce our waste stream by 80%.**
- **For every ton of 100% recycled paper used in place of non-recycled paper, 17 trees are saved, 64% less energy is used, and air pollution is cut by 74%.**
- **Only 35% of newspapers in the United States are recycled, even though a single Sunday edition of a major newspaper, such as the *New York Times*, typically uses 75,000 trees in its production.**
- **Recycling one glass jar saves enough energy to light a 100 watt bulb for four hours.**

**Hold a School or Youth Group “Paper Saving Day”**

Plan a day for your school, for example on Tu B’Shevat, where the synagogue or youth group’s goal is to avoid throwing out as much paper as possible by reducing, reusing, and recycling paper. Make arrangements with a local supermarket to borrow paper bags. Have students decorate them with paper-saving messages. Return the bags to the store for customers to use, reuse, and recycle. Please visit <http://www.coejl.org/tubshvat/activities/papersavingday.php> for full program description.

**Recyclemania!**

RecycleMania is a friendly competition among university recycling programs in the United States that provides students with a fun, proactive activity in waste reduction. Over a ten-week period, schools compete in different contests to see which institution can collect the largest amount of recyclables, the least amount of trash, and have the highest recycling rate. All participating schools are required to report measurements on a weekly basis in pounds. The university that recycles the most wins. For more information on how your local campus can become part of this project, please visit, [www.recyclemaniacs.org](http://www.recyclemaniacs.org).

### **Make your own “recycled paper”**

As a kickoff to your recycling project at school or home, you can teach children how to make their own “recycled paper.” You will need the following: Scrap paper, a piece of screening (approximately 10” x 10”) with the edges taped over to prevent wounds (duct tape works best), washbasin, blender or food processor, old towels, rolling pin.

- a. Tear scrap paper into small pieces. Soak it in hot water for one-half hour. Take a handful of the paper, put it into a blender or food processor, and add water until half-full. Blend until you no longer see pieces of paper.
- b. Pour mixture over the screen (with basin to catch water). Shake the screen back and forth to get an even layer of fibers on the screen. It may be necessary to lower the screen into the water in the basin in order to even out the layer. Lift the screen carefully out of the water.
- c. Lay the screening between old towels. Roll with a rolling pin to get the fibers flat and even. Let dry for at least an hour.
- d. Gently remove the paper from the screen by turning the screen upside down and peeling the paper away from the edges. The rest of the paper should fall away from the screen.

### **Environmental Art Projects**

What a better way to learn about the environment than producing art made of recycled materials! Children in the religious school can make art projects representing the environment and how much we as individuals and human beings rely on it for survival. The religious school can involve students and parents in a collective session and learn together about the importance of the environment and the affects it has on us today. The school might have a ‘recycled art’ sale, with the proceeds donated to charitable organizations aimed at protecting and preserving the environment.

### **Waste-Free Lunches ([www.wastefreelunches.org](http://www.wastefreelunches.org))**

Much of the trash we generate comes from the packaging on the food we buy, and lunch foods are no exception. In fact, it has been estimated that on average a school-age child bringing a disposable lunch generates 67 pounds of waste per school year. That equates to 18,760 pounds of lunch waste for just one average-size elementary school. A waste-free lunch program educates students, parents, and school staff about where our trash ends up and how we, as individuals, can reduce the amount of trash we generate. Waste-free lunch programs favor the use of reusable food containers, drink containers, utensils, and napkins. They discourage the use of disposable packaging, such as prepackaged foods, plastic bags, juice boxes and pouches, paper napkins, and disposable utensils. Many schools across the country have begun waste-free lunch programs and it is truly making a tremendous difference.

### **Environmental Paper Hunt**

This is a great program for families to find out how much paper they use in their homes and how one can reduce, reuse, and recycle more paper! For further information please visit: <http://www.coejl.org/tubshvat/activities/paperhunt.php>.

### **Water Initiative Program**

This program is designed for those who want to understand and examine how much water is being used on a daily scale. This activity can provide a way to reduce the amount of water we waste and learn how we can be most efficient in our usage of water, life's most precious element. For information, please visit:

<http://www.coejl.org/tubshvat/activities/howmuchwater.php>

### **Become an Advocate for Forests and Wilderness Areas**

#### **5 Actions You Can Take in 15 Minutes To Protect Forests**

Here are five helpful tips we can all practice in order to protect our forests, the environment and our ecosystem:

**1. Send a virtual postcard to the US Forest Service** at <http://www.ourforests.org/> to support an effective policy to protect our national forests.

**2. Reduce junk mail.** Send a letter to the Direct Marketing Association, Mail Preference Service, POB 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008 asking to remove your name from mailing lists.

**3. Buy one forest-friendly alternative to an everyday product.** Some suggestions: avoid paper cups by investing in a reusable travel mug, buy stationery from tree-free paper or recycled paper with at least 50% post-consumer waste, share a newspaper or magazine subscription with a friend.

**4. Make a commitment to purchase only wood products certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC);** ask for them at The Home Depot and other building supply stores.

**5. Pick two actions from COEJL's "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" list** and commit to doing them this year. Next year, pick two more!

([http://www.coejl.org/learn/for\\_top5.php](http://www.coejl.org/learn/for_top5.php))

#### **Be A Tree-Tective: How to Spot Common Tree Troubles and How to Help!**

This is an excellent program for families and individuals who want to make an important contribution to the environment by inspecting trees around their area and work towards repairing the damages that have been caused. COEJL's website ([www.coejl.org/tubshvat/activities/treetective.php](http://www.coejl.org/tubshvat/activities/treetective.php)) provides tips and ideas that one can do to ensure that the environment is healthy and how one can offer assistance to better take care of the ecosystem.

### **Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Practices**

#### **Green Star Policy**

Congregation Beth Shalom in Anchorage, Alaska has made a concerted effort to improve environmental quality through wise decisions. These include conserving energy, reducing or eliminating waste, recycling, and properly disposing of the remaining waste. The congregation believes that our responsibility to prevent pollution is part of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. It is actively working to achieve

and maintain Green Star standards and to be a model for other organizations, congregations, and the community. For further information about green star programs, please visit, <http://greenstarinc.org/>.

### **“Sustainable Sanctuaries”**

Temple Sharey Tefilo-Israel, South Orange, New Jersey ([www.tsti.org](http://www.tsti.org)), is the first New Jersey temple accepted into the “Sustainable Sanctuaries” program developed by GreenFaith, an interfaith organization devoted to the religious imperative of preservation and stewardship of the Earth, and by COEJL (Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life). The program, the first of its kind in the country, helps participating congregations, selected through a competitive application process, to model environmentally sustainable behavior to their members and communities, and become centers of religious environmental activism. Synagogues that would like to enter this program are encouraged to contact GreenFaith at [info@greenfaith.org](mailto:info@greenfaith.org) and ask about the Sustainable Sanctuaries or Greening Synagogues program.

### **Mass Transit and Carpooling**

A simple way to reduce emissions and be kind to the environment is to make use of the public transit systems in ones’ city. This means fewer cars on the road polluting the air and the environment. Fewer cars on the road means precious fossil fuels can be conserved. If transit systems are not accessible then try carpooling to work or school. By carpooling, we reduce the amount and automobiles on the roads and their emissions. Carpooling not only helps us preserve the environment and the ecosystem, but also saves money and helps make friends!

### **Energy Efficient Light Bulbs**

Though we call them light bulbs, traditional incandescent bulbs are actually small heaters that give off a little bit of light—something you know if you've ever touched a bulb that's been on for a while. These bulbs were technological wonders when they were patented in 1880, but today they are inefficient dinosaurs. They waste energy and money, and they are responsible for millions of tons of pollution. Fortunately, the next generation of bulbs is here: Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) now give off high-quality light using a fraction of the electricity. Using CFLs puts less strain on the electric grid and saves you money. If every household in the United States replaced just three 60-watt incandescent light bulbs with CFLs, we would reduce as much pollution as if we took 3.5 million cars off the roads! For further information, please visit: [www.fightglobalwarming.com/page.cfm?tagID=269](http://www.fightglobalwarming.com/page.cfm?tagID=269) to see how you can “pick a better bulb,” and make a difference in our world! Also visit [http://www.coejl.org/climatechange/cc\\_cfl.php](http://www.coejl.org/climatechange/cc_cfl.php) for information on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Rethinking Energy Use in Our Homes**

U.S. households produce 21 percent of the country's global warming pollution. Energy-conscious families can reduce their emissions by up to two-thirds. If every household in the U.S. made energy-efficient choices, we could save 800 million tons of global warming pollution—more than the heat-trapping emissions from over 100

countries. That would go a long way toward stabilizing our climate. For a full list and ideas on how to cut pollution at home, please visit:

<http://www.fightglobalwarming.com/>.

### **Drive Smart Initiative ([www.fightglobalwarming.com](http://www.fightglobalwarming.com))**

Watching how you drive can improve your car's mileage per gallon, cutting global warming pollution and saving you anywhere from \$200 to \$500 each year. This website provides tips and guidelines for drivers to cut emissions, save money, and work towards a better environment, which will benefit us all and make a safer and more environmentally conscious world! See <http://www.fightglobalwarming.com> for further information.

## **Planting and Beautification Projects**

### **Beautifying Broadway Initiative ([www.hillel.org](http://www.hillel.org))**

Beautify Broadway was a community service Tu B'Shevat event organized by Hillel in New Orleans for fraternities and sororities. The program consisted of an on campus student beautification day where students were able to plant trees, flowers, shrubs, and decorate pots for charity. Students gave back to their university and community, while learning about the Jewish holiday and celebrating trees and our environment. For full program details, please visit, <http://notes.hillel.org/hillel/exchange.nsf/>.

### **Tree Planting and Tree Planting Ceremonies**

Tree planting ceremonies on Tu B'Shevat are appropriate for all ages and provide a hands-on teaching opportunity about the importance and majesty of trees. It can be held on congregational grounds or at any other appropriate location. You may want to ask your city or town parks department which areas in your community would most greatly benefit from the planting of trees. Bear in mind that the on-going care that trees require to remain healthy is of equal importance to their actual planting; continuing care of the trees should be part of the program plan. Trees may be purchased from local nurseries, the National Arbor Day Foundation (<http://www.arborday.org/>), or EarthPlan, Inc. (<http://www.coejl.org/programbank>). At the same time you physically plant your own trees, you might also donate money to have trees planted in Israel through the Jewish National Fund ([www.jnf.org](http://www.jnf.org)) or in rainforests around the globe through the World Wildlife Fund ([www.worldwildlife.org](http://www.worldwildlife.org)).

### **The Olive Tree Project ([www.rhr.org](http://www.rhr.org))**

Rabbis for Human Rights has launched The Olive Tree Project to support Palestinians whose trees have been cut down. Money donated to this fund will go towards planting trees in the West Bank, buying olive oil produced by Palestinians and donating it to those in need, and doing educational work to protect olive trees.

### **Form a Teva Committee**

Temple Emek Shalom, Ashland, Oregon created a *Teva* (“nature”) Committee, which organizes creative programming all year round. A special hike aimed at appreciating local ecology and nature might serve as the kick-off event for the committee and can be used as a way of recruiting members. Contact COEJL for more information on starting a *Teva* Committee ([www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)).

### **World Union of Jewish Students Environmental Activism**

The World Union of Jewish Students has created a program designed to introduce students to the issues of the environment. The program’s goals are to explore Jewish texts dealing with ecology and the environment; to encourage activism on environmental issues; and to analyze relevant Jewish texts and examine their application today. For program details, please visit:

<http://www.wujs.org.il/activist/programmes/programmes/tubishvat/>.

## **HEALTH ISSUES**

*“There is no wealth like health” (Apocrypha, Ben Sira, 30:16)*

Environmental health issues are those aspects of human health, including quality of life, that are determined by physical, chemical, social, biological, and psycho-social factors in the environment. Nutrition, soil contamination, water, air and light pollution, waste control and public health are all integral aspects of environmental health. We have a moral responsibility to protect and preserve the environment as well as our health. Proper diet, nutrition, exercise and good living are all vital ingredients for a healthy body. Listed below are program ideas related to health and the environment.

### **Promote Healthy Farming and Healthy Eating**

#### **Don’t Panic—Buy Organic!**

Organic food is food produced according to organic standards, which means crops grown without the use of conventional pesticides, artificial fertilizers or sewage sludge; animals reared without the routine use of antibiotics or growth hormones; and food processed without ionizing radiation or food additives. Purchasing organic products is a great way to protect oneself against harmful pesticides, become more aware and conscious of the food we eat and how it is grown, as well as support organic farmers, whose hard work and dedication make it possible to enjoy such products. Buying organic is also a wonderful way to educate children about the dangers of pesticide use and how important it is to make informed decisions, especially on what goes into our mouths.

#### **Organic Oneg**

One way to introduce organic foods to congregants is to organize an “organic *oneg*” whereby community members bring to the synagogue organic produce and foods for

a Shabbat dinner or *oneg*. Alternatively, the synagogue might host an “organic tasting” where members are blindfolded and asked to taste different foods and determine which ones are organic and which ones are not. This program allows members to see for themselves that organic food tastes just as good as “regular” food and educates members about safe food measures.

### **Fair Trade Coffee**

Coffee is the world’s second largest traded commodity after oil. It is also the leading source of income for the developing world. Fair trade certification for coffee, chocolate and other products guarantees that local farmers are paid for their wages, workers are treated fairly and environmentally sound and sustainable practices are utilized. Congregations can educate members about Fair Trade practices, hold Fair Trade coffee tastings and make a commitment to purchasing only Fair Trade coffee. Advocates and consumers can put pressure on their local supermarkets to guarantee that they stock Fair Trade Certified™ products, display them prominently on shelves and market them to their shoppers. For further information, please visit: [www.rac.org/advocacy/issues/fairtrade/](http://www.rac.org/advocacy/issues/fairtrade/); [www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org) or [www.oxfamamerica.org/whatyoucando/act\\_now/campaign\\_action/coffee](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/whatyoucando/act_now/campaign_action/coffee).

### **Tuv Ha’Aretz (www.hazon.org)**

*Tuv Ha’Aretz* is Hazon's Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program, which enables the Jewish community to support local, sustainable agriculture. Individuals commit to purchase an entire season of produce from an organic family farm, thus providing the farmer with a stable base of customers. Supporting the work of small farmers helps protect land from development and urban sprawl. Such programs can be replicated in other communities to support local organic farms and educate the Jewish community.

## **Reduce Air Pollution**

### **Pollution Solutions and Fuel Efficient Automobiles**

Automobiles emit a tremendous amount of pollution into our atmosphere, which is harmful and destroys our environment. Population growth has helped put more cars on the road, and a strong economy has led to more cars per driver. We can help the environment and ourselves by choosing to drive fuel efficient cars and “greener” automobiles. For further information please visit: <http://www.fightglobalwarming.com>, as well as [www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov).

### **Hybrid Automobile Incentives**

The affects of motor vehicles on the road are disastrous to human health. Outdoor air pollution from cars, SUVs, trucks, and buses causes acute respiratory problems, temporary decreases in lung capacity, and inflammation of lung tissue; impairs the body’s immune system; increases a person’s risk of cancer-related death; contributes to birth defects, low birth weight, and infant deaths; and makes healthy active children 3 to 4 times more likely to develop asthma. One way to minimize some of these problems are to invest and encourage others to purchase hybrid cars, which are

better for the environment because they are low-polluting and low-petroleum consuming cars. To support and encourage congregants that purchase hybrid cars, congregations/youth groups can offer discount hybrid car-washes or special hybrid car parking spaces.

### **Promote Health and Healing**

#### **Healing Herb Garden for Tu B'shevat**

The Rosh Chodesh group at Hillel in San Francisco planted a Healing Herb Garden on Tu B'Shevat and dedicated it to *Shalom Bayit* (a shelter for women abused by domestic violence). The students learned about the herbs and their healing properties in conjunction with the holiday of Tu B'Shevat. For further information, visit [www.hillel.org](http://www.hillel.org).

#### **Health Fair Extraordinaire**

For the past several years, Congregation Beth Emeth in Albany, New York has hosted a community-wide Health Fair along with the Jewish Community Center. The goal of this social action event is to provide free medical screenings, medical educational lectures and health-related information, especially to those who otherwise have no such opportunities. This has grown to be the largest health fair in the region, with more than 3,000 people attending throughout the day. For further details and information, please visit: [www.saaajcc.org/programguidefull.pdf](http://www.saaajcc.org/programguidefull.pdf).

#### **New York Jewish Environmental Bike Ride ([www.hazon.org](http://www.hazon.org))**

Hazon organizes the New York Jewish Environmental Bike Ride to raise money for cutting-edge Jewish environmental education in the US and in Israel. The New York Ride takes place over a weekend and includes participants of all ages and religious backgrounds, emphasizing the value of *tzedakah*, physical challenge and connection to the world around us. Events like this can be planned by congregations or individuals for Tu B'Shevat.

#### **Congregational Alternative Services**

A great way to help congregants make a connection between their personal well-being and the environment is to organize worship services in a natural, outdoor setting (see Appendix B for prayers and readings dealing with nature and the environment). Other activities can include a meditative /or healing service in conjunction with Tu B'Shevat.

## **EDANGERED SPECIES**

We have an obligation to those creatures that share the planet with us, to protect and preserve the ecosystem so that those who dwell within it may live and survive as we do. Listed below are some program ideas to help protect and sustain animals and endangered species in our world.

### **Pine Cone Bird Feeders**

This program designed for children, families and youth groups emphasizes the importance of trees and the environment, as well as those that dwell in them, namely animals. The activity involves making bird feeders out of pine cones, which serves as a home for the many winged creatures that are in need of homes. For a full description of this project, please visit: <http://www.coejl.org/tubshvat/activities/pineconebird.php>.

### **Wildlife Advocacy**

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), established in 1961, works to protect endangered species. The WWF safeguards hundreds of species around the world, but focuses special attention on giant pandas, tigers, endangered whales and dolphins, rhinos, elephants, marine turtles and great apes. These species not only need special measures and extra protection in order to survive, they also serve as umbrella species; helping them helps numerous other species that live in the same habitats. For further information on how you can contribute or help, contact WWF at: [www.worldwildlife.org](http://www.worldwildlife.org). Congregations and individuals can protect endangered species through advocacy campaigns, education programs and Shabbat speakers to educate their community about animal endangerment.

### **Adopt an Animal or Species**

Religious schools and individuals can “adopt” an animal through their local zoo, or adopt an endangered species by donating their *tzedekah* money to organizations whose aim is to protect wildlife and endangered species, such as the African Wildlife Foundation ([www.awf.org](http://www.awf.org)).

### **Heifer Project**

The Heifer Project works with communities to end hunger and poverty by providing livestock and other animals in order for subsistence farmers to become self-sufficient. The foundation educates people about the symbiotic relationships between animals and humans, particularly in developing countries. Religious schools can use its *tzedekah* funds to “purchase” animals to sustain impoverished families. For more information, go [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org).

**APPENDIX A**  
**TEXTS, PRAYERS AND POEMS ON JUDAISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Texts**

Then the Lord, God formed the human of the dust of the ground, and breathed into the nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living soul. (Genesis 11:7)

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I, Adonai, am your God. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

For the Lord your God shall lead you into the good land, a land of streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing. (Deuteronomy 8:7-9)

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? (Deuteronomy 20:19)

Consider the work of God: for who can make straight that which has been made crooked? (Ecclesiastes 7:13)

Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult; let the sea and all within it thunder, the fields and everything in them exult; then shall all the trees of the forest shout for joy at the presence of Adonai, who is coming to rule the earth; God will rule justly and its people with faithfulness. (Psalms 96:11-13)

But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the sky, they will teach you, or speak to the earth, it will teach you; the fish of the sea, they will inform you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of Adonai has done this? (Job 12:7-9)

Rav Judah said, "He who goes out during the days of Nisan and sees the trees budding, should say, 'Blessed be He who has caused nothing to be lacking in His universe, and created therein beautiful creations and beautiful trees from which people can derive pleasure.' (Babylonian Talmud, *B'rachot* 43b)

If a man sees beautiful persons and beautiful trees, he should say, "Blessed be He who created beautiful creatures in His world." (Babylonian Talmud, *B'rachot* 7:7)

R. Elazar said, "With what may the righteous in this world be compared? To a tree whose trunk stands entirely in a pure place, but its branches extend over to an unclean place. If

those branches are cut off, then all the tree is in a pure place.” So God imposes sufferings on the righteous in this world so that they may inherit the world to come. (Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* 40b)

Rabbi Eleazar, son of Rabbi Simeon observed, ‘Why does Scripture at times put the earth before heaven and at other times heaven before earth? To teach that the two are of equal value.’ (Genesis Rabbah 1:15)

When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: “Look at my works! See how beautiful they are, how excellent! Take care not to spoil or destroy My world, for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you.” (Midrash Rabbah, Commentary on Ecclesiastes 7:13)

It should not be believed that all the beings exist for the sake of the existence of humanity. On the contrary, all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes, and not for the sake of something else. (Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yose were sitting one day beneath some trees on the plain by the Sea of Ginnosar. Rabbi Shimon said: “The shade spread over us by these trees is so pleasant! We must crown this place with words of Torah!” (Zohar 2:127a)

Said Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirech [in the Ukraine]: Your kind deeds are used by God as seed for the planting of trees in the Garden of Eden; thus, each of you creates your own Paradise. (Esser Orot (Ten Lights))

All that [we] see—the heaven, the earth, and all these things are the external garments of God. (Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe)

Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy. (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)

He that planteth a tree is a servant of God, he provideth a kindness for many generations, and faces that he haith not seen shall bless him. (Henry Van Dyke)

## **Prayers**

*Master of the Universe  
Grant me the ability to be alone;  
May it be my custom to go outdoors each day  
Among the trees and grasses,  
Among all growing things  
And there I may be alone,  
And enter into prayer  
To talk with the one  
That I belong to.  
(Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav)*

*Whenever I turn my eyes, around on Earth or to the heavens, I see You in the field of stars, I see you in the yield of the land in every breath and sound, a blade of grass, a simple flower, an echo of Your holy Name. (Abraham Ibn Ezra, God Everywhere)*

**A Blessing on Seeing Trees Blossoming:**

*Blessed are You, Lord our God, who has withheld nothing from Your world and has created in it beautiful creatures and goodly trees for the enjoyment of all Your people.*

(Cherie Koller-Fox, Tu B'Shevat Seder, Harvard Hillel, Temple Israel, Westport, CT)

**An Ecological Kavannah:**

*For the sake of the earth, for the sake of the generations, and for the sake of all the waters and creatures and plants, for the sake of all who are hungry, for the sake of thankfulness, and for the sake of our own souls, may we have the wisdom and courage to protect and restore, and not diminish the integrity of creation. May we always open our hearts and our hands to share the bounty of the Earth with all who are in need.*

(Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life)

**A Tu B'Shevat Prayer for Creation**

*Source of Creation and Life of the Universe, we gather together on Tu B'Shevat, as Jews of conscience, with a deep spiritual bond to your natural wonders, to affirm and preserve creation.*

*We are grateful for creation in all its majesty: the ever flowing waters, the azure blue skies, the complex life of Earth's forests, the myriad of life forms—amoebae and falcon, black footed ferret and wild turkey, human being and soaring eagle.*

*The life of all creatures and our own lives are One, profoundly dependent upon each other.*

*We call our ancient scroll of wisdom, the Torah, an Eitz Chayim, a tree of life, for it, like the Earth's great forests, sustains us. Torah teaches us that creation, in its great diversity, is harmoniously interconnected. Like the trees, we too need strong and deep roots for nourishment.*

*The uplifted branches of trees point to our future. God, let us be strong, as strong as ancient trees. The Psalmist was right when he said, "like a tree planted by the waters, we shall not be moved."*

*We are grateful for the life we are lent. We pledge to lift up our voices, both in praise of You and in defense of Your Creation.*

(Rabbi Warren Stone)

The olive tree is a sign of hope that, despite the enormity of destruction, life can be restored. When the great flood began to subside, Noah sent out a dove. *The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! So then Noah knew that the waters had subsided from upon the earth.* (Genesis 8:11)

### **Poems for Tu B'Shevat**

#### *I Love a Tree*

By Samuel N. Baxter

*When I pass to my reward, whatever that may be, I'd like my friends to think of me as one who loved a tree.*

*I might not have a statesman's poise, nor thrill a throng with speech, but I may benefit mankind if I set out a beech.*

*If I transplant a sapling oak to rear its mighty head t'will shade and shelter to those who come long after I am dead.*

*If in the park I plant an elm where children come to play t'will make for them a childhood shrine that will not soon decay.*

*Or if I plant a tree with fruit, on which the birds may feed, then I have fostered feathered friends and that's a worthy deed.*

*For winter when the days grow short and spirits may run low, I'd plant a pine upon the scape t'would lend a cherry glow.*

*I'd like a tree to mark the spot where I am laid to rest for that would be the epitaph that I would like the best.*

*Tho it's not carved upon a stone for those who come to see but friends would know that resting there is he, who loved a tree.*

## **APPENDIX B: STORIES FOR TU B'SHEVAT**

Stories are useful tools to teach about the moral responsibility we have to the environment and the need to respect and preserve it.

### **Honi Ha-Me'agel Sleeps for Seventy Years**

A long time ago, there lived in Israel a man named Honi Ha-Me'agel. He was a very wise man. One spring day, Honi went for a walk. "What a lovely sunny day it is today," he thought to himself. He noticed that there were people in the fields planting vegetables and fruit trees. As he passed by a pretty little house, he saw an old man planting a tree. "Why would such an old man be planting a tree?" he wondered. "It takes a very long time for fruit trees to grow, and planting is hard work. He might not even be around when the tree is big enough to give fruit." Then Honi said aloud, "Excuse me sir, but what kind of tree are you planting?" "This sapling is a carob tree," said the man. "I love to eat carob on Tu B'Shevat. In about seventy years, this tree will produce carobs good enough for eating." "Do you think that you will live seventy more years and be able to eat the carob fruit," asked Honi. The man looked surprised. "Oh no! But I remember seeing carob trees growing when I was a little boy. I ate some of those carobs on Tu B'Shevat. They were so delicious! Those carob trees were planted by those who wanted to leave a gift for younger people. I am planting this tree as a gift for the people who will be living seventy years from now. Then they can enjoy eating carob on Tu B'Shevat, too. Just as my parents and grandparents planted trees for me, so I plant trees for my children and grandchildren." "That's a very smart thing to do," said Honi, and he continued his walk. After a short while, he began to feel very tired. "I'll just rest for a few moments," he thought, as he sat down on the ground. "Maybe I'll close my eyes for a while. I'll eat my lunch when I wake up." Honi stretched out on the ground, closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep. While he slept, a wonderful thing happened. A rock appeared nearby. It grew bigger and bigger. After a while, it began to surround Honi. Then it grew into the shape of a tent, with Honi inside. The tent protected him from the wind, from the rain, from the cold, and from the hot sun. Honi slept very comfortably inside the tent. He slept on and on for a very long time. He slept for seventy years!

One day, the tent that covered Honi began to shrink. It grew smaller and smaller until it did not cover him anymore. Honi woke up. He looked around. He stretched and stretched. "What a good nap I had!" said Honi, his arms out wide and his mouth yawning. "I must have slept for a long time." Honi noticed a man picking carobs from a tree nearby. This man was not the one to whom Honi had spoken earlier. Honi stood up and walked over to the man. "Did you plant this tree?" he asked. "No," answered the man. "My grandfather planted it seventy years ago." "I can't believe it," Honi said to himself. "I must have been sleeping for seventy years!" "I'm going to plant a carob tree also," said the man. "See, I have a sapling all ready to plant. Someday my children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy carobs just as I do." Honi remembered the words of the old man. "Just as my parents and grandparents planted trees for me, so do I plant trees for my children and grandchildren."

(Story excerpted from *Lively Legends-Jewish Values*, Miriam P. Feinberg and Rena Rotenberg, A.R.E. Publishing, Inc: Denver, Colorado, 1993, pp.47-58)

### **The Stolen Donkey**

Rabbi Hanina owned a donkey. He always took very good care of his pet. He gave the donkey oats to eat and water to drink. One day, some thieves came into the Rabbi's garden and stole his donkey. They led him through the gate. They led him away, down the road, until they could no longer see Rabbi Hanina's house. They walked and walked, pulling the donkey behind them. At last, they came to their own house. They tied the donkey to a post so that he could not wander off. "Let's feed the donkey," said one thief. They put a pile of oats in front of the donkey, but the donkey would not eat. "That's strange," said another thief. "Let's give him water." But the donkey would not drink. Day after day, the donkey would not eat and would not drink. At last, the thieves decided, "Let's get rid of this strange animal. He won't eat or drink. He could die. He's just not a good donkey." So they untied him, and chased him away.

The donkey had become weak from not eating or drinking. He was far from Rabbi Hanina's house. It was far, far off in the distance. As weak as he was, he managed to drag his tired legs and weary body to the gate of Rabbi Hanina's house. There he stopped and lay on the ground. He was too tired to go any farther.

Rabbi Hanina was in his house with his family. Suddenly his daughter said, "Father, did you hear that? It sounds like our donkey is braying." Everyone in the family listened for the sound. "You're right!" shouted Rabbi Hanina. "Let's go outside and see where the braying is coming from." They ran outside as fast as they could. Then they saw him. There, lying on the ground, was their donkey. He looked so weary! Rabbi Hanina ran to get food for the donkey. His daughter scurried to find water. The donkey ate the oats. Then he drank the water. Slowly, the donkey's strength returned. After a while, he was strong enough to walk to his home inside Rabbi Hanina's yard. It was good to be back home again with people who cared about him! He felt very happy!

(Story excerpted from *Lively Legends-Jewish Values*, Miriam P. Feinberg and Rena Rotenberg, A.R.E. Publishing, Inc: Denver, Colorado, 1993, pp.26-36)

### **Resources for other stories about the environment, animals and health**

Grace Ragues Maisel, Samantha Shubert, *A Year of Jewish Stories: 52 Tales for Children and Their Families*, UAHC Press: New York, 2004, pp. 84-107

Jules Harlow, *Lessons from Our Living Past*, Behrman House Inc. Publishers: New York, 1972

Malka Drucker, *The Family Treasury of Jewish Holidays*, Little, Brown and Company: Boston, New York, Toronto, London, 1994, pp.64-76

Barbara Diamond Goldin, *The Family Book of Midrash: 52 Jewish Stories from the Sages*, Jason Aronson, Inc.: Northvale, New Jersey, London, 1990

## APPENDIX C: RESOURCES

### Online Resources

**The Religious Action Center** ([www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org)) website has numerous issue pages related to the environmental advocacy ([www.rac.org/advocacy/issues/issueenv](http://www.rac.org/advocacy/issues/issueenv)) and programming ([www.rac.org/programbank](http://www.rac.org/programbank)). Some issues to advocate for include: climate change, environmental justice, environmental health and endangered species.

**The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)** ([www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)) seeks to deepen the Jewish community's commitment to the stewardship of creation and mobilizes the resources of Jewish life and learning to protect the Earth and all its inhabitants. COEJL works with synagogues and other local Jewish organizations to bring Jewish environmental education, ecologically conscious Jewish observance, and opportunities for environmental action to Jewish families and individuals.

**The Interfaith Climate Change Network (ICCN)** ([www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org)) is a collaborative effort of the Eco-Justice Working Group of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life. The ICCN's goal is to pursue justice for the poor around the world and protect all life on Earth by taking action to address global climate change. ICCN provides many educational, programmatic, and action resources.

**The National Religious Partnership for the Environment** ([www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)) seeks to weave care for God's creation throughout religious life in such a way as to provide inspiration, moral vision, and commitment to social justice to protect habitat and human well-being within it. Its website has resources and links relating to environmental issues.

**The Teva Learning Center** ([www.tevacenter.org](http://www.tevacenter.org)) immerses participants in the natural world and provides structured activities that sensitize them to nature's rhythms. Teva helps participants develop a more meaningful relationship with nature and their own Jewish practices. This process also facilitates personal growth, community building, and a genuine commitment to *tikkun olam*, healing the world. All Teva programs are built on a thematic progression - from Awareness to Interconnectedness to Responsibility.

**Hazon** ([www.hazon.org](http://www.hazon.org)) – Hazon's mission is to create and support a range of programs, especially, though not exclusively, focused on Jewish outdoor and environmental education. These programs will bring joy and meaning to people's lives and will foster new vision in the Jewish community and the world beyond.

**The Forum on Religion and Ecology** ([www.environment.harvard.edu/religion](http://www.environment.harvard.edu/religion)) is the largest international multi-religious project of its kind. It is engaged in exploring religious worldviews, texts, and ethics in order to broaden understanding of the complex nature of current environmental concerns. The Forum recognizes that religions need to be in dialogue with other disciplines (e.g., science, ethics, economics, education, public policy,

gender) in seeking comprehensive solutions to both global and local environmental problems.

**The Jewish National Fund (JNF)** ([www.jnf.org](http://www.jnf.org)) - The Jewish National Fund was created with the singular task of reclaiming the Land of Israel. It has been instrumental in this process of realizing the Zionist dream, the challenge of preserving and developing the land of Israel. To meet this challenge, JNF, with the support of hundreds of thousands of people who identify with this mission, invests its time and efforts in seven Action Areas, namely, forestry and ecology, water, community development, security, education, research and development, and tourism and recreation. This work continues to be a driving force in Israel and throughout the greater Jewish world.

**The Earth Charter Initiative** ([www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)) - The Earth Charter Initiative is the collective name for the extraordinarily diverse, global network of people, organizations, and institutions who participate in promoting the Earth Charter, and in implementing its principles in practice. The Initiative is a broad-based, voluntary, civil society effort, but participants include leading international institutions, national government agencies, university associations, NGOs, cities, faith groups, and many well-known leaders in sustainable development. The mission of the Earth Charter Initiative is, *"To establish a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society and to help build a sustainable world based on respect for nature, diversity, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace."*

**The World Environment Organization** ([www.world.org](http://www.world.org)) - The World Environment Organization is devoted to the preservation of the natural diversity of plant and animal species, and their habitats, through the prevention of environmental degradation and destruction. It educates the public about a wide variety of environmental topics, including preservation of natural habitats, organic farming, endangered species preservation, animal rescue, nutritional treatments for health conditions, renewable energy, the reduction of fossil fuel consumption, climate change, and other related environmental topics.

### **Books on Judaism and the Environment**

Benstein, Jeremy, The Way Into Judaism and the Environment, Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, Vermont, 2006

Bernstein, Ellen, Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet, Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, Vermont, 1998

Buxbaum, Yitzhak, A Person Is Like A Tree: A Sourcebook For Tu Beshvat, Jason Aronson Inc.: Northvale, New Jersey, Jerusalem, 2000

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, To Till and to Tend: A Guide to Jewish Environmental Study and Action, New York, NY

- Dorff, Elliot N., The Way Into Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World), Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, Vermont, 2005
- Dorff, Elliot and Newman, Louis, Contemporary Jewish Ethics and Morality: A Reader, Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York, 1995
- Elon, Ari, Hyman, Naomi Mara, Waskow, Arthur, Trees, Earth, and Torah: A Tu B'shvat Anthology, The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 1999
- Isaacs, Ronald H., The Jewish Sourcebook on the Environment and Ecology, Jason Aronson Inc.: Northvale New Jersey, Jerusalem, 1998
- Kitov, Eliyahu, The Book of Our Heritage, Feldheim Publishers: Jerusalem, New York, 1978
- Tamari, Meir, With All Your Possessions: Jewish Ethics and Economic Life, Jason Aronson Inc.: Northvale, New Jersey, Jerusalem, 1998
- Schwartz, Richard H., Ph.D., Judaism and Vegetarianism, Lantern Books: New York, 2001
- Schwartz, Richard H., Judaism and Global Survival, Atara Publishing Co.: New York, 1987
- Schochet, Elijah Judah, Animal Life in Jewish Tradition: Attitudes and Relationships, Ktav Publishing House, Inc.: New York, 1984
- Vorspan, Albert and Saperstein, David, Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time, UAHC Press: New York, 1998
- Waskow, Arthur, Torah of the Earth, Volumes 1 and 2, Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, Vermont, 2000
- Waskow, Arthur I., Seasons of Our Joy: A Handbook of Jewish Festivals, Summit Books: New York, 1982

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to all the colleagues and friends who reviewed this publication and offered their insightful suggestions for its structure and improvement. In particular, we wish to acknowledge **Rose Kowel**, whose patience, understanding and support was greatly appreciated. We are also grateful to **Sean Thibault**, who did an amazing job getting this material on-line with little time to do so, and to **Donald Cohen-Cutler** and **Alyssa Agard**, who provided so much ongoing support to the work of the Commission on Social Action during the drafting of this guide.

**Matthew Durbin, Rabbinic Intern**

Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

**Rabbi Marla J. Feldman, Director**

Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

Copyright © 2007 by the Union for Reform Judaism

