

Introduction

“Both love of the Creator and love of that which [God] has created are finally one and the same.” So wrote Martin Buber (*On Judaism*, p. 209), one of many giants of the Jewish tradition who each said in their way that concern for the environment -- for Creation -- is a profoundly “Jewish issue.” There are at least four major reasons why the Jewish community should take a lead on ecological issues:

First, the environment is a “Jewish issue” rooted in our traditions, sacred text, and experience. Our holidays track the seasonal cycles of nature. Our holy books bid us to preserve and protect God's good world. Jewish law teaches us to avoid waste (*bal tashchit*), even stipulating in the Talmud (Shabbat 67b) that in doing a particular task, one must use the available technology which burns the least oil. Our observance of Shabbat is cited around the world as an environmental ethic unto itself, a bulwark against those contemporary norms which can so easily led to despoliation. These are just a few of the countless examples of why environmental efforts are an authentic, “organic” outgrowth of Jewish values and tradition.

Second, all of our good work on Jewish continuity and security, on Israel and world Jewry, on justice and democracy, threatens to be (literally) washed away by the threat of climate change, among other looming ecological disasters. It is in our long-term interest to work on these issues, inasmuch as it is in everyone's long-term interest.

To say that we care for Creation, of course, does not automatically imply support for any particular initiative or strategy or piece of legislation. As we consider supporting “environmental initiatives” we must judge them on principles of economic justice, i.e, they should not disproportionately burden the poor; they should not drive working families into poverty. Environmental initiatives should also be sustainable over time; they should be grounded in sound science, and they should encourage participation by government, industry, institutions, and individuals.

The current situation

There is broad scientific consensus human economic activity, and in particular, the increased consumption of carbon-based fossil fuels to produce energy, is accelerating climate change and threatening the survival of some species, as well as the economic and physical well-being of human populations throughout the planet. If left unchecked, human economic activity, and in particular, activity by polluting industries, also poses risks to health, safety and ecological balance through despoiling of our air and water and contamination of the land. Damage to the unique resources of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, for example, is a particular concern to our region. Humankind has the capacity to transform the natural world, but with that capacity comes the responsibility both to safeguard ecological systems (so that the diversity of life can thrive) and to conserve resources (so that they are available for future generations).

Our dependence upon oil, especially foreign oil, not only endangers our environment, it also affects our economy and our national energy security. Today, over half of the oil we use is imported (60%) and our dependence will increase as we use up domestic resources. In addition to being one of the largest causes of climate change and not being a sustainable energy resource, our growing dependence on foreign oil leaves the United States vulnerable to hostile countries

and regimes and threatens its historic support for Israel. Most of the world's oil reserves are concentrated in the Middle East, and about two-thirds are controlled by OPEC members.

Promotion of Alternative Energy Resources and clean fuel technologies

Ultimately, the solution to this problem lies in technological progress. The worldwide development of renewable energy and clean fuel technologies not only has the potential to significantly reduce dependence on OPEC oil, but reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions. These include products made from biomass energy crops, agricultural crop wastes and residues, wood wastes and residues, aquatic plants, animal wastes, municipal wastes, and other waste materials. Already on-line in this country and overseas are renewable energy sources like wind, solar, geothermal, ocean waves and tides, and hydrogen. They can play an important role in satisfying the future electrical generation needs of our nation. The United States in particular can learn from Israel's success in harnessing solar energy.

Protection of our air, water, and land from pollution and contamination

Protecting the quality of our air, water, and land against pollution and contamination is critical to the protection of our health and to the survival of humankind, other species, and plant life. Technological solutions, as well as measures that promote conservation, can be effective to protect air and water quality as well as to protect land from contamination.

Community planning

As the environmental impact of buildings becomes more apparent, a new field called "green building" is gaining momentum. Green or sustainable building is the practice of creating healthier and more resource-efficient models of construction, renovation, operation, maintenance, and demolition. In the United States, buildings account for: 39% of total energy use, 12% of total water consumption, 68% of total electricity consumption and 38% of total carbon dioxide emissions. Green building brings together a vast array of practices and techniques to reduce and ultimately eliminate the impacts of buildings on the environment.

"Smart Growth" is an urban planning and transportation theory concentrating growth in the center of a city or a suburb to avoid urban sprawl; and advocates compact, transit-oriented, walkable, bicycle friendly transit-oriented land use, including neighborhood schools, streets that work for everyone, with a range of housing choices. It locates people near each other, near jobs, and near shopping, reduces travel time and transportation infrastructure costs.

"Mass Transit" comprises all transport systems in which the passengers do not travel in their own vehicles. While the above terms are generally taken to include rail and bus services, wider definitions might include ferries, taxicab services, hourly car rental services located at mass transit stops such as Zipcar, ride sharing programs and car pooling. Scientists estimate public transportation already reduces emissions of carbon dioxide, which contributes to global climate change, by over 7.4 million tons annually. If Americans were to use public transportation at equivalent rates as Europeans, scientists estimate that U.S. dependence on imported oil would decrease by more than 40% and that carbon dioxide emissions would be reduced by more than 25%.

“Alternate transportation,” ranges from the return to healthy walking resulting from the revitalization of the downtowns or transit corridors, bike commuting, and the safe use of motor scooters and Segway Personal Transporters. In the realm of automobiles, it means the use of hybrids, Flex-fuel vehicles using biofuels, and plug-in battery operated vehicles.

Resolution

The JCRC recognizes these issues are urgent and critical. As such, we support efforts to protect and conserve the resources, biological diversity, and quality of life on our planet. Therefore the JCRC:

- Will judge all environmental and energy initiatives through both the scientific/efficacy lens as well as the environmental justice lens to ensure that we do not unduly burden our low-income or vulnerable neighbors in our efforts to care for God’s creation.
- Applauds the bipartisan Congressional leadership and the Administration for enactment of the Energy Independence and Security Act (PL 110-140). This landmark legislation has the potential to greatly reduce our dependence on OPEC oil, reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions, and create good paying jobs here at home. It also furthers U.S.-Israel cooperation and can facilitate the transfer of Israeli energy saving and conservation technology to the U.S.
- Supports energy conservation and clean fuel technology measures as an effective means to combat climate change and to reduce our dependence on imported fuel.
- Urges local jurisdictions to seek innovative methods of expediting the use of clean alternative energy sources as a source of electrical power generation for home, business and industrial use.
- Applauds Washington, DC Mayor Fenty for instituting a Green Buildings program. While most major metropolises are turning to green codes, their policies have focused solely on public buildings. DC was the first major US city aiming to require both private and public buildings to be environmentally friendly and energy-saving. We encourage other jurisdictions to enact similar policies and programs.
- Supports “smart growth” efforts and urges members of the Jewish community to demonstrate good citizenship by supporting the redevelopment of the downtowns in older communities such as Washington, Bethesda, and Arlington where residents can lead a healthier lifestyle while reducing energy consumption and Greenhouse Gas Emissions.
- Urges the construction of new bike paths and congratulates Washington, DC for going ahead with a new European style bikes-only garage and service center at Union Station. We also encourage the creation of a Metrorail Silver Line to Dulles airport, Purple Line and Corridor Cities Transitway in Maryland, and policies that encourage use of mass transit and alternative transit throughout the communities.

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