

Ecology And Orthodoxy

Fall 5780

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The Story Of Shifra Shafran

1. **BGU Student Recruits Rabbis to Protect Environment** - <https://aabgu.org/bgu-student-cuts-plastic-use/#>

Shifra Shafran, a 27-year-old brain science student at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, has inspired thirty religious Zionist rabbis to sign a letter calling on Israelis to reduce their use of disposable plastic items as much as possible, coinciding with the beginning of this year's High Holy Days.

The letter notes that Israel is a world leader in the consumption of single-use plastic and that 90 percent of beach trash is made of plastic.

The discarded plastic "comes back to our plates in fish, salt and even the water we drink," the letter says. "Research shows that we consume an average of five grams of plastic every week and small particles of plastic have even been found in mother's milk."

Israel is the second biggest per capita consumer of single-use plastic in the world.

The signatories to the letter include Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, head of Jerusalem's Ateret Yerushalim Yeshiva; Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, director of the Tzohar Center for Jewish Ethics at the Tzohar rabbinical organization; the Ofra settlement's chief rabbi Avi Gisser; David Dudkevich, the rabbi of the settlement of Yitzhar; and the Beit Hillel organization.

...
Shafran, while not religiously observant, studied at Midreshet Ein Prat, a pluralistic center of Jewish learning in the West Bank, northeast of Jerusalem.

"My flatmate was religious so I'm connected to that world," Shafran said, "and already for a long time, I've thought that an appeal from rabbis from all the religious Zionist streams could have a significant impact. On the eve of the holiday (the Jewish New Year), the country is going to fill up with mountains of plastic trash and I felt I had to do something."

- <https://www.makorrishon.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Capture-2.jpg>

Reckoning With Reality

Consensus on consensus: a synthesis of consensus estimates on human-caused global warming

<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/11/4/048002>

- *We examine the available studies and conclude that the finding of 97% consensus in published climate research is robust and consistent with other surveys of climate scientists and peer-reviewed studies.*

Examples of the impacts of climate change

- I. **An Association between Air Pollution and Mortality in Six U.S. Cities** - <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199312093292401>
- II. **See How the World's Most Polluted Air Compares With Your City's** - <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/02/climate/air-pollution-compare-ar-ul.html>
- III. **No Plastic In Nature: Assessing Plastic Ingestion From Nature To People** - http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/plastic_ingestion_press_singles.pdf
 - A. <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/newsroom/featured/plastic-ingestion-by-people-could-be-equating-to-a-credit-card-a-week/how-much-microplastic-s-are-we-ingesting-estimation-of-the-mass-of-microplastics-ingested>
- IV. **The broiler chicken as a signal of a human reconfigured biosphere** - <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.180325#d1132643e1>
 - A. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02381-2>
- V. <https://www.globalchange.gov/climate-change/impacts-society>

2. **R' Eliezer Waldenberg** [1916 – 2006, Israel], **Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer** 15:39

אם כן בודאי ובודאי שאבסורדי הוא להעלים עין מכל זה ולהפטיר כלאחר יד ולומר כי גם על כגון זה נאמר שומר פתאים ד'.

If so, it is absolutely absurd to ignore all of this [evidence] and casually cast it aside, saying, "The concept of 'G-d protects the fools' applies here as well."

3. **R' Avigdor Nebenzahl** [1935 - , Israel], **Letter to the Editor**, **Assia** 5

לענ"ד* לא שייך שומר פתאים ד' בדבר דאנן סהדי דאין רצונו ית' לשמור.

In my humble opinion, "G-d protects the fools" isn't applicable to something that we see isn't His desire to protect [against].

- <https://asif.co.il/download/kitvey-et/zor/zhr%2015/zhr%2015%2010.pdf> זיהום אוויר, הלכה ואקטיביזם קהילתי

The Culprit Of Climate Change? Judeo Christian Values [?!?]

4. **Lynn White Jr.** - <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1525/aa.1946.48.1.02a00060>

In the days of the scratch-plow, fields were distributed generally in units capable of supporting a single family. Subsistence farming was the presupposition. But no peasant owned eight oxen: to use the new and more efficient plow, peasants pooled their oxen to form large plow-teams, originally receiving (it would appear) plowed strips in proportion to their contribution. Thus, distribution of land was based no longer on the needs of a family but, rather, on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth. Man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature. Nowhere else in the world did farmers develop any analogous agricultural implement.

Is it coincidence that modern technology, with its ruthlessness toward nature, has so largely been produced by descendants of these peasants of northern Europe?

This same exploitive attitude appears slightly before A.D. 830 in Western illustrated calendars. In older calendars the months were shown as passive personifications. The new Frankish calendars, which set the style for the Middle Ages, are very different: they show men coercing the world around them - plowing, harvesting, chopping trees, butchering pigs. Man and nature are two things, and man is master.

These novelties seem to be in harmony with larger intellectual patterns. What people do about their ecology depends on what - they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny - that is, by religion. To Western eyes this is very evident in, say, India or Ceylon. It is equally true of ourselves and of our medieval ancestors.

The victory of Christianity over paganism was the greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture. It has become fashionable today to say that, for better or worse, we live in "the post-Christian age." Certainly the forms of our thinking and language have largely ceased to be Christian, but to my eye the substance often remains amazingly akin to that of the past. Our daily habits of action, for example, are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient. It is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology. The fact that Communists share it merely helps to show what can be demonstrated on many other grounds: that Marxism, like Islam, is a Judeo-Christian heresy. We continue today to live, as we have lived for about 1700 years, very largely in a context of Christian axioms. What did Christianity tell people about their relations with the environment?

...

Christianity inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation. By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful G-d had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, G-d had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. G-d planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in G-d's image.

At the level of the common people this worked out in an interesting way. In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genius loci*, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men, but were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns, and mermaids show their ambivalence. Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.

Why Is Climate Change Science Seemingly Ignored By The Orthodox Community?

5. **Yosef Shalhev and Motti Kaplan** [*Current, Israel*], **The Charedi Community And The Environment** [*Hebrew*] - https://jerusalem.institute.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/PUB_הקהילה-החרדית-ואיכות-הסביבה.pdf

1. היעדרה של ארץ - Lack of sovereign territory (i.e. Eretz Yisrael)
2. ד' אמות של הלכה בלבד - Centrality of Torah and Mitzvot
3. עירוניות - Urban lifestyle
4. שמרנות - Conservative worldview

6. **Shmuel Chayen** [*Current, Israel*], **Why Is Environmental Ethics Missing From Religious Zionist Thought? Akdamut 19** [*Hebrew*] <http://www.text.org.il/index.php?book=0714071>

Another explanation, a sociological-philosophical one, of the alienation of religious society towards the environment is presented by Manfred Gerstenfeld in his book *Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment*. Gerstenfeld stresses the concern of Orthodox thinkers with extreme biocentric approaches that confer a divine status to nature. He also highlights the concerns that rabbis had about the influence of environmental movements that they regarded as neo-pagan. Another expression of this kind of concern can be seen in the statements of some Charedi-Leumi (*Chardal*) rabbis which have become very strong in recent years.

For example, Rabbi Yair Shachor, Rabbi of Ma'ale Levona, writes: "The Torah view is an antithesis to the 'HaYerokim' view. They place animals at the center and human morality is not their concern. Whereas for us, according to the Torah, Man and his morality are at the center..." A more severe formulation, by Rabbi Yisrael Rosen, appears in his article on ecology: "There is a danger that in the deifying of nature, Man is lowered to the status of an animal." In that article, Rabbi Rosen notes the Earth Summit held in Johannesburg in 2002. The main thing engraved in his consciousness of this summit, he notes, was "a stage for anti-Israel [views] and a Palestinian red-green flag." And thus he writes in relation to this phenomenon: "Not that it was a surprise, because the world was waiting for this drama and received it with equanimity; restoring the Nazi Shturmer legacy that Jews are an ecological problem." Therefore, he concludes: "Environmental protection will not take hold [לא תהא תקומה] as long as its loyalists are striking at the Jewish heart of humanity, and believe that the Jews have crucified "That Man" [traditionally a euphemism for Jesus, here used as a reference to deified nature], piercing a hole in the ozone ..." Approaches like these demonstrate widespread concern among Orthodox Jewry regarding engagement with environmental issues out of concern for the negative impact of environmental movements on Orthodox life.

7. **Rambam** [1135-1204, Spain, Egypt], **Hil' Avodat Kochavim 1:1** [translation by Eliyahu Touger]

בימי אָנוּשׁ טעו בְּנֵי הָאָדָם טְעוֹת גְּדוֹלָה, וּנְבַעְרָה עֲצַת חֲכָמֵי אוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר; וְאָנוּשׁ עֲצָמוֹ, מִן הַטּוֹעִים. וְזוֹ הִיְתָה טְעוּתָם: אֲמָרוּ הוּאֵיל וְהָאֵל לְבָרָא כּוֹכָבִים אֱלוֹ וְגַלְגָּלִים אֱלוֹ לְהִנְהִיג אֶת הָעוֹלָם, וּנְתַנֵּם בְּמִרוֹם, וְחָלַק לָהֶם כְּבוֹד, וְהֵם שִׁמְשִׁים הַמְּשַׁמְשִׁים לְפָנָיו--וְרָאוּיִים הֵם לְשַׁבְּחָם וּלְפָאֵרָם, וְלְחַלֵּק לָהֶם כְּבוֹד. וְזֶה הוּא רְצוֹן הָאֵל-בְּרוּךְ הוּא, לְגַדֵּל וּלְכַבֵּד מִי שֶׁגִּדְלוּ וּנְכַבְּדוּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִמְלִךְ רוּחָהּ לְכַבֵּד עַבְדָּיו וְהַעוֹמְדִים לְפָנָיו, וְזֶה הוּא כְּבוֹדוֹ שֶׁלְמִלְכָּהּ. כִּינֵן שֶׁעֲלָה דְבַר זֶה עַל לִבָּם, הִתְחִילוּ לְבָנוֹת לְכוֹכָבִים הִיכְלוֹת, וְלְהַקְרִיב לָהֶם קִרְבָּנוֹת, וּלְשַׁבְּחָם וּלְפָאֵרָם בְּדָבָרִים, וְלְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְמוֹלָן--כְּדִי לְהַשִּׁיג רְצוֹן הַבוֹרָא, בְּדַעְתָּם הַרְעָה. וְזֶה, הִיָּה

We are going to have to pull back from all forms of exploitation to protect the possibility of breakfast for the babies. In that statement is the imperative for clean oceans, for gender equality, for protection of the forests, for human rights, and to end both poverty and wealth. What will it take to provide a world in which it is possible to feed the babies, where the soil is teeming with microorganisms that meet happily with their associates in the intestines of breakfast eaters—where the people who harvested the grains can also feed their babies?

...

...My clothing is made by women knee-deep in carcinogenic dye 16 hours a day. Everything my eye falls upon in my living room is made possible by exploitation. I cannot put any of it back.

I cannot fix it. But I had better not deny it. No matter the difficulty, I welcome the tangled mess; bring it forward into my perception. Let me grasp it with as much contextual and transcontextual description as I can muster. To welcome the complexity now is to meet it, to know it is bigger than originally anticipated and coming faster than the experts predicted.

12. **R' Yuval Cherlow** [1957 - , Israel], **Ecology - Religion or Science?** - WhatsApp message group, "זיקים" -

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/C15Zfz4jo2SBzzkQS66dJf>

יש בעיסוק האקולוגי *יסודות עמוקים מאוד של מדע*: היפותזות, ניסויים, מחלוקות בדבר פענוח הממצאים, מעקב לאורך שנים, היבטים סוציולוגיים, אינטרסים ומניפולציות – כל מה שמאפיין את העולם המדעי, שהוא גם חלק מהחברה הכללית. *ניתן לומר שחלק גדול מהמדענים סובר כי הבעיות האקולוגיות שאנו מותירים לשנים הבאות מאיימות על קיום האנושות ועל קיום העולם*;

יש בעיסוק האקולוגי *יסודות עמוקים מאוד של דת*: עולם של ערכים, פנאטיות לכיוונים מנוגדים, מאבקים יצריים, אמונות שונות הנוגעות להווייה כמכלול, מצוות ואיסורים, היבטים סוציולוגיים, אינטרסים ומניפולציות, מאבק כנגד נביאי שקר – כל מה שמאפיין את עולם הדתות, שהוא גם חלק מהחברה הכללית. *ניתן לומר שרוב מוחלט של כוהני הדת האקולוגית משוכנעים שהם מצילים את העולם ורוב מוחלט של אלה שאינם כאלה סוברים שהמצב לא נורא*.

אבל נראה שדווקא כאן *קשה לומר שיש מחלוקת גדולה על דרך האמצע*. לפחות דרך האמצע.

אין סיבה שבעולם שלא יהיה צמצום בזיהום העולם, בשאיבת משאביו, בהפחתת שימוש בכלים לא מתכלים, בחשיבה על הדורות הבאים, במיעוט כריתת יערות הגשם (תוך המחויבות לתת מענה לאלה שחיהם תלויים בכך), במיחזור של מה שכמעט ואין עליו מחלוקות, בסילוק ראוי של פסולת רעילה, ובעוד אין ספור עניינים שהמחלוקת עליהם קטנה.

את הדיונים הגדולים ניתן להשאיר לאלה שאוהבים אותם.

ואת ההתנהגות הבינונית – פשוט לאמץ. ולהפוך את העולם לטוב יותר, ואת ההתנהגות המוסרית שלנו לנכונה יותר.

*** Ecology - Religion or Science? / Rabbi Yuval Cherlow***

There are *very deep foundations of science in ecology: * Hypotheses, experiments, disputes about deciphering findings, long-term follow-up, sociological aspects, interests and manipulations - everything that characterizes the scientific world, which is also part of the general society. * It can be said that a great deal of scientists believe that the ecological problems we face for the years to come are threatening the existence of humanity and of the world;

Ecology has *very deep religious foundations: * A world of values, fanatics in opposite directions, conflict between desires, different beliefs about existence as a unified entity, commandments and prohibitions, sociological perspectives, interests and manipulations, the struggle against false prophets - everything that characterizes the world of religion - which is also part of general society. * It can be said that a great majority of the "priests" of the ecological religion are convinced that they are saving the world and a great majority of those who disagree do not believe that the situation is bad.

But it is precisely here that *it is difficult to say that there is a great controversy about the middle way. * To diminish the middle way.

There is no reason in the world that there should be no reduction in pollution of the world, consumption of resources, and reducing the use of non-perishable tools [ie one time use plastics], thinking of future generations, the minimizing of rainforest deforestation (with a commitment to addressing those whose lives depend on it [harvesting resources]), recycling of anything undisputed [halachically and otherwise], proper disposal of poisonous waste, and countless other matters which aren't disputed [as to their efficacy].

* The big debates* can be left to those who love them.

* And the moderate actions* - Simply adopt [them]. And change the world for the better, as well as our moral behavior to be more correct.

12. **R' Yaakov Ariel** [1937 - , Israel], **Halachah B'Yimeinu, Judaism and Ecology**

<https://www.toraland.org.il/%D7%A7%D7%98%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%92-%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91/%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%9B%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%95/%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%A8-%D7%91-%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%9B%D7%94-%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%93%D7%A2/%D7%99%D7%94%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%95%D7%90%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%92%D7%99%D7%94/>

Basic Outline Of Sources

Shifra Shafran story

- <https://newshaifakrayot.net/?p=157669>
- Shafran was awarded the פרס ע"ש נחמה ריבלין ע"ה לקיימות

Why wasn't charge led by religious student?

- This question is *not* meant as a judgement of Shafran, but rather to draw our attention to our own community
- Is it happenstance or is indicative of a broader trend (a lack of concern for environmental issues in the Orthodox community at large)?

Seems to be a broader trend.

Now that we've generated that question and boosted it up to a larger population [ie the Orthodox community]

- ~97% consensus on the question
 - Four different methods
 - Obvious preference toward peer-reviewed etc

Examples of climate change

- 6 City Study
 - PP2.5 in London subways - 15x higher than street level
- City comparison
- Plastic in the food chain
 - Credit card amount
 - As such, there is confidence that based on the literature reviewed and subsequent analysis performed that up to 5 g/week of microplastic particles is potentially ingested by humans. Having said that, it should be stressed that the amount of the microplastics ingested by an individual will depend on a combination of parameters that is highly variable not only pertaining to the characteristics of the microplastics but also to each's age, size, geographic location, demographics of the location, nature of development and life-style options.
 - 94.4% of water samples taken in US had plastic fibers in them
 - Water is primary source - even bottled
 - Research is still in progress
- Broiler chicken as signal

Halachah and scientific consensus

- Great deal has been said regarding halachic statement that can lend weight to an environmentally friendly ethic
 - Work and Preserve
 - Bal Tashchis
 - Bava Batra 2
 - Rav Yaakov Ariel
- What if we take a step back from specific sources that seem to point to an ethic rooted in the Torah and look at the science?
 - Does halachah accept data about the world discovered by science and act accordingly?

- Comparison to smoking - an interesting comparison if weak in certain respects, R' Dov Berkovitz article
- Shomer Petayim Hashem vs. scientifically acknowledged danger to health

If it were that simple, maybe concern for environmental issues would be more widespread in the Orthodox community

To gain a better understanding of the complexity of the Orthodox community's stance on the issue we have to see some surprising background

Lynn White Jr.'s thesis

Christian -> Judeo-Christian = Judaism

- Important to note that White's approach has had its critics

Shalhev and Kaplan

- Lack of EY
- Centrality of halachah
 - This might be linkable to the anti-paganism stance below
- Urban lifestyle
- Conservative worldview

Interesting emphasis on post-Churban and the influence of galut

Shmuel Chayen

- There are expressions of concern over the presence and rise of neo-paganism by noted Rabbis
- This would seemingly explain why there is modern hesitance to engage with environmental movements beyond the general trepidation regarding secular trends

Rambam Hil' AZ 1:1

- The neo-paganism of viewing nature as holy (perhaps even intrinsically so) seems to closely parallel the history of Avodah Zarah as described by the Rambam.

Meshech Chochmah, Shemot 32:19

Ego vs. Eco diagram

- This diagram is a powerful summary of the Deep Ecology movement's worldview
- It is stridently anti-anthropocentric
- R' A. Lichtenstein (see Mussar Aviv), R' N. Lamm (Faith And Doubt), and others clearly state that the Torah's position is unequivocally anthropocentric. R' Lichtenstein notes that we should be proud of that tenant

The Biocentric worldview has been criticized for being a (potential) slippery slope to forced population control. While it's not clear that this would result in genocide per se, the quote from Greenpeace in Source #10 contains the dubious line, "Some human rights activists fear that population efforts might violate human rights, but crowding already erodes human rights." Where this argument ends up is not immediately clear.

Additionally, Holocaust research has uncovered parallels to Deep Ecology in the Nazi party's worldview and rhetoric. See Source #9 and attached link to a fantastic and disconcerting paper by Boaz Neuman on this topic.

- 1935 the Nazis passed what is regarded as the first environmental protection legislations in history.

Nora Bateson

- Bateson family legacy of thinking about complexity and complex systems
- How much of our lives are entangled in actions harmful to the environment? Do we recognize them? Can we stop them?
- Thinking about the complexity and trans-contextuality of our lives highlights the difficulty of these problems - there is no "plug and play" solution.
- In an interview Nora Bateson notes that realizing how we are caught up in the causes of climate change, human exploitation, etc through so many facets of our lives can be a painful realization. However, that can create a heightened sensitivity within us to the reality around us. She also describes being asked by her daughter, "I am a good person?" What does that question mean in light of the above and what is the answer?

R' Yuval Chertow

While it may seem that there is no concrete action we could take to change things on a global scale, we must still adopt any positive changes that we can and work toward a better world