



The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life  
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## JEWISH TEXTS AS RESOURCES ON GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

- Judaism has always recognized that the stakes are high, and we can't afford to make too much of a mess:
  - “God led Adam around all the trees of the Garden of Eden. And God said to Adam: ‘See My works, how good and praiseworthy they are?! And all that I have created, I made for you. [But,] be mindful then that you do not spoil and destroy My world - for if you spoil it, there is no one after you to repair it.’” (Midrash Qohelet Rabbah 7:13; ca. 8th Century C.E.)
- Remember whose Earth we're messing up in the first place, and what we're supposed to be doing with it:
  - “The Earth is God's, and the fullness thereof; the settled land, and its inhabitants.” (Psalm 24:1)
  - “The land shall not be sold forever; for the land is Mine; you are strangers and sojourners with me.” (Leviticus 25:23)
  - “God placed the human in the Garden of Eden, l'ovdah (to serve/till) u'l'shomrah (and to guard/tend it).” (Gen. 2:15)
- On Conservation:
  - Bal Tashchit: “When you besiege a city... do not destroy (lo tashchit) any of its trees...” (Deuteronomy 20:19)
  - Rav Zutra said: “Whoever covers an oil lamp, or uncovers a naphtha lamp, transgresses the law of bal tashchit.” (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 67b, on actions that make fuel burn inefficiently)
  - “Righteous people ... do not waste in this world even a mustard seed. They become sorrowful with every wasteful and destructive act that they see, and if they can, they use all their strength to save everything possible from destruction. But the wicked ... rejoice in the destruction of the world, just as they destroy themselves.” (Sefer HaChinuch 529; 13th Century)

- On Justice/Equality:
  - “Tzedek tzedek tirdof – Justice, justice, you shall pursue, in order that you may live... ” (Deuteronomy 16:20)
  - “God loves righteousness and justice; the Earth is full of God’s loving-kindness.” (Psalm 33:5)
  - “Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor ... Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:16, 19:18)
- On Preserving Life:
  - “One is forbidden from gaining a livelihood at the expense of another’s health.” (R Isaac b. Sheshet, Resp. 196, 14thC)
  - “Shabbat, like all the mitzvot/commandments, is pushed aside by danger to human life.” (Rambam, MT Zmanim 2:1)
- On Saving Endangered Species:
  - “Even those creatures you deem superfluous in the world - like flies, fleas, and gnats - nevertheless have their allotted task in the scheme of Creation (seder beresheet).” (Midrash Exodus Rabbah 10:1)
  - “It should not be believed that all beings exist for the sake of humanity’s existence ... [rather,] all the other beings, too, have been intended for their own sakes... ” (Rambam / Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed III:13; 12th Century, Egypt)
- In Conclusion:
  - “See, I have set before you this day life and death, blessing and curse - and [you should] choose life, in order that you and your children may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Source: Rabbi Fred Dobb