

Chapter 10



The Greening of Spirituality

ONE OF THE VEXING QUESTIONS about the environmental movement is its connection to spirituality. Historically, it has not thrived within Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In fact, at least in Europe, the United States and Canada, the rise of non-Christian religious movements have been tied closely to the rise of environmentalism. Whether the vegetarianism and non-violence of many Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the earth-based spirituality of Pagan traditions, the deep spiritual connection of people and culture to land and environment found in many indigenous traditions, or hosts of other metaphysical nature-based ideas, a true flourishing and reawakening of ecologically compatible spiritualities has occurred.

This has left Christianity and Judaism, in particular, reeling. Numerous connections between these traditions and environmental crisis were seen. Christianity participated actively in the colonization of indigenous peoples and many feel it is at least partly responsible for not only numerous genocides but also vast exploitation of the planet. Furthermore, these scriptures also appear to condone human domination of nature. Not surprisingly, environmentalism did not initially flourish within these traditions. Recently, however this has changed, and the different traditions within Judaism, Christianity and Islam now have developed careful responses to environmentalism, in many cases going so far as to argue that it is God's desire that we take care of this planet. Increasingly in the United States, Christian and Jewish communities are taking leadership roles, at both national and community levels, in environmental stewardship. We begin, then with readings from these traditions.

Hinduism and Buddhism have been inspiring to environmentalists for their nonviolent attitude towards animals, as well as traditions of sustainability and harmony with nature. The two essays explore some of these ideas.

Finally, we turn to modern paganism, traditions which place spirituality in the here and now, the earth, and our bodies, as much as in unseen beings. Pagans often borrow heavily from the environmental movement itself, and thus not surprisingly are highly ecologically conscious. Deep Ecology, discussed in Section 3, also has ties to paganism.

There are of course numerous other spiritual traditions on this planet; interestingly, many of them come with built-in environmental ethics.

Indigenous perspectives were taken up previously in Section 9, as well as in the introduction to this text.

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Genesis 1-3

According to ancient Hebrew tradition, Moses (ca. 1450 BCE) wrote this account of the creation of the heavens, Earth, and all that dwells therein. While scholars dispute the authorship and date, they agree that it is a very old account and sets forth the Hebrew-Christian view of a divine Creator who creates the world as good and man and woman in his own image. Scholars often refer to the two accounts of the creation as the E and J accounts, since in the first God is referred to as Elohim and in the second as Yahweh (or Jehovah). These chapters form the basis for the Western religious view of the relationship of humanity to nature.

1. THE CREATION AND THE FALL

The First (E) Account of the Creation. ¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's spirit hovered over the water.

³God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴God saw that light was good, and God divided light from darkness. ⁵God called light "day," and darkness he called "night." Evening came and morning came: the first day.

⁶God said, "Let there be a vault in the waters to divide the waters in two." And so it was. ⁷God made the vault, and it divided the waters above the vault from the waters under the vault. ⁸God called the vault "heaven." Evening came and morning came: the second day.

⁹God said, "Let the waters under heaven come together into a single mass, and let dry land appear." And so it was. ¹⁰God called the dry land "earth"

and the mass of waters "seas," and God saw that it was good.

¹¹God said, "Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants, and fruit trees bearing fruit with their seed inside, on the earth." And so it was. ¹²The earth produced vegetation: plants bearing seed in their several kinds, and trees bearing fruit with their seed inside in their several kinds. God saw that it was good. ¹³Evening came and morning came: the third day.

¹⁴God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of heaven to divide day from night, and let them indicate festivals, days and years. ¹⁵Let them be lights in the vault of heaven to shine on the earth." And so it was. ¹⁶God made the two great lights: the greater light to govern the day, the smaller light to govern the night, and the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the vault of heaven to shine on the earth, ¹⁸to govern the day and the night and to divide light from darkness. God saw that it was good. ¹⁹Evening came and morning came: the fourth day.

²⁰God said, "Let the waters teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth within the vault of heaven." And so it was. ²¹God created great sea-serpents and every kind of living creature with which the waters teem, and every kind of winged creature. God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters of the seas; and let the birds multiply upon the earth." ²³Evening came and morning came: the fifth day.

²⁴God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living creature: cattle, reptiles, and every kind of wild beast." And so it was. ²⁵God made every kind of wild beast, every kind of cattle, and every kind of land reptile. God saw that it was good.

²⁶God said, "Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth."

²⁷God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them, saying to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth." ²⁹God said, "See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are upon the whole earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this shall be your food. ³⁰To all wild beasts, all birds of heaven and all living reptiles on the earth I give all the foliage of plants for food." And so it was. ³¹God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good. Evening came and morning came: the sixth day....

The Second (J) Account of the Creation: Paradise
⁵At the time when Yahweh God made earth and heaven there was as yet no wild bush on the earth nor had any wild plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not sent rain on the earth, nor was there any man to till the soil. ⁶However, a flood was rising from the earth and watering all the surface of the soil. ⁷Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his

nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being.

⁸Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden which is in the east, and there he put the man he had fashioned. ⁹Yahweh God caused to spring up from the soil every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. ¹⁰A river flowed from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided to make four streams. ¹¹The first is named the Pishon, and this encircles the whole land of Havilah where there is gold. ¹²The gold of this land is pure; bdellium and onyx stone are found there. ¹³The second river is named the Gihon, and this encircles the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The third river is named the Tigris, and this flows to the east of Ashur. The fourth river is the Euphrates. ¹⁵Yahweh God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it. ¹⁶Then Yahweh God gave the man this admonition, "You may eat indeed of all the trees in the garden. ¹⁷Nevertheless of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, for on the day you eat of it you shall most surely die."

¹⁸Yahweh God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate." ¹⁹So from the soil Yahweh God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it. ²⁰The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts. But no helpmate suitable for man was found for him. ²¹So Yahweh God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And while he slept, he took one of his ribs and enclosed it in flesh. ²²Yahweh God built the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. ²³The man exclaimed: "This at last is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh! This is to be called woman, for this was taken from man." ²⁴This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body.

²⁵Now both of them were naked, the man and his wife, but they felt no shame in front of each other.

The Fall. ^{3.} ¹The serpent was the most subtle of all the wild beasts that Yahweh God had made. It asked the woman, "Did God really say you were not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?"

²The woman answered the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden. ³But of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, 'You must not eat it, nor touch it, under pain of death.'" ⁴Then the serpent said to the woman, "No! you will not die! ⁵God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil." ⁶The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was desirable for the knowledge that it could give. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She gave some also to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together to make themselves loincloths.

⁸The man and his wife heard the sound of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But Yahweh God called to the man. "Where are you?" he asked. ¹⁰"I heard the sound of you in the garden," he replied. "I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." ¹¹"Who told you that you were naked?" he asked. "Have you been eating of the tree I forbade you to eat?" ¹²The man replied, "It was the woman you put with me; she gave me the fruit, and I ate it." ¹³Then Yahweh God asked the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman replied, "The serpent tempted me and I ate."

¹⁴Then Yahweh God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Be accursed beyond all cattle, all wild beasts. You shall crawl on your belly and eat dust every day of your life. ¹⁵I will make you enemies of each other: you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. It will crush your head and you will strike its heel."

¹⁶To the woman he said: "I will multiply your pains in childbearing, you shall give birth to your children in pain. Your yearning shall be for your husband, yet he will lord it over you."

¹⁷To the man he said, "Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, Accursed be the soil because of you. With suffering shall you get your food from it every day of your life. ¹⁸It shall yield you brambles and thistles, and you shall eat wild plants. ¹⁹With sweat on your brow shall you eat your bread, until you return to the soil, as you were taken from it. For dust you are and to dust you shall return."

²⁰The man named his wife "Eve" because she was the mother of all those who live. ²¹Yahweh God made clothes out of skins for the man and his wife, and they put them on. ²²Then Yahweh God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, with his knowledge of good and evil. He must not be allowed to stretch his hand out next and pick from the tree of life also, and eat some and live for ever." ²³So Yahweh God expelled him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he had been taken. ²⁴He banished the man, and in front of the garden of Eden he posted the cherubs, and the flame of a flashing sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the proper relationship between humanity and nature according to the Genesis account? Go over Genesis 1:26–29. Then compare it with Genesis 2:15. Do you see a different message in the two accounts?
2. How is nature, after the fall, understood?
3. What type of relationship between man and nature is portrayed here?

Jewish Tradition, the Traditional Jew and the Environment

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Dr. Barry Freundel is the rabbi of Keshet Israel congregation in Washington DC, and a professor at Towson University. He is a leading voice on environmental and biomedical ethics in the Modern Orthodox tradition. In this essay he provides a detailed account of why environmental concerns are deeply a part of Judaism. He also differentiates Judaism, which places God and man at the center of ethical considerations, from spiritual perspectives, such as many indigenous and pagan traditions, which see inherent value within the ecological relationships in nature.

"At the time that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, created the first man, He took him and had him pass before all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him: See my works, how fine and excellent they are! Now all that I made was created for you. Think about this and do not harm them, there will be none to fix them after you."¹

"One should not remove stones from his ground to public ground. A certain man was removing stones from his ground into public ground when a pious man found him doing so and said to him, 'Fool, why do you remove stones from ground which is not yours to ground which is yours?' The man laughed at him. Sometimes later he had to sell his field and when walking on that public ground he stumbled over those same stones. He then said: 'How well did the pious man say to me, why do you remove stones from ground which is not yours to ground which is yours?'"²

These two Rabbinic sources—with grand existential scope and in pragmatic utilitarian fashion respectively—present Judaism's intrinsic concern with people's treatment of God's world, while at

the same time embodying the *raison d'être* of the environmental movement that has shaped national and international agendas over the past few decades. Since the environment is such a major world issue, it is important to analyze, through traditional sources, whether and how Judaism and the Jewish community ought to share in this issue. It is with that purpose in mind—to look at Judaism's view of ecology and the environment and to assess the present environment movement through Jewish eyes—that this paper is presented.

The environment is a natural locus of concern for Judaism. Since the health of the planet first became a popular subject for discussion in secular culture in the 1960's series of important articles on the subject have been written from a Jewish perspective based on the very large number of Biblical, Rabbinic and mystical texts that deal with or touch on the issues involved.³ In addition several Jewish environmental organizations and projects have made their mark on the community and the world.⁴

Often the discussion begins with the Biblical commandment of *bal tashhit*—not to destroy, without appropriate purpose, any object from which someone might derive legitimate benefit. The origin of this prohibition is the Torah's requirement that soldiers at war not cut down fruit trees.⁵ Absent this law Jewish combatants might have taken down these trees in order to increase the pressure on their adversaries who would now lose an important source of food, or to use the wood from these trees in besieging an enemy.

War time is, clearly, a moment of overarching need, and, sadly, of great destruction. If limits are imposed on the misuse of natural resources under those circumstances, then clearly ecological concerns are well-rooted in Jewish tradition. If we remember that for Biblical era combatants a restriction such as this is tantamount to a contemporary declaration placing half the world's available petroleum resources off-limits for a modern army; we must necessarily extend the prohibition to other less extreme circumstances as well. Wanton environmental destruction is certainly prohibited for anyone if it is prohibited for soldiers under the pressure of war and battle. In fact, the great rabbinic scholar and legal codifier Maimonides (1138–1204) includes a significant number of destructive activities under this prohibitive rubric, thus indicating that the parameters of the prohibition have long been seen to be broader than the single case of fruit trees and war described in the Biblical verses.⁶

Not only direct acts of wanton destruction are prohibited, but even indirect acts, such as cutting off water sources necessary for the trees to grow, are also precluded.⁷ Similarly, when normal human activity does require some destruction of natural resources, decisions must be made in favor of methods that involve less rather than greater destruction (i.e., destroy the tree that does not bear fruit before the one that does bear fruit.)⁸ Further, even partial destruction or unwarranted depreciation of the momentary value of natural resources are precluded or restricted by this law.⁹

Beyond the prohibition of actual destruction, an entire series of Jewish laws deals with maintaining the general environmental quality of life. The

Mishnah (edited c. 200 CE.) in the second chapter of tractate *Baba Bathra* requires that one not open a shop in a courtyard if the noise pollution of customers coming and going will disturb a neighbor's sleep;¹⁰ that one must put a pigeon cote at least fifty cubits (approximately 75 to 100 feet) from town so that the scavenging birds do not damage people's vegetable gardens;¹¹ that threshing floors must also be kept at this same distance to prevent the chaff from creating an air pollution problem for the city.¹² So too carrion, graves and tanneries also have this same distance requirement because of the odors they produce.¹³ In the latter case there is also an imperative that the tannery be placed on the side of the city away from or directly opposite the direction of the prevailing winds in that region.¹⁴ That will also help keep the air quality of the town within appropriate standards. This series of legislation is an obvious forerunner to a useful precedent for *halakhic* (Jewish legal) analysis of many different aspects of contemporary environmental issues.

Environmental concerns play a role in other areas as well. When the Jewish people entered the land of Israel for the first time the Bible says that God removed the seven nations who were living there previously; but only slowly, so that the land not become barren and the environment thus be ruined. If these people had been taken away precipitously the concern was that no one would have been there to preserve the proper ecological balance while the Jews were getting settled.¹⁵

The Biblical Book of Jonah tells the story of God sending that prophet to Nineveh so that its populace can repent and it not be destroyed. Jonah balks at the idea and only after some dramatic and miraculous interventions by God, agrees (or more accurately, is compelled), to go.

The book ends with God's explanation to Jonah of why Nineveh was so important to Him. Part of the reason is the large number of human beings who lived there, many of whom were innocent young children. But the climatic words of the book are *'u-veheimah rabbah*—and many animals.¹⁶ They, too, and the concern for their well-being which would be harmed if the city fell, were

factored into God's considerations of how to judge Nineveh and direct its fate.

Concern for the well-being of animals is manifest in many parts of Jewish practice. Traditionally one says, "May it wear out and you acquire another one" to someone who has put on a new garment. This is, however, not said for anything made of leather as an animal must be killed for the wish to come true.¹⁷

In much the same vein: Normally when one performs a commandment for the first time a special blessing is recited. This blessing called *she-heheyanu* praises God for allowing the individual to reach the point in time when he or she can fulfill God's imperative. Meat can only be eaten according to traditional Jewish practice, if the animal has been killed by the correct process of ritual slaughter. Nonetheless, one who performs this ritual slaughter for the first time—even though this act fulfills an important precept—does not recite this blessing as an animal must be killed at that moment—and so there is no joyous benediction.¹⁸

Even simple environmental amenities that improve the quality of life are subject to *halakhic* concern. In that regard, trees must be kept 25 to 50 cubits (depending on the species of tree and the amount of shade a typical representative of that species usually has), from the city wall. In this way these trees will not block the cool breezes that might alleviate the heat that is so prevalent in the desert climate of Israel from reaching those inside the town's limits.¹⁹

For this reason, as well, cities in Israel are required to be surrounded by a *migrash*—an amenities area (a park in modern parlance) of 1000 cubits on all sides of the town, left for public enjoyment, into which nothing may intrude.²⁰ This *migrash* stands between the city with its inhabitants, and its cultivated fields.

Further, according to the Rabbis, the *migrash* may not be turned into a field as such a change destroys the beauty of the city. Keeping things in balance, a field may also not be made into a *migrash* as doing that will diminish the crops. So, too, a *migrash* cannot be made into a part of the town because that too will destroy the city's beauty, while making a *migrash* out of the city's territory

destroys the places where people need to live. All of this is the opinion of the Rabbis. In contrast, Rabbi Eliezer argues that in order to preserve Jewish cities, the law should allow a field to become a *migrash* and a *migrash* to become part of the city as long as basic space ratio between these different areas is maintained as the town grows or shrinks.²¹

In a similar vein, what farmers call the woolly locusts, i.e., sheep and small cattle may not be raised in Israel itself, as they, with their grazing, will defoliate the land and devour its crops.²² Intriguingly, one early Rabbi, who kept a goat because drinking its milk was Necessary for his health, is said to have diminished the entire rabbinic enterprise due to this environmentally troubling act. Even though it was only one goat, and even though he kept it tethered to his bed, the fact that he subverted the environmental rules of the Rabbis discredited him as the scholar who brought "falsehood" (*dofei*) into Jewish law.²³ It is in his generation that we first find unresolved debates about Jewish practice appearing in rabbinic texts, and that is blamed on this one decision.²⁴ In short, violating an environmental enactment can lead to the most far reaching consequences.

An interesting law promoting positive development of the environment in the land of Israel comes from the case of a farmer whose olive trees are swept away in a flood and are then found rooted in another person's field. Though discussion and debate surround the question of who owns what with regard to the fruit that they bear in their new location, all agree that the trees are not to be returned to their original owner. Rabbi Johanan, the author of this *halakhah*, explains his decision as emerging from his concern that Israel be well cultivated and settled. Presumably the original farmer, who almost surely gets part of his livelihood from growing olives, will replace his lost trees. The other fellow may or may not have had any interest in olive trees. Now, however, he is almost certainly going to preserve these trees and this new source of income, and two olive groves will grow in the land, where only one had existed before. Rabbi Jeremiah calls Rabbi Johanan "a great teacher" for this decision.²⁵

A similar consideration led to alteration of the sacrificial service in the ancient Temple in

Jerusalem. Olive wood and wood from grape vines were precluded from use on the altar in that Temple. One sage explains that the reason for this prohibition is again concern for the settlement and cultivation of the land of Israel. "Do not cut down these types of trees that are so important to the environmental and economic well being of the land," says he. The second opinion is even more specific to environmental concerns. These kinds of wood produce a great deal of smoke when they burn, and this production of noxious air pollution is to be avoided especially when worshipping God.²⁶

Returning to more general discussions of environmental issues: most nuisances, if implemented for someone's benefit and tolerated by one's neighbors when first initiated, cannot subsequently be removed because of the latter's complaints. Once the nuisance has been accepted this creates an easement that allows the activity to continue. This is not true, however, in regard to four particular types of nuisance issues. Smoke, the odor of a privy, dust and vibration are assumed to be such noxious intrusions into a human being's personal environment that no one can ever be assumed to have truly and completely accepted their presence.

Therefore, if one engages in work that produces these types of pollution, he can only protect himself by purchasing the rights to create these nuisances from those affected.²⁷

The United States has implemented a number of programs that have corporations paying for the amount of environmental damage that they cause. These contemporary programs are conceptually similar to this ancient rabbinic law.

A corollary to this law is found in the case of the members of a courtyard being allowed to prevent one of their number from engaging in a profession that will bring the noise pollution of customers or other nuisances to the courtyard's environment. Only a teacher of Torah to children cannot be prevented in this way, despite the number of people who may come to the area to facilitate children or others learning from his or her wisdom. Only the study of sacred Jewish texts is considered to be a more important value and communal need than noise pollution.²⁸

Jerusalem as the holiest of cities also had special legislation designed to protect its unique environment for the enjoyment of its inhabitants and visitors. In that regard all garbage was removed from the city each day²⁹ and no kilns were ever allowed to operate within its borders.³⁰ In this way vermin and smoke were kept out of the area and the quality of life for everyone in Jerusalem was improved.

Given the broad extent of Biblical and Rabbinic legislation in this area, one can reasonably ask whether any underlying principles or rationale can be found to explain the strong concern for environmental issues found in Jewish law? On analysis, several approaches seem to emerge from the sources.

Certainly the most direct and obvious answer is that the Earth is God's. Just as Adam was put in the Garden of Eden, *le'avdah 'uleshomrah*—"to work it and watch over it,"³¹ so too, all human beings are required to watch over, preserve and protect the Almighty's creations. Perhaps the fullest treatment of this view appears in the writings of Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), who describes improper use of Earth's resources as theft from God and as reflecting an arrogant usurpation of His ownership of this world.³²

Something closely akin to the concept of natural law may also be at work here. The Biblical prohibition against mixing diverse types of seeds and creating hybrids is explained by some as violating *hukim shehakakti be'olami*—"laws which I (God), have inscribed in my world."³³ By extension all environmental violations may fall into this category as they run the risk of causing harm to the natural order that the Creator built into His universe.

One interesting extension of this approach may be reflected in the numerous sources that equate at least some of the ecological sensitivity in Jewish law with maintaining the proper balance in nature. Ramban (Nahmanides, 1194–1270), in discussing Biblical Prohibitions against mixing species (*keilayim*),³⁴ slaughtering an animal and its offspring on the same day,³⁵ taking the mother bird when taking the eggs or young offspring,³⁶ and castration³⁷ suggests that these laws emerge from a concern that all species be preserved and not disappear

from this world. This same idea appears in Sefer Hahinukh (13th century) which explains that while God's providence and mercy extend to every human being, in the animal kingdom the same attributes are directed only at entire species. This means that God is concerned that individual species be preserved.³⁸ Much present environmental legislation reflects the same concern.

This "preservation of species" concern is given a pragmatic rationale in the *Talmud*. "Rab Judah said in Rab's name:" of all that the Holy One Blessed be He, created in His world He did not create a single thing without purpose ... There then follows a list of medicinal uses for even the lowliest of creatures such as snails, flies and mosquitos.³⁹ Again this suggests that the loss of a single species means the loss of something very precious.

God, too, uses this theme of balance and harmony within nature, in His statement to Job. Job, an extremely righteous man, suffers terribly though he has not sinned. He challenges God to justify why all this has happened to him. Eventually God speaks from out of the whirlwind to Job and describes the magnificence and interconnectedness of all creation. It is that interconnectedness that somehow responds to Job's challenge—though scholars have long debated precisely why this is so and how this answers Job's challenge.⁴⁰

Perhaps, the most dramatic statement of this balance is Rabbi Haninah's (1st–2nd century CE), attempt to explain why his son died before his time. His answer: because he cut down a fig tree before its time.⁴¹

A mystical approach to the environment should also be mentioned here. In *Kabbalah* (Medieval Jewish mysticism) all objects, even inanimate ones—and certainly plant life and animals—contain a spark of God. As such, everything that exists has the right to be treated with the respect due to the presence of the divine. The Baal Shem Tov (c. 1698–1760), the founder of Hassidism, is recorded as having said that "The *Shehina* (the divine presence), permeates all four orders in the world: inanimate objects, plants, living things and humans. It is inherent in all creatures in the universe whether they are good or bad."⁴²

A later Hassidic master Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772–1810), put his approach more poetically, "Oh, that you might merit hearing the songs and praises of the grasses and plants! Every blade of grass sings a song of praise to God without any extraneous motives, without strange thoughts, without any idea of reward. How good, how lovely it is when one hears this song of the grasses; it is good to be pious among them."⁴³ Further, based on the verse, *ki ha' adam etz hasadeh* ...—"for man is as the tree of the field" which appears in the *bal tashhit* context⁴⁴ the Bratslaver declared the act of cutting down a tree for no appropriate purpose tantamount to murder.⁴⁵

A more rationalistic presentation that also suggests that all of nature has an intrinsic status deserving of respect beings with God's personal covenant with the Earth, itself. After the Almighty floods the Earth in the time of Noah, He declares—by way of a sacred covenant—that He will never destroy it in this way again.⁴⁶ Since the Jewish people also see themselves as sharing in a covenantal partnership with God, they must, perforce, not only live up to their specific obligations to the Creator that is part of their compact with Him; they must also preserve and protect those entities which He has, by covenant, placed under His personal protection. It is part of their partnership with God to be concerned about those things which God has taken as precious unto Himself. In fact the Bible explicitly describes human beings who live under God's protective providence as also having formed a covenant with stones and with animals. "For your covenant shall be with the stones of the field, and the beast of the field are at peace with you."⁴⁷

Perhaps the most individually challenging suggestion of all is that Jewish environmental teaching does not really begin as an attempt to protect the Earth, but rather it emerges out of concern for the callousness and cruelty that a human being displays when he or she is insensitive to nature and to this beautiful world that God has given to humankind. Sefer Hahinukh, in explaining the reason for the *bal tashhit* prohibition with which we began our discussion says: "... it is in order to teach our souls the good and the productive and to cleave to those

qualities. As a result the good also cleave to us. Similarly, we should separate from all evil things and from every destructive element. For this is the way of the pious and people of good deeds—loving peace, and rejoicing in the God of all creation and bringing them close to Torah. They do not destroy anything—even a mustard seed—and it troubles them to encounter any destruction or harm. Further, if they can act to save from destruction, they use all their power to save ..."⁴⁸ Similar sentiments are echoed by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch who describes purposeless physical damage as childish arrogance, senseless rage, and of an animal rather than that of a human being.⁴⁹

An intriguing story in this regard is the tale of Rabbi Judah Hanasi's (late 2nd–early 3rd century) experiencing painful physical distress sent from heaven, because he told a calf that tried to hide under his robes to avoid being slaughtered, "Go, for this reason were you created." Since he showed no mercy he was made to suffer until the that his maid was going to sweep away a nest of weasels and he stopped her out of compassion for these small animals. This despite the fact that these weasels, as adults, would inevitably become destructive scavengers that would need to be destroyed. At that point his suffering ceased.⁵⁰

The Midrash goes so far as to make ecological sensitivity a *sine qua non* for the good life of the righteous and the exact opposite for the wicked. "A wicked man while alive is thought of as dead because he sees the sun shine and does not say the blessing, 'who creates light,' the sun sets and he does not recite the blessing on food. But the righteous recite blessings on every single thing that they eat, drink, see or hear."⁵¹ In other words the righteous live a life that sanctifies the world around them.

This teaching is in line with the Talmudic dictum that one who consumes anything from this world without saying a blessing is guilty of stealing from God.⁵² That comment now carries an additional ecological message indicating that taking anything from nature must involve an act of sanctification of the world, and by derivation, an act of sanctification of ourselves.

Given all the positive Rabbinic and Biblical statements regarding environmental issues that we have discussed, why then does the Jewish community and particularly the Orthodox segment of that community not take a greater role in protecting the environment? Part of the answer may be that Jews suffered a 2000 year alienation from their homeland and the natural environment in Israel when they were forced into exile and Diaspora after the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE. This was compounded by the fact that in many places and for significant periods of time, Jews, as a persecuted minority, were not even allowed to own land.

Thought contemporary Israelis are nowhere near ecologically perfect, my experience has been that much more concern for the environment exists in that country where—because of the geography of what is a very small state and its economic realities—agriculture is an issue that is frequently part of the consciousness of the average citizen. This is different than their Diaspora co-religionists who rarely anything to do, on a personal level, with the land or with nature.

Nonetheless, this alienation is inappropriate. The Midrash says, quite correctly, "Even if a king rules from one end of the world to the other, if the fields produce he will succeed, and if not he is lost."⁵³ Many militarily powerful countries have fallen or struggled to survive when the strength of their armies of their weapons has not matched the output of their wheat fields.

There is one other consideration as well, and it will serve as the concluding point that this paper will explore. For the Jewish community to speak out on this issue, it must first become more comfortable with the existing ideology of ecology. For a number of reasons it has not been completely at home, and frankly, almost certainly cannot fit within all of the existing conceptual structures of the movement.

One of the founding attitudes underpinning contemporary environmental thinking is an early and frequent critique of the Hebrew Bible and its claimed insensitive treatment of this issue. This critique usually focuses on God's command to Adam to subdue or conquer the world.⁵⁴

In ignoring all of the other sources that display ecological concern, this approach gives an exaggerated emphasis to this one verse. It then goes on to suggest a return to a type of Paganism that views every blade of grass, every tree, every animal as having a deity that protects it. This, it is suggested, will move mankind back to proper respect for nature.⁵⁵

There are many reasons why no Jew can sign on to such an approach, not the least of which is the fact that the Jewish mystical understanding of nature described above comes very close to embracing this position, without demanding a return to a polytheistic world-view.⁵⁶ It should be noted here that Sefer Hahinukh argues that the supernatural focus of Paganism is of concern to God precisely because it tends to destroy the natural order of things. This text makes the claim that it was the practitioners of ancient Pagan magic who boasted of creating hybrid creatures with for example the head of an eagle and the body of a lion.⁵⁷ Nothing could be more disruptive to the structure of creation than this type of activity.

There is also a second concern that should be raised here. From a traditional Jewish perspective Paganism presents a problem in that it seems to diminish God Himself by positing that other deities rule along with Him. But Paganism, as traditional Judaism understands it, also diminishes humankind. God invested in human beings as the most important entities in the created universe⁵⁸ and Pagans, by placing stones, wood and animals above mankind, effectively diminish people's existential and ontological status within their belief system.

It is, therefore, no accident—Jewish tradition would argue—that some forms of Paganism came to allow unspeakable acts such as child sacrifice.⁵⁹ Diminishing the value of people can and did lead to these outrages. For those who make this argument it is, therefore, no surprise that the consequences of the “new ecological Paganism” include the murder of veterinary professors, the dangerous insertion of metal roads into trees that injure lumberjacks who cut them down, the death threats to those involved in research, even important and lifesaving research, with animals, etc.

This occurs—or so the argument goes—as a natural consequence of this “new ecological Paganism,” that like its ancient predecessor diminishes the human being's place in the universe thus making acts of physical violence less reprehensible. For some Jews, therefore, as long as an ideology that endorses Paganism is present, this fact alone will serve as an excuse not to be involved in the environmental movement, even if one need not be part of these destructive activities to be fully engaged.

Closely related to this is the approach of some activists that people are no more existentially or ontologically significant than animals. The term “speciesism” that has made its way into the lexicon in some quarters, is used to refer to the human being's “inappropriate” sense of superiority to other species. Here traditional Judaism is unequivocal. From Genesis on it is humanity and, in fact, every single human being, who exists in a place that is more cosmically significant than the niche held by any animal.⁶⁰

Similarly—for some—almost all human activity and technology is seen as intrusive and destructive. Therefore no West Side Highway was ever built in lower New York City to replace the one that collapsed many years ago, no nuclear power plants can be constructed anywhere, no new oil drilling can be allowed on United States land or in its territorial waters and no technology or construction can be done without insuring that virtually all negative environmental impact has been vitiated—at least according to some who are most involved in the ecology movement. Further, any suggestion that environmental damage is being done, even if insufficient or contradictory evidence exists, leads to calls for legislation to radically alter how society functions to prevent this putative harm to nature.

Without specific reference to the *halakhic* reaction to any or all of these particular environmental and public policy issues, the tendency to oppose almost every project of this type is not consistent with Jewish tradition. Judaism sees man as unequivocally superior to animals, and as able to make use of this world and all it contains for any and all positive purposes. In fact, creation is considered

incomplete without people to bring the potential that God has built into it into existence.

A prime example of the clash between a Jewish ecology and at least some current secular approaches is the previously cited discussion of placing tanneries on the downwind side of the city. Where Judaism recognizes the necessity of promoting these industries and places them where they will do the least harm, some modern ecologists would seek to ban them altogether. Similarly, though fruit trees, in general, may not be destroyed as discussed above, they may in fact, be cut down if the value of the wood is greater than the value of the fruit that the tree can produce.⁶¹

In this regard it is interesting to note Abraham Ibn Ezra's (1089–1164) explanation of why the builders of the Biblical Tower of Babel were punished.⁶² The Bible describes these builders, who lived shortly after Noah and his flood came to the world, as saying that they were construction their city and their tower to “prevent people from being scattered over all the Earth.”⁶³ In Ibn Ezra's opinion it was their attempt to limit civilization to only one location on the globe that led to God making them speak different languages which forced them to separate and populate the entire planet.⁶⁴ Their plans put them in direct opposition to the prophet Isaiah's statement of God's purpose for the world. *Lo tohu bera'ah lashevet yetzarah*—“He did not create it barren, He formed it to be settled,”⁶⁵ and of God's command to Adam and Eve—later repeated to Noah and his sons—*milu et ha 'aretz*—“fill the world.”⁶⁶

The Talmud specifically rejects the extreme ecological view in the following debate: Rav Hisda said: “When one can eat barley bread and eats

wheat bread he violates *bal tashhit*—(do not destroy),” Rav Papa says: “If one can drink beer and drinks wine, he is also in violation of this verse (wheat and wine are more extravagant and cause more environmental consequences).” But this is incorrect. “Do not destroy,” as applied to oneself is more important.⁶⁷ In other words, reasonable use and enjoyment of this world, even if such acts cause greater ecological consequences, is permissible.

How, then, should the Biblical command of *vekiyshuhah* (subdue or conquer the Earth), that some find so objectionable, be understood? It is not to be taken as license to conquer the world by raping and destroying its resources. Its implication is assumed to be consistent with the Bible's description of how Adam and Eve are to function in the Garden of Eden, i.e., *Povdah u'leshomrah*—“to work it and to watch it,” or perhaps idiomatically “to develop it while preserving it.”⁶⁸ Responsible use mixed with sincere concern, progress with restraint, growth and technology with conservation and preservation, appear to be the agenda that the Bible and Jewish tradition have for this world of ours.

In summation, then, Judaism has a strong pro-environmental bent, but incorporates it within a positivist view of technology, industry, growth and, most importantly, of faith in the human being. If ecology is to be the issue of the twenty-first century, the Jewish community needs to be heard in favor of legitimate concern for and protection against uncontrolled ecological damage. But it also needs to create a God-human being centered environmental movement that to its most essential faith principles.

NOTES

1. Koheleth Rabba 7:28
2. Tosefta Bava Kama: chapter 2 (end), B. Bava Kama 50b.
3. A partial list includes: Gerstenfeld, Manfred; Manna as an Environment Paradigm, in B'Or Ha'Torah 14 (2004) 123–130, Zemer, Moshe;

Ecology as a Mitzvah, in Environment in Jewish Law; Essays and Responsa, Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, ed, New York, (2003) 24–33, Blanchard, Tsvi; Can Judaism Make Environmental Policy? Sacred and Secular Language in Jewish Ecological Discourse, in Judaism and Ecology;

Created World and Revealed Word, Hava Tirosh-Samuels, ed. (2002) 423–448, Fishbane, Michael A.; Toward a Jewish Theology of Nature, in *Judaism and Ecology; Created World and Revealed Word*, Hava Tirosh-Samuels, ed. (2002) 17–24, Rosenberg Shalom; Concepts of Torah and Nature in Jewish Thought, in *Judaism and Ecology; Created World and Revealed Word*, Hava Tirosh-Samuels, ed. (2002) 189–225, Schwartz, Richard; Environment Ethics and Spiritual Consciousness, In *Edah* 2, 1 (2002), Sokol, Moshe Z.; What are the Ethical Implications of Jewish Theological Conceptions of the Natural World?, in *Judaism and Ecology; Created World and Revealed Word*, Hava Tirosh-Samuels, ed. (2002) 261–282, Sperber, Daniel; Jewish Environment Ethics, in *Edah* 2,1 (2002), Schwartz, Eilon; “Bal Tashchit” : a Jewish Environmental Precept, in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics; a Reader*, Martin D. Yaffe, ed, Lanham, (2001) 230–249, Helfand, Jonathan I; The Earth is the Lord’s: Judaism and Environment Ethics, in *Torah of the Earth; Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought*, Arthur Waskow, ed, Woodstock, VT, (2000) v. 1, 127–140, Lamm Norman, Ecology in Jewish law and theology in Torah of the Earth, (2000), 1, 103–126, Freundel, Barry; Judaism’s Environmental Laws, in *Ecology & the Jewish Spirit; Where Nature and the Sacred Meet*, Ellen Bernstein, ed, Woodstock, VT: (1998) 214–224, Intrator, Sam M; Sustaining the Work of Creation: an exploration of Jewish environmental education, in *Journal of Jewish Education* 64, 1–2 (1998) 102–114, Attia, Ilana; Jewish Environmental Law: a selected bibliography of classical sources with annotations, in *B’Or Ha’Torah* 10(1997) 17–23, Perelmuter, Hayim Goren; “Do not destroy”: Ecology in the Fabric of Judaism, in *Harvest of a Dialogue; Reflections of a Rabbi/Scholar on a Catholic Faculty*, Dianne Bergant and John T. Pawalikowski, ed, Hoboken, NJ (1997) 213–226, Strikovsky, Aryeh; G-d, Man, and Tree, in *B’Or HA’Torah* 10 (1997) 25–29, Bleich, J. David; Judaism and Natural Law, in *WCJS* 8, 3 (1982) 7–11, Carmell, Aryeh; Judaism and the Quality of the Environment, in *Challenge: Torah Views on Science and Its Problems*, A. Carmell and C. Domb, ed New York (1976) 500–525, Belkin, Samuel; Man as a Temporary Tenant, in *Judaism and Human Rights*, Milton R. Konovitz, ed, New York,

(1972), Freudenstein, Eric G; Ecology and the Jewish Tradition, in *Judaism* (1970), 409–414.

4. Adam Teva V’Din: The Israel Union for Environmental Defense, Alma—Association for Environmental Quality, The Arava Institute for Environment Studies, Canfei Nesharim, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, Eco-Activist Beit Midrash, Green Zionist Alliance, Hazon, Jewish National Fund, Jewish Global Environment Network, The Noah Project, Teva Learning Center.
5. Deuteronomy 20:19–20.
6. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings, 6:8. Maimonides includes smashing utensils, tearing cloths, demolishing buildings, blocking springs of water and destroying food. See also Sifrei to these verses in Deuteronomy that if destroying the tree is prohibited, then destroying the fruit must also be prohibited. Many other types of wanton destruction are included in this prohibition by other authorities.
7. Sifrei loc. Cit. See also the incident involving Hezekiah and the waters of Gihon in Jerusalem, 2 Chronicles 32:2–4, 30 and Rabbinic disapproval of his actions, B. Pesahim 56a.
8. B. Baba Kamma 91b
9. Rashi (1040–1105), Kiddushin 32a s.v. *befumbaymi*, but see Shiltei Giborim, Avodah Zarah, chapter 1.
10. M. Baba Bathra 2:3.
11. Ibid 2:5.
12. Ibid 2:8.
13. Ibid 2:9.
14. See discussion B. Baba Bathra 25a. See also Tosefot, ad. Loc, s.v. *ein burseki*.
15. Exodus 23:29–30. Deuteronomy 7:22.
16. Jonah 4:11. For discussion of a rabbinic text that explains the continued existence of evil people as resulting from the need for them to feed the animal in their care, see my: *Of Hearts, Headlines, and Halacha*, in *Jewish Action*, 45:3, Spring 1985.
17. Ramo (16th century), Orah Hayim 223:6.
18. Ramo, Yoreh Deah 28:2.
19. M. Baba Bathra 2:11 and B. Baba Bathra 24b.
20. Numbers 35:2–5 and Rashi ad. Loc. See also Maimonides, Laws of Shemita 13:5.
21. B. Arkhin 33b.

22. B. Baba Kamma 79b.
23. M. Sotah 9:9, Tosefta Baba Kama 8:13, B. Sotah 47a–b, B. Temurah 15b–16a.
24. M. Hagigah 2:2, Rashi, Sotah 47a Temurah ibid.
25. B. Baba Metzia 10a.
26. B. Tamid 29b.
27. Maimonides, Laws of Neighbors 11:4. In some cases other nuisances may also be included in this category, See Maimonides, ibid. 11:5 and B. Baba Bathra 23a.
28. B. Baba Bathra 21a.
29. B. Baba Kamma 82b.
30. Ibid.
31. Genesis 2:15.
32. Horeb #56, see also Belkin op.cit.
33. J. Kilayim 1:7.
34. Leviticus 19:19.
35. Leviticus 22:28.
36. Deuteronomy 22:6.
37. Leviticus 22:24.
38. Mitzvah 294 and 545.
39. B. Shabbat 77b.
40. Job chapter 40 ff. For a number of different approaches to the book to the meaning of God’s response see Nahum Glatzer, *The Dimensions of Job*, N.Y. 1969.
41. B. Baba Kama 91b–92a.
42. Toledot Yaakov Yosef, p.25.
43. Magid Sihot p.48.
44. Deuteronomy 20:20.
45. For a full treatment of the mystical approach see Lamm op. cit.
46. Genesis 9:8–13.
47. Job 5:23.
48. Mitzvah #529

49. Horeb #56.
50. B. Baba Metzia 85a.
51. Tanhuma Deuteronomy end.
52. B. Berakhoth 35a–35b. Tosefta, Berakhoth 4:1, see Helfand op.cit.
53. Leviticus Rabba 22:1.
54. Genesis 1:26,28.
55. cf. White, Lynn, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” in *Science*, 155: 1203–1207, (1967), online at <http://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White.pdf>.
56. Paganism in fact does not have such a wonderful environmental record. The Romans plowed salt into the ground to ruin the fertility of the Temple Mount and cf. Isaiah 37:24 for defoliation and ecological destruction by the pagans of his day. Further. Hirsch. loc. cit. argues that ecological destruction implies lack of recognition of God’s ownership of the world and, therefore, is itself tantamount to paganism.
57. #62
58. Cf. Ps. 8:6 You have made him (man) but little lower than God.
59. Deuteronomy 12:31.
60. In addition to Genesis 1:28 cf. Genesis 2:19–20 and the commentaries of David Kimhi (1160–1235) and Nahmanides to Genesis 2:18.
61. B. Baba Kama 91b– 92a.
62. Genesis 11:1–9.
63. Ibid, 11:4
64. See his commentary to Genesis 11:3.
65. Isaiah 45:18
66. Genesis 1:28, 9:1.
67. B. Shabbat 140b.
68. Genesis 2:15.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. According to Rabbi Freundel, why is the environment a moral issue to a Jew?
2. For non-Jews, what does this perspective contribute to environmental thought?
3. Compare/contrast this perspective to one of the other religious traditions mentioned in this text.
4. How might a modern day pagan respond to Rabbi Freundel’s characterizations of paganism?

The Judeo-Christian Stewardship Attitude to Nature

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Dobel argues that the Judeo-Christian attitude is an ethics of stewardship and that humility toward God regarding nature, not arrogance, is enjoined by our religious heritage.

Browsing in a local bookstore recently, I took down several of the more general books from the "Ecology" shelf. Scanning the tables of contents and indexes of 13 books, I discovered that nine of them made reference to "Christianity," "the Bible" or the "Judeo-Christian tradition." Examining their contents more closely, I found that seven of these books blamed specific Christian or Bible-based values as significant "causes" of the ecology crisis.

Over half these books referenced an article by Lynn White, Jr., titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" (*Science*, March 10, 1967). In this short, undocumented and simplistic article White argues that the root of the entire problem lies in "the Christian maxim that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man." From the Christians' penchant for cutting down sacred Druidic groves to the development of "modern science from natural theology," Christianity, White argues, laid the foundations of Western "arrogance towards nature" and "limitless rule of creation."

Almost all similar statements are indebted to White; they even cite the same examples: grief over the destruction of the sacred groves; respect

for Saint Francis of Assisi. Although few of the authors have read anything about him except that he talked to birds, they have raised poor Francis to the rank of first "ecological saint," while conveniently ignoring his myriad admonitions about asceticism and communal ownership of property.

DOMINION OVER THE EARTH

The ecological indictment of Christianity boils down to two somewhat contradictory assertions: that the postulated transcendence and domination of humanity over nature encourages thoughtless exploitation of the earth and that the otherworldly orientation of Christianity encourages contempt and disregard for the earth. In documenting the first indictment authors often cite Genesis 1:26: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." Some also quote Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the

birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

These texts lead to the conclusion that the Bible emphasizes the absolute superiority of humanity over the rest of creation. And this relation must be primarily one of antagonism and alienation, for "cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.... In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Gen. 3:17).

Thus Christianity separates both humanity and God from the earth and destroys the inherent sacredness of the earth. This alienation is coupled with humanity's innate superiority over nature and the divine mandate to exploit nature limitlessly for human ends—a mandate that is carried out in the context of antagonism and an expectation that the earth must be treated harshly to gain the yield of human survival. Together these notions have shaped Western culture's spoliation of the earth.

In bringing the second indictment, critics point out that Christianity's otherworldly preoccupation also contributes to human abuse of the environment. Christians are instructed to "kill everything in you that belongs only to the earthly life" and to "let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth" (Col. 3:2-5). The emphasis is upon awaiting "a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (II Pet. 3:13). In some ways this stress undercuts the mandates of superiority and rule since it implies that humanity rules nothing but a fallen and contemptible orb. If the contempt, however, is tied to an antagonistic human domination and the need of people to discipline their unruly bodies through work, it can provide an ethical framework to support the thoughtless and arrogant exploitation which is part of the ecology crisis. The thesis linking Calvinism with the rise of industrialization reflects this ambivalent world-hating but smug and exploitative attitude.

The critics see modern science and technology along with notions of unbridled progress and exploitation emerging from this Judeo-Christian matrix. They conclude that Christianity must accept most of the "blame" for the unique "Western" perspectives which have led to the present state of affairs. This "blame" somehow rings false

when the ecologists extend the link to the later implications of a secularized technology and a liberal view of human progress.

LOOKING FOR THE ROOTS

The attempt to discover historical roots is a dubious business at best, and in this case it borders on the ludicrous. Christianity's ecological critics consistently underestimate the economic, social and political influences on modern science and economy; their approach makes for good polemics but bad history. Their thesis lacks a careful historical analysis of the intellectual and practical attitudes toward the earth and its use in the consciously Christian Middle Ages. They disregard the earth-centered ideals of the Christian Renaissance and its concern with the delicate limitations of the Great Chain of Being, and they pay little attention to the emergence of a peculiarly non-Christian deism and theism which defined God in the 17th and 18th centuries to accommodate a newly secularized nature and new developments in science and trade. These critics neglect to mention the specifically Christian prohibitions which often made religion a detriment to economic and scientific development.

They also ignore the rise of the secularized nation-state from the decay of "Christendom"; yet these new government regimes provided much of the impetus to maximize the exploitation of resources and the discovery of new lands. Most of the operative "roots" of the present crisis are to be found in the far more secularized and non-Christian world of nationalism, science and liberalism in the 16th through the 19th centuries.

Given the unsoundness of the theory that blames Christianity for the environmental crisis, it is surprising that it has gained such remarkable currency. In light of this fact there are two distinct tasks which confront the Christian community. First, this thesis should be addressed in some detail, not only to show its flaws but to discover what ideas and practices the tradition can contribute to a concrete ecological program. Second, we must use the vast ethical and conceptual resources of the

Judeo-Christian tradition to develop a God-centered ecological ethic which accounts for the sacredness of the earth without losing sight of human worth and justice. In addressing myself to this second task, I will try to develop appropriate responses to the following questions through textual exegesis of the Bible: What is the ethical status of the earth as an entity in creation? What is the proper relation of humanity to the earth and its resources?

Ecological critics have nostalgically lamented the decline of "nature worship" and have spoken wistfully of the need to import "Eastern" concepts of pantheism or quietist respect for the "equality of all life." Even some of the most secularized ecologists are calling for a rediscovery of the "sacredness" of nature.

Although it is hard to discover the enduring sacredness of anything in a totally secularized world, we must keep several points in mind about these calls. First, all cultures, regardless of religion, have abused or destroyed large areas of the world either because of economic or population pressures or from simple ignorance. Second, the ethical consequences of the new nature worship, neopanthemism and the militant assertion of the equality of all creaturehood pose grave problems for establishing any prior claims of worth or inherent dignity for human beings. The more undifferentiated God and the world become, the harder it is to define individual humans as worthwhile with specific claims to social justice and care. Third, a sort of mindless ecological imperative based upon such notions is ultimately reactionary and anti-human, as well as anti-Christian. There are fundamental ethical differences between plants and animals and between animals and human beings. To resort simplistically to militantly pro-earth and antiprogress positions misses the vital Christian and humanistic point that our sojourn upon the earth is not yet completed and that we must continue to work unflaggingly toward social justice and the well-being of all people.

The unique contribution a Christian ecology can make to the earth is the assertion that we can insist on a reasonable harmony with our world without abandoning our commitment to social justice for all members of our unique and self-consciously alienated species. We can love and respect our environment without obliterating all

ethical and technological distinctions, and without denying the demand that we cautiously but steadily use the earth for the benefit of all humanity.

The first question to address is the status of the earth and its resources. A different way of putting this is "Who owns the earth?" The answer of the entire Judeo-Christian tradition is clear: God. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:3). In direct ethical terms God created the earth, and in distributive-justice terms it belongs to him: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 24:1). As an act of pure love he created a world and he "founded the earth to endure" (Ps. 119:90-91).

What kind of world did God create? The answer has two dimensions: the physical or descriptive and the ethical. As a product of nature the world was created as a law-bound entity. The laws are derivative of God's will for all creation as "maintained by your rulings" (Ps. 119:90-91). Things coexist in intricate and regulated harmony—the basic postulate of science, mythology and reason. Although we have a world of laws, it is also a world of bounty and harmony. For it had been promised that "while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). It was arranged "in wisdom" so that in the balance of nature, "All creatures depend upon you to feed them . . . you provide the food with a generous hand." God's presence ultimately "holds all things in unity" (Col. 1:16-20) and constantly "renews" the world (Ps. 104:24-30). This world abounds in life and is held together in a seamless web maintained by God-willed laws.

In ethical terms, God saw that the world was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). In love and freedom he created the world and valued it as good. All the creatures of the world also share in this goodness (I Tim. 4:4). This does not mean that the world is "good for" some purpose or simply has utilitarian value to humanity. The world, in its bounty and multiplicity of life, is independently good and ought to be respected as such.

As an independent good, the earth possesses an autonomous status as an ethical and covenanted entity. In Genesis 9:8-17, God directly includes the earth and all the animals as participants in the covenant. He urges the animals to "be fruitful and

multiply." Earlier in Genesis 1:30, he takes care specifically to grant the plant life of the earth to the creatures who possess "breath of life." In the great covenant with Noah and all humanity, he expressly includes all other creatures and the earth.

And God said, "This is a sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the sky, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth" [emphasis added].

The prophets, Isaiah especially, constantly address the earth and describe its independent travail. Paul describes the turmoil and travail of the earth as a midwife of all creation and redemption (Rom. 8:18-22). The earth must be regarded as an autonomous ethical entity bound not just by the restraints of physical law but also by respect for its inherent goodness and the covenanted limitations placed upon our sojourn. Perhaps we must think seriously of defining a category of "sins against the earth."

The proper relation between humanity and the bountiful earth is more complex. One fact is of outstanding moral relevance: the earth does not belong to humanity; it belongs to God. Jeremiah summarizes it quite succinctly: "I by my great power and outstretched arm made the earth, land and animals that are on the earth. And I can give them to whom I please" (Jer. 27:5). For an ecological ethic this fact cannot be ignored. The resources and environment of the earth are not ours in any sovereign or unlimited sense; they belong to someone else.

A TRUST FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Humanity's relation to the earth is dominated by the next fact: God "bestows" the earth upon all of humanity (Ps. 115:16). This gift does not, however, grant sovereign control. The prophets constantly remind us that God is still the "king" and

the ruler/owner to whom the earth reverts. No one generation of people possesses the earth. The earth was made "to endure" and was given for all future generations. Consequently the texts constantly reaffirm that the gift comes under covenanted conditions, and that the covenant is "forever." The Bible is permeated with a careful concern for preserving the "land" and the "earth" as an "allotted heritage" (Ps. 2:7-12).

This point is central to the Judeo-Christian response to the world. The world is given to all. Its heritage is something of enduring value designed to benefit all future generations. Those who receive such a gift and benefit from it are duty-bound to conserve the resources and pass them on for future generations to enjoy. An "earth of abundance" (Judg. 18:10) provides for humanity's needs and survival (Gen. 1:26-28, 9:2-5). But the injunction "obey the covenant" (I Chron. 16:14-18) accompanies the gift.

There are some fairly clear principles that direct our covenanted responsibilities toward the earth. Each generation exists only as "sojourner" or "pilgrim." We hold the resources and the earth as a "trust" for future generations. Our covenanted relations to the earth—and for that matter, to all human beings—must be predicated upon the recognition and acceptance of the limits of reality. For there is a "limit upon all perfection" (Ps. 119:96), and we must discover and respect the limits upon ourselves, our use of resources, our consumption, our treatment of others and the environment with its delicate ecosystems. Abiding by the covenant means abiding by the laws of nature, both scientific and moral. In ecological terms the balance of nature embodies God's careful plan that the earth and its bounty shall provide for the needs and survival of all humanity of all generations.

The combined emphases upon God's ownership, our trusteeship and the limits of life call for an attitude of humility and care in dealing with the world. Only "the humble shall have the land for their own to enjoy untroubled peace" (Ps. 37:11). Knowledge of limits, especially of the intricacy of the ecosystems, makes humility and care a much more natural response. The transgression of limits usually brings either unknown or clearly dangerous

consequences and ought to influence all actions with a singular sense of caution. Humility and respect do not mean simple awe, or withdrawal from all attempts to use or improve the bounty we are given. At the very least, they lead to the loss of arrogant ignorance which leads us to pursue policies in contradiction to the clear limits and laws of nature and particular ecosystems.

THE STEWARDSHIP IMPERATIVE

The New Testament distills these notions and adds a strong activist imperative with its account of stewardship. This activist element is a vital alternative to some of the more extreme ethical positions in reactionary ecological ethics. The parable of the good steward in Luke 12:41–48 and the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30 summarize the concept. The preservation of what is given “in trust” demands a recognition of the owner’s dictates for the resources. We must know the limits and laws of the world in order to use them wisely. Our actions must be guided, in part, by concerns for future generations. Above all, we must never knowingly exhaust or ruin what has been given to us. If doing so is absolutely necessary to sustain life, then equity demands that we must leave some equally accessible and beneficial legacy to replace what has been exhausted.

But there is more involved in being a “faithful and wise steward.” Even the most conservative banker is obliged to improve the stock for the benefit of the heirs. The parable of the talents makes it abundantly clear that we who are entrusted with his property will be called to account for our obligation to improve the earth. The stewardship imperative assumes that the moral and ecological constraints are respected, and it adds the obligation to distribute the benefits justly. The steward must “give them their portion of the food at the proper time.” Mistreating his charges, gorging himself on the resources in excess consumption, and not caring for the resources will all cause the stewards to be “cut off.” True stewardship requires both respect

for the trusteeship and covenanted imperatives and an active effort to improve the land for the future and to use it in a manner to benefit others. Ethical proportionality applies to all those responsible for the earth, for “when a man has had a great deal given to him on trust, even more will be expected of him” (Luke 12:48–49).

AN INFORMED HUMILITY

The lessons are clear. Any ecological ethic which takes into account both God and humanity and does not reduce both to some extension of undifferentiated nature must begin with a rejection of the unbridled sovereignty of humanity over the earth. In this rejection is the recognition that all work upon the earth must be informed by a clear understanding of and respect for the earth as an autonomous and valuable entity and the laws of nature on which the bounty of the earth depends.

These are necessary but by no means sufficient within the Judeo-Christian tradition. For the earth, while it possesses its own moral autonomy, is not God and must not be confused as such. Our own relation to it must be predicated upon a careful understanding that earth and its resources are for any generation a restricted gift held in trust for future generations. We must never lose sight of the fact that a just and informed humility provides the framework for a working relationship with the earth.

Much more work remains to be done on the “ethics of stewardship”; I have merely suggested a few ethical considerations: the obligation not to exhaust nonrenewable resources, the imperative to provide accessible replacements, the necessity to improve our heritage modestly and carefully, the greater responsibility of the advantaged to improve that which exists and to share, and the obligation to refrain from excessive consumption and waste. “Each of you has received a special gift, so like good stewards responsible for all the different gifts of God, put yourselves at the service of others” (I Pet. 4:10–11).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Compare Dobel’s understanding of a Christian environmental ethics with another tradition mentioned in this text.
2. If human beings do not own Earth, what is our role, according to Dobel? Do you agree? Explain your answer.
3. If one does not accept a theistic version of creation, does the stewardship model make any sense? A steward is one who manages the household affairs of another person. If there is no God, Earth is not God’s household. But then whose is it? To whom are we stewards?

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Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law, and Society

MAWIL Y. IZZI DEEN (SAMARRAI)

Mawil Y. Izzi Deen (Samarrai) is assistant professor, King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, consultant to the Saudi Arabian Center for Science and Technology, and co-author of Islamic Principles for the Conservation of the Natural Environment. Deen sets forth the Islamic view that the foundation of environmental protection is found in the idea that God created the world and set human beings in it to enjoy and carefully use it. Ecological balance and sustainable care of nature are promoted by Islam.

Islamic environmental ethics, like all other forms of ethics in Islam, is based on clear-cut legal foundations which Muslims hold to be formulated by God. Thus, in Islam, an acceptance of what is legal and what is ethical has not involved the same processes as in cultures which base their laws on humanistic philosophies.

Muslim scholars have found it difficult to accept the term “Islamic Law,” since “law” implies a rigidity and dryness alien to Islam. They prefer the Arabic word *Shari’ah* (Shariah) which literally means the “source of water.” The Shariah is the source of life in that it contains both legal rules and

ethical principles. This is indicated by the division of the Shariah relevant to human action into the categories of: obligatory actions (*wajib*),—those which a Muslim is required to perform; devotional and ethical virtues (*mandub*),—those actions a Muslim is encouraged to perform, the non-observance of which, however, incurs no liability; permissible actions (*mubah*),—those in which a Muslim is given complete freedom of choice; abominable actions (*makruh*),—those which are morally but not legally wrong; and prohibited actions (*haram*)—all those practices forbidden by Islam.

A complete separation into the two elements, law and ethics, is thus unnecessary in Islam. For a Muslim is obliged to obey whatever God has ordered, his philosophical questions having been answered before he became a follower of the faith.

THE FOUNDATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

In Islam, the conservation of the environment is based on the principle that all the individual components of the environment were created by God, and that all living things were created with different functions, functions carefully measured and meticulously balanced by the Almighty Creator. Although the various components of the natural environment serve humanity as one of their functions, this does not imply that human use is the sole reason for their creation. The comments of the medieval Muslim scholar, Ibn Tamiyah on those verses of the Holy Qur'an which state that God created the various parts of the environment to serve humanity, are relevant here:

In considering all these verses it must be remembered that Allah in His wisdom created these creatures for reasons other than serving man, for in these verses He only explains the benefits of these creatures [to man].

The legal and ethical reasons for protecting the environment can be summarized as follows: First, the environment is God's creation and to protect it is to preserve its values as a sign of the Creator. To assume that the environment's benefits to human beings are the sole reason for its protection may lead to environmental misuse or destruction.

Second, the component parts of nature are entities in continuous praise of their Creator. Humans may not be able to understand the form or nature of this praise, but the fact that the Qur'an describes it is an additional reason for environmental preservation:

The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not

such a thing but hymneth his praise; but ye understand not their praise. Lo! He is ever Clement, Forgiving. (Sūrah 17:44)

Third, all the laws of nature are laws made by the Creator and based on the concept of the absolute continuity of existence. Although God may sometimes wish otherwise, what happens, happens according to the natural law of God (*summah*), and human beings must accept this as the will of the Creator. Attempts to break the law of God must be prevented. As the Qur'an states:

Hast thou not seen that unto Allah payeth adoration whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is in the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the hills, and the trees, and the beasts, and many of mankind. (Sūrah 22:18)

Fourth, the Qur'an's acknowledgment that humankind is not the only community to live in this world—"There is not an animal in the earth, nor a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are peoples like unto you" (Sūrah 6:38)—means that while humans may currently have the upper hand over other "peoples," these other creatures are beings and, like us, are worthy of respect and protection. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) considered all living creatures worthy of protection (*hummah*) and kind treatment. He was once asked whether there will be a reward from God for charity shown to animals. His reply was very explicit: "For [charity shown to] each creature which has a wet heart there is a reward." Ibn Hajar comments further upon this tradition, explaining that wetness is an indication of life (and so charity extends to all creatures), although human beings are more worthy of the charity if a choice must be made.

Fifth, Islamic environmental ethics is based on the concept that all human relationships are established on justice (*adl*) and equity (*ihsān*): "Lo! Allah enjoineth justice and kindness" (Sūrah 16:90). The prophetic tradition limits benefits derived at the cost of animal suffering. The Prophet Muhammad instructed: "Verily Allah has prescribed equity (*ihsān*)

in all things. Thus if you kill, kill well, and if you slaughter, slaughter well. Let each of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters."

Sixth, the balance of the universe created by God must also be preserved. For "Everything with Him is measure" (Sūrah 13:8). Also, "There is not a thing but with Us are the stores thereof. And We send it not down save in appointed measure" (Sūrah 15:21).

Seventh, the environment is not in the service of the present generation alone. Rather, it is the gift of God to all ages, past, present and future. This can be understood from the general meaning of Sūrah 2:29: "He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth." The word "you" as used here refers to all persons with no limit as to time or place.

Finally, no other creature is able to perform the task of protecting the environment. God entrusted humans with the duty of viceregency, a duty so onerous and burdensome that no other creature would accept it: "Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it" (Sūrah 33:72).

THE COMPREHENSIVE NATURE OF ISLAMIC ETHICS

Islamic ethics is founded on two principles—human nature, and religious and legal grounds. The first principle, natural instinct (*fitrah*), was imprinted in the human soul by God at the time of creation (Sūrah 91:7–8). Having natural instinct, the ordinary individual can, at least to some extent, distinguish not only between good and bad, but also between these and that which is neutral, neither good nor bad. However, an ethical conscience is not a sufficient personal guide. Due to the complexities of life an ethical conscience alone cannot define the correct attitude to every problem. Moreover, a person does not live in a vacuum, but is affected by outside influences which may corrupt the ability to choose between good and evil.

Outside influences include customs, personal interests, and prevailing concepts concerning one's surroundings.

The religious and legal grounds upon which Islamic ethics is founded were presented by the messengers of God. These messengers were possessed of a special nature, and since they were inspired by God, they were able to avoid the outside influences which may affect other individuals.

Legal instructions in Islam are not negative in the sense of forcing the conscience to obey. On the contrary, legal instructions have been revealed in such a way that the conscience approves and acknowledges them to be correct. Thus the law itself becomes a part of human conscience, thereby guaranteeing its application and its success.

An imported, alien law cannot work because, while it may be possible to make it legally binding, it cannot be made morally binding upon Muslims. Muslims willingly pay the poor-tax (*zakah*) because they know that if they fail to do so they will be both legally and ethically responsible. Managing to avoid the legal consequences of failure to pay what is due will not help them to avoid the ethical consequences, and they are aware of this. Although a Muslim poacher may be able to shoot elephants and avoid park game wardens, if a framework based on Islamic principles for the protection of the environment has been published, he knows that he will not be able to avoid the ever-watchful divine Warden. The Muslim knows that Islamic values are all based on what God loves and wants: "And when he turns away [from thee] his effort in the land is to make mischief therein and to destroy the crops and the cattle; and Allah loveth not mischief" (Sūrah 2:205).

When the Prophet Solomon and his army were about to destroy a nest of ants, one ant warned the rest of the colony of the coming destruction. When Solomon heard this he begged God for the wisdom to do the good thing which God wanted him to do. Solomon was obviously facing an environmental problem and needed an ethical decision; he begged God for guidance:

Till, when they reached the Valley of the Ants, an ant exclaimed: O, ants! Enter

your dwellings lest Solomon and his armies crush you, unperceiving.

And [Solomon] smiled, laughing at her speech, and said: My Lord, arouse me to be thankful for Thy favor wherewith Thou hast favored me and my parents, and to do good that shall be pleasing unto Thee, and include me among [the number of] Thy righteous slaves. (Sūrah 27: 18–19)

Ethics in Islam is not based on a variety of separate scattered virtues, with each virtue, such as honesty or truth, standing isolated from others. Rather virtue in Islam is a part of a total, comprehensive way of life which serves to guide and control all human activity. Truthfulness is an ethical value, as are protecting life, conserving the environment, and sustaining its development within the confines of what God has ordered. When 'Āīsha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, was asked about his ethics she replied: "His ethics are the whole Qur'ān." The Qur'ān does not contain separate scattered ethical values. Rather it contains the instructions for a complete way of life. There are political, social and economic principles side by side with instructions for the construction and preservation of the earth.

Islamic ethical values are based not on human reasoning, as Aristotle claimed values to be, nor on what society imposes on the individual, as Durkheim thought, nor on the interests of a certain class, as Marxists maintain. In each of these claims values are affected by circumstances. In Islam, ethical values are held to be based on an accurate scale which is unalterable as to time and place. Islam's values are those without which neither persons nor the natural environment can be sustained.

THE HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT RELATIONSHIP

As we have seen, within the Islamic faith, an individual's relationship with the environment is governed by certain moral precepts. These originate with God's creation of humans and the role they

were given upon the Earth. Our universe, with all its diverse component elements was created by God and the human being is an essential part of His Measured and Balanced Creation. The role of humans, however, is not only to enjoy, use and benefit from their surroundings. They are expected to preserve, protect and promote their fellow creatures. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "All creatures are God's dependents and the best among them is the one who is most useful to God's dependents." The Prophet of Islam looked upon himself as responsible for the trees and the animals and all natural elements. He also said: "The only reasons that God does not cause his punishment to pour over you are the elderly, the suckling babes, and the animals which graze upon your land." Muhammad prayed for rain when he was reminded that water was short, the trees suffering from drought, and animals dying. He begged for God's mercy to fall upon his creatures.

The relationship between human beings and their environment includes many features in addition to subjugation and utilization. Construction and development are primary but our relationship to nature also includes meditation, contemplation and enjoyment of its beauties. The most perfect Muslim was the Prophet Muhammad who was reported by Ibn 'Abbās to have enjoyed gazing at greenery and running water.

When reading verses about the Earth in the Holy Qur'ān, we find strong indications that the Earth was originally a place of peace and rest for humans:

Is not He [best] Who made the earth a fixed abode, and placed rivers in the folds thereof, and placed firm hills therein, and hath set a barrier between the two seas? Is there any God beside Allah? Nay, but most of them know not! (Sūrah 27:61)

The Earth is important to the concept of interrelation. Human beings are made from two components of the Earth—dust and water.

And Allah hath caused you to grow as a growth from the earth, And afterward

He maketh you return thereto, and He will bring you forth again, a [new] forthbringing. And Allah hath made the earth a wide expanse for you. That ye may thread the valleyways thereof. (Sūrah 71:17–20)

The word "earth" (*ard*) is mentioned twice in this short quotation and in the Qur'ān the word occurs a total of 485 times, a simple measure of its importance.

The Earth is described as being subservient to humans: "He it is Who hath made the earth subservient unto you, so walk in the paths thereof and eat of His providence" (Sūrah 67:15). The Earth is also described as a receptacle: "Have we not made the earth a receptacle both for the living and the dead" (Sūrah 77: 25–26). Even more importantly, the Earth is considered by Islam to be a source of purity and a place for the worship of God. The Prophet Muhammad said: "The earth is made for me [and Muslims] as a prayer place (*masjid*) and as a purifier." This means that the Earth is to be used to cleanse oneself before prayer if water is unobtainable. Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet of Islam said: "God is beautiful and loved everything beautiful. He is generous and loves generosity and is clean and loves cleanliness."

Thus it is not surprising that the Islamic position with regard to the environment is that humans must intervene in order to protect the Earth. They may not stand back while it is destroyed. "He brought you forth from the earth and hath made you husband it" (Sūrah 11:61). For, finally, the Earth is a source of blessedness. And the Prophet Muhammad said: "Some trees are blessed as the Muslim himself, especially palm."

THE SUSTAINABLE CARE OF NATURE

Islam permits the utilization of the natural environment but this utilization should not involve unnecessary destruction. Squandering is rejected by God: "O Children of Adam! Look to your adornment at

every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not prodigal. Lo! He loveth not the prodigals" (Sūrah 7:31). In this Qur'ānic passage, eating and drinking refer to the utilization of the sources of life. Such utilization is not without controls. The component elements of life have to be protected so that their utilization may continue in a sustainable way. Yet even this preservation must be undertaken in an altruistic fashion, and not merely for its benefit to human beings. The Prophet Muhammad said: "Act in your life as though you are living forever and act for the Hereafter as if you are dying tomorrow."

These actions must not be restricted to those which will derive direct benefits. Even if doomsday were expected imminently, humans would be expected to continue their good behaviour, for Muhammad said: "When doomsday comes if someone has a palm shoot in his hand he should plant it." This *hadīth* encapsulates the principles of Islamic environmental ethics. Even when all hope is lost, planting should continue for planting is good in itself. The planting of the palm shoot continues the process of development and will sustain life even if one does not anticipate any benefit from it. In this, the Muslim is like the soldier who fights to the last bullet.

A theory of the sustainable utilization of the ecosystem may be deduced from Islam's assertion that life is maintained with due balance in everything: "Allah knoweth that which every female beareth and that which the wombs absorb and that which they grow. And everything with Him is measured" (Sūrah 13:8). Also: "He unto Whom belongeth the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, He hath chosen no son nor hath He any partner in the sovereignty. He hath created everything and hath meted out for it a measure" (Sūrah 25:2).

Humans are not the owners, but the maintainers of the due balance and measure which God provided for them and for the animals that live with them.

*And after that He spread the earth,
And produced therefrom water
thereof and the pasture thereof,*

And He made fast the hills,
A provision for you and
for your cattle.
(SŪRAH 79:30–33)

The Qur'ān goes on to say:

But when the great disaster cometh,
The day when man will call
to mind his [whole] endeavor.
(SŪRAH 79:34–35)

Humans will have a different home (*ma'wā*) or place of abode, different from the Earth and what it contains. The word *ma'wā* is the same word used in modern Arabic for "environment." One cannot help but wonder if these verses are an elaboration on the concept of sustainable development, a task that humans will undertake until their home is changed.

Sayyid Qutb, commenting on these verses, observes that the Qur'ān, in referring to the origin of ultimate truth, used many correspondences (*muwāfaqāt*)—such as building the heavens, darkening the night, bringing forth human beings, spreading the earth, producing water and plants, and making the mountains fast. All these were provided for human beings and their animals as providence, and are direct signs which constitute proof as to the reality of God's measurement and calculation. Finally, Sayyid Qutb observes that every part of God's creation was carefully made to fit into the general system, a system that testifies to the Creator's existence and the existence of a day of reward and punishment.

At this point, one must ask whether it is not a person's duty to preserve the proof of the Creator's existence while developing it. Wouldn't the wholesale destruction of the environment be the destruction of much which testifies to the greatness of God?

The concept of the sustained care of all aspects of the environment also fits into Islam's concept of charity, for charity is not only for the present generation but also for those in the future. A story is told of 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb, the famous

companion of the Prophet. He once saw that an old man, Khuzaymah ibn Thābit, had neglected his land. 'Umar asked what was preventing him from cultivating it. Khuzaymah explained that he was old and could be expected to die soon. Whereupon, Umar insisted that he should plant it. Khuzaymah's son, who narrated the story, added that his father and 'Umar planted the uncultivated land together.

This incident demonstrates how strongly Islam encourages the sustained cultivation of the land. Land should not be used and then abandoned just because the cultivator expects no personal benefit.

In Islam, law and ethics constitute the two interconnected elements of a unified world view. When considering the environment and its protection, this Islamic attitude may constitute a useful foundation for the formulation of a strategy throughout, at least, the Muslim world. Muslims who inhabit so much of the developing world may vary in local habits and customs but they are remarkably united in faith and in their attitude to life.

Islam is a religion of submission to God, master of all worlds. The Earth and all its inhabitants were created and are dominated by God. All Muslims begin their prayers five times a day with the same words from the Holy Qur'ān: "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds" (Sūrah 1:1). These opening words of the Qur'ān have become not only the most repeated but also the most loved and respected words for Muslims everywhere. Ibn Kathīr, like many other Qur'ānic commentators, considers that the word "worlds" (*'ālamīn*) means the different kinds of creatures that inhabit the sky, the land, and the sea. Muslims submit themselves to the Creator who made them and who made all other worlds. The same author mentions that Muslims also submit themselves to the signs of the existence of the Creator and His unity. This secondary meaning exists because "worlds" comes from the same root as signs; thus the worlds are signs of the Creator.

A Muslim, therefore, has a very special relationship with those worlds which in modern times have come to be known as the environment.

Indeed, that these worlds exist and that they were made by the same Creator means that they are united and interdependent, each a part of the perfect system of creation. No conflict should exist between them; they should exist in harmony as different parts of the whole. Their coexistence could be likened to an architectural masterpiece in which every detail has been added to complete and complement the structure. Thus the details of creation serve to testify to the wisdom and perfection of the Creator.

THE PRACTICE OF ISLAMIC ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Islam has always had a great influence on the formation of individual Muslim communities and the policy making of Muslim states. Environmental policy has been influenced by Islam and this influence has remained the same throughout the history of the Islamic faith.

The concept of *himā* (protection of certain zones) has existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. *Himā* involved the ruler or government's protection of specific unused areas. No one may build on them or develop them in any way. The Mālikī school of Islamic law described the requirements of *himā* to be the following. First, the need of the Muslim public for the maintenance of land in an unused state. Protection is not granted to satisfy an influential individual unless there is a public need. Second, the protected area should be limited in order to avoid inconvenience to the public. Third, the protected area should not be built on or cultivated. And fourth, the aim of protection (Zuhaylī 5:574) is the welfare of the people, for example, the protected area may be used for some restricted grazing by the animals of the poor.

The concept of *himā* can still be seen in many Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, where it is practised by the government to protect wildlife. In a less formal way it is still practised by some bedouin tribes as a custom or tradition inherited from their ancestors.

The *harīm* is another ancient institution which can be traced back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. It is an inviolable zone which may not be used or developed, save with the specific permission of the state. The *harīm* is usually found in association with wells, natural springs, underground water channels, rivers and trees planted on barren land or *mawāt*. There is careful administration of the *harīm* zones based on the practice of the Prophet Muhammad and the precedent of his companions as recorded in the sources of Islamic law.

At present the role of Islam in environmental protection can be seen in the formation of different Islamic organizations and the emphasis given to Islam as a motive for the protection of the environment.

Saudi Arabia has keenly sought to implement a number of projects aimed at the protection of various aspects of the environment, for example, the late King Khalid's patronage of efforts to save the Arabian oryx from extinction.

The Meteorology and Environmental Protection Administration (MEPA) of Saudi Arabia actively promotes the principles of Islamic environmental protection. In 1983 MEPA and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources commissioned a basic paper on the Islamic principles for the conservation of natural environment.

The Islamic faith has great impact on environmental issues throughout the Arab and Muslim world. The first Arab Ministerial Conference took as its theme "The Environmental Aspects of Development" and one of the topics considered was the Islamic faith and its values. The Amir of Kuwait emphasized the fundamental importance of Islam when he addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1988. He explained that Islam was the basis for justice, mercy, and cooperation between all humankind; and he called for an increase in scientific and technological assistance from the North to help conserve natural and human resources, combat pollution and support sustainable development projects.

Finally, it is imperative to acknowledge that the new morality required to conserve the environment

which the World Conservation Strategy emphasizes, needs to be based on a more solid foundation. It is not only necessary to involve the public in conservation policy but also to improve its morals and alter its attitudes. In Muslim countries such changes should be brought about by identifying

environmental policies with Islamic teachings. To do this, the public education system will have to supplement the scientific approach to environmental education with serious attention to Islamic belief and environmental awareness.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Compare Deen's view of the Islamic environmental ethics with the preceding views on Hinduism and Buddhism. Then compare it with Patrick Dobel's view (Reading 61) of Christian environmental ethics.
2. What insights or practices in Islam have you found that might be helpful in developing a Western environmental ethic? How would Islam contribute toward a global ecumenical environmental ethic?

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Satyagraha for Conservation: A Hindu View

O. P. DWIVEDI

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In this essay, Dwivedi argues that a profound environmental ethics, consisting in satyagraha (the persistent quest for truth) permeates Hinduism. Hinduism holds to a strong version of the equal sanctity of all life and for thousands of years practiced sustainable agriculture and nonviolence (ahimsa) toward animals and nature. Dwivedi argues that in the last hundreds of years satyagraha lost much of its effectiveness, but there are signs that it is reasserting itself.

The World Commission on Environment and Development acknowledged that to reconcile human affairs with natural laws "our cultural and

spiritual heritages can reinforce our economic interests and survival imperatives." But until very recently, the role of our cultural and spiritual

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The Buddhist Attitude Towards Nature

LILY DE SILVA

Lily de Silva is professor of Buddhist studies at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. In this essay, she sets forth a Buddhist perspective on environmental ethics, arguing that Buddhism emphasizes simple, nonviolent, gentle living. In its doctrine of karma and rebirth (similar to Hinduism), it recognizes that all animals and humans are spiritual entities to be treated with loving kindness.

Buddhism strictly limits itself to the delineation of a way of life designed to eradicate human suffering. The Buddha refused to answer questions which did not directly or indirectly bear on the central problem of human suffering and its ending. Furthermore, environmental pollution is a problem of the modern age, unheard of and unsuspected during the time of the Buddha. Therefore it is difficult to find any specific discourse which deals with the topic we are interested in here. Nevertheless, as Buddhism is a full-fledged philosophy of life reflecting all aspects of experience, it is possible to find enough material in the Pali Canon to delineate the Buddhist attitude towards nature.

The word "nature" means everything in the world which is not organised and constructed by man. The Pali equivalents which come closest to "nature" are *loka* and *yathābhūta*. The former is usually translated as "world" while the latter literally means "things as they really are." The words *dharmatā* and *niyāma* are used in the Pali Canon to mean "natural law or way."

NATURE AS DYNAMIC

According to Buddhism changeability is one of the perennial principles of nature. Everything changes

in nature and nothing remains static. This concept is expressed by the Pali term *anicca*. Everything formed is in a constant process of change (*sabbe sankhārā aniccā*). The world is therefore defined as that which disintegrates (*lujjatīti loko*); the world is so called because it is dynamic and kinetic, it is constantly in a process of undergoing change. In nature there are no static and stable "things"; there are only ever-changing, ever-moving processes....

MORALITY AND NATURE

The world passes through alternating cycles of evolution and dissolution, each of which endures for a long period of time. Though change is inherent in nature, Buddhism believes that natural processes are affected by the morals of man.... Buddhism believes that though change is a factor inherent in nature, man's moral deterioration accelerates the process of change and brings about changes which are adverse to human well being and happiness....

[S]everal suttas from the Pali Canon show that early Buddhism believes there to be a close relationship between human morality and the natural environment. This idea has been systematised in the

Reprinted from *The Buddhist Attitude Towards Nature*, ed. K. Sandell (Buddhist Publication Society, Sri Lanka, 1987). Notes deleted.

theory of the five natural laws in the later commentaries. According to this theory, in the cosmos there are five natural laws or forces at work, namely *utu-niyāma* (lit. "season-law"), *bi-janiyāma* (lit. "seed-law"), *cittaniyāma*, *kammaniyāma* and *dhammaniyāma*. They can be translated as physical laws, biological laws, psychological laws, moral laws and causal laws, respectively. While the first four laws operate within their respective spheres, the last-mentioned law of causality operates *within* each of them as well as *among* them.

This means that the physical environment of any given area conditions the growth and development of its biological component, i.e., flora and fauna. These in turn influence the thought pattern of the people interacting with them. Modes of thinking determine moral standards. The opposite process of interaction is also possible. The morals of man influence not only the psychological make-up of the people but the biological and physical environment of the area as well. Thus the five laws demonstrate that man and nature are bound together in a reciprocal causal relationship with changes in one necessarily bringing about changes in the other.

The commentary on the *Cakkavattis ihanāda Sutta* goes on to explain the pattern of mutual interaction further. When mankind is demoralised through greed, famine is the natural outcome; when moral degeneration is due to ignorance, epidemic is the inevitable result; when hatred is the demoralising force, widespread violence is the ultimate outcome. If and when mankind realizes that large-scale devastation has taken place as a result of his moral degeneration, a change of heart takes place among the few surviving human beings. With gradual moral regeneration conditions improve through a long period of cause and effect and mankind again starts to enjoy gradually increasing prosperity and longer life. The world, including nature and mankind, stands or falls with the type of moral force at work. If immorality grips society, man and nature deteriorate; if morality reigns, the quality of human life and nature improves. Thus greed, hatred and delusion produce pollution within and without. Generosity, compassion and

wisdom produce purity within and without. This is one reason the Buddha has pronounced that the world is led by the mind, *cittena niyata loko*. Thus man and nature, according to the ideas expressed in early Buddhism, are interdependent.

HUMAN USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

For survival mankind has to depend on nature for his food, clothing, shelter, medicine and other requisites. For optimum benefits man has to understand nature so that he can utilise natural resources and live harmoniously with nature. By understanding the working of nature—for example, the seasonal rainfall pattern, methods of conserving water by irrigation, the soil types, the physical conditions required for growth of various food crops, etc.—man can learn to get better returns from his agricultural pursuits. But this learning has to be accompanied by moral restraint if he is to enjoy the benefits of natural resources for a long time. Man must learn to satisfy his needs and not feed his greeds. The resources of the world are not unlimited whereas man's greed knows neither limit nor satiation. Modern man in his unbridled voracious greed for pleasure and acquisition of wealth has exploited nature to the point of near impoverishment....

Buddhism tirelessly advocates the virtues of non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion in all human pursuits. Greed breeds sorrow and unhealthy consequences. Contentment (*santu.t.thi*) is a much praised virtue in Buddhism. The man leading a simple life with few wants easily satisfied is upheld and appreciated as an exemplary character. Miserliness and wastefulness are equally deplored in Buddhism as two degenerative extremes. Wealth has only instrumental value; it is to be utilised for the satisfaction of man's needs. Hoarding is a senseless anti-social habit comparable to the attitude of the dog in the manger. The vast hoarding of wealth in some countries and the methodical destruction of large quantities of agricultural produce to keep the

market prices from falling, while half the world is dying of hunger and starvation, is really a sad paradox of the present affluent age.

Buddhism commends frugality as a virtue in its own right. Once Ānanda explained to King Udena the thrifty economic use of robes by the monks in the following order. When new robes are received the old robes are used as coverlets, the old coverlets as mattress covers, the old mattress covers as rugs, the old rugs as dusters, and the old tattered dusters are kneaded with clay and used to repair cracked floors and walls. Thus nothing usable is wasted. Those who waste are derided as "wood-apple eaters." A man shakes the branch of a wood-apple tree and all the fruits, ripe as well as unripe, fall. The man would collect only what he wants and walk away leaving the rest to rot. Such a wasteful attitude is certainly deplored in Buddhism as not only anti-social but criminal. The excessive exploitation of nature as is done today would certainly be condemned by Buddhism in the strongest possible terms.

Buddhism advocates a gentle non-aggressive attitude towards nature. According to the *Sigālovāda Sutta* a householder should accumulate wealth as a bee collects pollen from a flower. The bee harms neither the fragrance nor the beauty of the flower, but gathers pollen to turn it into sweet honey. Similarly, man is expected to make legitimate use of nature so that he can rise above nature and realise his innate spiritual potential.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS ANIMAL AND PLANT LIFE

The well-known Five Precepts (*pañca s ila*) form the minimum code of ethics that every lay Buddhist is expected to adhere to. Its first precept involves abstention from injury to life. It is explained as the casting aside of all forms of weapons, being conscientious about depriving a living being of life. In its positive sense it means the cultivation of compassion and sympathy for all living beings. The Buddhist layman is expected to abstain from trading in meat too.

The Buddhist monk has to abide by an even stricter code of ethics than the layman. He has to abstain from practices which would involve even unintentional injury to living creatures. For instance, the Buddha promulgated the rule against going on a journey during the rainy season because of possible injury to worms and insects that come to the surface in wet weather. The same concern for non-violence prevents a monk from digging the ground. Once a monk who was a potter prior to ordination built for himself a clay hut and set it on fire to give it a fine finish. The Buddha strongly objected to this as so many living creatures would have been burnt in the process. The hut was broken down on the Buddha's instructions to prevent it from creating a bad precedent for later generations. The scrupulous non-violent attitude towards even the smallest living creatures prevents the monks from drinking unstrained water. It is no doubt a sound hygienic habit, but what is noteworthy is the reason which prompts the practice, namely, sympathy for living creatures.

Buddhism also prescribes the practice of *mettā*, "loving-kindness" towards all creatures of all quarters without restriction. The *Karan iyamettā Sutta* enjoins the cultivation of loving-kindness towards all creatures, timid and steady, long and short, big and small, minute and great, visible and invisible, near and far, born and awaiting birth. All quarters are to be suffused with this loving attitude. Just as one's own life is precious to oneself, so is the life of the other precious to himself. Therefore a reverential attitude must be cultivated towards all forms of life....

The understanding of karma and rebirth, too, prepares the Buddhist to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards animals. According to this belief it is possible for human beings to be reborn in subhuman states among animals. The *Kukkuravatika Sutta* can be cited as a canonical reference which substantiates this view. The Jātakas provide ample testimony to this view from commentarial literature. It is possible that our own close relatives have been reborn as animals. Therefore it is only right that we should treat animals with kindness and sympathy. The Buddhist notion of merit also engenders a

gentle non-violent attitude towards living creatures. It is said that if one throws dish-washing water into a pool where there are insects and living creatures, intending that they feed on the tiny particles of food thus washed away, one accumulates merit even by such trivial generosity. According to the *Macchuddāna Jātaka* the Bodhisatta threw his leftover food into a river in order to feed the fish, and by the power of that merit he was saved from an impending disaster. Thus kindness to animals, be they big or small, is a source of merit—merit needed for human beings to improve their lot in the cycle of rebirths and to approach the final goal of Nibbāna.

Buddhism expresses a gentle non-violent attitude towards the vegetable kingdom as well. It is said that one should not even break the branch of a tree that has given one shelter. Plants are so helpful to us in providing us with all necessities of life that we are expected not to adopt a callous attitude towards them. The more strict monastic rules prevent monks from injuring plant life.

Prior to the rise of Buddhism people regarded natural phenomena such as mountains, forests, groves and trees with a sense of awe and reverence. They considered them as the abode of powerful non-human beings who could assist human beings at times of need. Though Buddhism gave man a far superior Triple Refuge (*tisarana*) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, these places continued to enjoy public patronage at a popular level, as the acceptance of terrestrial non-human beings such as *devatās* and *yakkhas* did not violate the belief system of Buddhism. Therefore among the Buddhists there is a reverential attitude towards specially long-standing gigantic trees. They are called *vanaspati* in Pali, meaning "lords of the forests." As huge trees such as the ironwood, the *sāla* and the fig are also recognised as the Bodhi trees of former Buddhas, the deferential attitude towards trees is further strengthened. It is well known that the *figus religiosa* is held as an object of great veneration in the Buddhist world today as the tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

The construction of parks and pleasure groves for public use is considered a great meritorious deed. Sakka the lord of gods is said to have reached

this status as a result of social services such as the construction of parks, pleasure groves, ponds, wells and roads.

The open air, natural habitats and forest trees have a special fascination for the Eastern mind as symbols of spiritual freedom. The home life is regarded as a fetter (*sambādha*) that keeps man in bondage and misery. Renunciation is like the open air (*abbhokāsa*), nature unhampered by man's activity.... The Buddha's constant advice to his disciples also was to resort to natural habitats such as forest groves and glades. There, undisturbed by human activity, they could zealously engage themselves in meditation.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLLUTION

... Cleanliness was highly commended by the Buddhists both in the person and in the environment. They were much concerned about keeping water clean, be it in the river, pond or well. These sources of water were for public use and each individual had to use them with proper public-spirited caution so that others after him could use them with the same degree of cleanliness. Rules regarding the cleanliness of green grass were prompted by ethical and aesthetic considerations. Moreover, grass is food for most animals and it is man's duty to refrain from polluting it by his activities.

Noise is today recognised as a serious personal and environmental pollutant troubling everyone to some extent....

The Buddha and his disciples revelled in the silent solitary natural habitats unencumbered by human activity. Even in the choice of monasteries the presence of undisturbed silence was an important quality they looked for. Silence invigorates those who are pure at heart and raises their efficiency for meditation. But silence overawes those who are impure with ignoble impulses of greed, hatred and delusion....

The psychological training of the monks is so advanced that they are expected to cultivate a taste not only for external silence, but for inner silence of speech, desire and thought as well. The sub-vocal

speech, the inner chatter that goes on constantly within us in our waking life, is expected to be silenced through meditation. The sage who succeeds in quelling this inner speech completely is described as a *muni*, a silent one. His inner silence is maintained even when he speaks!...

NATURE AS BEAUTIFUL

The Buddha and his disciples regarded natural beauty as a source of great joy and aesthetic satisfaction. The saints who purged themselves of sensuous worldly pleasures responded to natural beauty with a detached sense of appreciation. The average poet looks at nature and derives inspiration mostly by the sentiments it evokes in his own heart; he becomes emotionally involved with nature. For instance, he may compare the sun's rays passing over the mountain tops to the blush on a sensitive face, he may see a tear in a dew drop, the lips of his beloved in a rose petal, etc. But the appreciation of the saint is quite different. He appreciates nature's beauty for its own sake, and derives joy unswayed by sensuous associations and self-projected ideas....

CONCLUSION

... In the present ecocrisis man has to look for radical solutions. "Pollution cannot be dealt with in the long term on a remedial or cosmetic basis or by tackling symptoms: all measures should deal with basic causes. These are determined largely by our values, priorities and choices." Man must reappraise his value system. The materialism that has guided his lifestyle has landed him in very severe problems.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Compare de Silva's Buddhist ethics with Dwivedi's Hindu perspective. How are they different or similar? Then compare each with Western views. Do you think we could help

Buddhism teaches that mind is the forerunner of all things, mind is supreme. If one acts with an impure mind, i.e., a mind sullied with greed, hatred and delusion, suffering is the inevitable result. If one acts with a pure mind, i.e., with the opposite qualities of contentment, compassion and wisdom, happiness will follow like a shadow. Man has to understand that pollution in the environment has been caused because there has been psychological pollution within himself. If he wants a clean environment he has to adopt a lifestyle that springs from a moral and spiritual dimension.

Buddhism offers man a simple moderate lifestyle eschewing both extremes of self-deprivation and self-indulgence. Satisfaction of basic human necessities, reduction of wants to the minimum, frugality and contentment are its important characteristics. Each man has to order his life on moral principles, exercise self-control in the enjoyment of the senses, discharge his duties in his various social roles, and conduct himself with wisdom and self-awareness in all activities. It is only when each man adopts a simple moderate lifestyle that mankind as a whole will stop polluting the environment. This seems to be the only way of overcoming the present ecocrisis and the problem of alienation. With such a lifestyle, man will adopt a non-exploitative, non-aggressive, gentle attitude towards nature. He can then live in harmony with nature, utilising its resources for the satisfaction of his basic needs. The Buddhist admonition is to utilise nature in the same way as a bee collects pollen from the flower, neither polluting its beauty nor depleting its fragrance. Just as the bee manufactures honey out of pollen, so man should be able to find happiness and fulfilment in life without harming the natural world in which he lives.

each other understand our responsibilities with regard to the environment? What would Western views' distinctive contributions be?