

Judaism and the Environment

“Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

(B'reishit 1:28)

“God placed man in the Garden of Eden to till it and to tend it.”

(B'reishit 2:15)

“When you lay siege and battle against a city for a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding an ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down.”

(D'varim 20:19)

“The heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth He gave over to humanity.”

(Psalms 115:16)

“When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: ‘Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.’”

(*Kohelet Rabbah* 7:13 1)

“When a person observes God’s works and God’s great and marvelous creatures, and they see from them God wisdom that is without estimate or end, immediately they will love God, praise God and long with a great desire to know God’s Great Name...And when a person thinks about these things they draw back and are afraid and realizes that they are small, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of God who is perfect in knowledge.”

(*Mishneh Torah, Sepher Madah, Hilkhos Yesodei Ha-Torah* 2:1-2)

“For Jews, the environmental crisis is a religious challenge. As heirs to a tradition of stewardship that goes back to Genesis and that teaches us to be partners in the ongoing work of Creation, we cannot accept the escalating destruction of our environment and its effect on human health and livelihood. Where we are despoiling our air, land, and water, it is our sacred duty as Jews to acknowledge our God-given responsibility and take action to alleviate environmental degradation and the pain and suffering that it causes. We must reaffirm and bequeath the tradition we have inherited which calls upon us to safeguard humanity’s home.”

(From mission statement of COEJL, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life)